

had assistants to aid in the day-to-day minutiae of his position and by the coronation of Henry VIII in 1509, Robert Poyntz had been appointed vice-chamberlain, but the overall responsibility fell to him.⁶⁶ Apart from minor favours to the royal family, as when the queen mother, Margaret Beaufort, countess of Derby, asked Ormond to bring her gloves along with him when he came to court, much of Ormond's time was spent organising the queen's chamber as it moved around the country.⁶⁷ As chamberlain, Ormond also played a role in the ceremonial of the court. It fell to him to choose suitable ladies-in-waiting to accompany Catherine of Aragon, when she came to England in 1501 for her wedding to Arthur, prince of Wales.⁶⁸

The exact relationship between Ormond, as the queen's chamberlain, and his counterpart in the king's chamber is unclear, as are the financial arrangements made for the queen's household but these details are largely irrelevant to a consideration of Ormond's position within the court of Henry VII. For Ormond, the most important point was not whether he was subordinate to the king's chamberlain, but that he had regular, intimate contact with the royal family throughout the reign of Henry VII. Ormond can be found at many of the great ceremonial occasions of the reign of Henry VII. He attended the ceremonies surrounding the creation of Henry's second son, Henry, as duke of York on 1 November 1494.⁶⁹ He was also among the nobles that accompanied Henry VII to Calais to meet Archduke Philip in 1500.⁷⁰ Ormond even outlived the much younger Henry VII and attended the king's funeral on 21 May 1509.⁷¹ By 1509, Ormond was eighty four years of age and probably regarded as a fixture at court. He was appointed chamberlain to the new queen, Catherine of Aragon, and attended her coronation, although his

⁶⁶ PRO LC9/50 f. 187

⁶⁷ PRO. SC1/51/189

⁶⁸ L. & P. Rich. III & Hen. VII, i, p. 410

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, pp 402-03

⁷⁰ C. P., x, 132

⁷¹ L. & P. Hen. VIII, 1509-14, no. 20, p. 14

post had probably become largely ceremonial, with the real work being done by his vice-chamberlain.⁷²

Ormond's intimate connections with the royal family also continued into the realm of government. He was active as one of the king's council by Michaelmas term 1485.⁷³ About 225 men were officially part of Henry VII's council over his reign, but the vast majority of those only attended one or two meetings. The majority of the council work was done by a small group of men. These included officials like the chancellor, Dr. John Morton, archbishop of Canterbury, the lord privy seal, Richard Foxe and the treasurer, Lord Dynham, personal representatives of the king such as Giles, Lord Daubeney, Sir Thomas Lovell and Sir Reginald Bray and a small group of peers, the most prominent of whom were Ormond, the earl of Derby and the earl of Arundel.⁷⁴ Taken together, these men appear to have formed an inner council that did most of the actual work of the council, and Ormond's regular attendance at council meetings would seem to place him firmly in this group. Some of these men, like Dr. Morton, were old Lancastrian colleagues of Ormond from his days in exile with Margaret of Anjou; others, like Reginald Bray were newer connections and in Bray's case Ormond strengthened their connection by making him a life grant of his newly recovered manor of Shere Vacherie in Surrey on 28 January 1486.⁷⁵

Part of Ormond's role as councillor seems to have been to advise the king on matters pertaining to Ireland. On 12 May 1487, the king summoned Ormond from London to Kenilworth after receiving news that a Yorkist army had landed in Ireland to support the pretender, Lambert Simnel. Ormond was to bring the queen and the queen mother to Kenilworth and the king also required Ormond's 'advice and counsel in such matters as we have to do for the subduing of the said rebels'.⁷⁶ Ormond's role as an advisor on Irish affairs appears to have remained

⁷² L & P. Hen. VIII, 1509-14, no. 82, pp 38, 41

⁷³ W. Campbell, *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII*, i, p. 519

⁷⁴ S.J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, p. 49; C. G. Bayne, *Select cases in the council of Henry VIII*, p. xxv-xxvii

⁷⁵ *Cal. anc. deeds*, iii, C3273, p. 348

⁷⁶ Sir H. Ellis, *Original letters illustrative of English history*, first series, i, pp 18-19

constant throughout the reign and his ability to gain the king's ear was well known in Ireland as several letters attest during the crisis of the 1490s.

In addition to his position as chamberlain to the queen and councillor to the king, Ormond served the king in a variety of other fashions. On 11 September 1490, Ormond and Sir Richard Guilford were jointly placed in charge of 'such new building reparation and transposing of doors and windows in our palace of Westminster'.⁷⁷ In the same year Ormond was sent as one of Henry VII's ambassadors to Brittany and reimbursed by the king to the extent of forty marks.⁷⁸ Ormond was also sent as one of the king's ambassadors to Burgundy in 1497.⁷⁹ Ormond also appears serving the king in a judicial capacity appearing on commissions *oyer et terminer* for Essex, Middlesex, Kent and London in 1491, 1494, 1495, 1496, 1502 and 1503.⁸⁰ He also served as a J.P. for Essex from 1496, on commissions of gaol delivery for Colchester castle, and on 18 March 1499 he was appointed commissioner for sewers.⁸¹

As can be seen by the geographic range of these commissions, Ormond had begun to limit the areas upon which he focused his personal attention. He still had extensive lands belonging to his wife in Devon and Dorset but he does not appear to have attempted to rebuild his brother's support either in the southwest or in the midlands. Ormond appears to have been content with his influence at court and to build up his influence in Essex. Ormond appears to have changed residence in London in the late 1480s, leasing a mansion in Westminster belonging to the prior of St. Paul's, London, from 30 November 1487 for a yearly rent of £6.⁸² After the lease on that property was up, Ormond lived in a house near St. Paul's wharf, also belonging to St. Paul's cathedral before eventually returning to a room in the house of St. Thomas of Acre.⁸³

⁷⁷ W. Campbell, *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII*, ii, pp 509-10

⁷⁸ P.R.O. E404/80/633

⁷⁹ Rhymer, *Foedera*, xii, 655

⁸⁰ *Cal. pat. rolls, 1485-94*, pp 356, 477; *Cal. pat. rolls, 1494-1509*, pp 29-30, 86, 290, 326

⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp 180, 194, 359, 639

⁸² *Cal. anc. deeds*, ii, C1869, p. 458

⁸³ *ibid.*, i, C1736, p. 501; ii, C2728, p. 550

One of Ormond's main activities, with respect to his landed wealth, was the purchase of a block of land in and around Boreham in Essex. His first acquisition was the manor of Newhall in Boreham and all the lands belonging to Thomas Coggelshales in Essex on 10 February 1475.⁸⁴ He later received licence to crenellate the manor and empark a 1,000 acres of land around it.⁸⁵ For the rest of his life Ormond was involved with acquisitions of land in this area, indicating he was involved in the movement to enclose lands to make the wool trade more profitable. In one transaction, dated 24 and 30 November 1492, Ormond purchased land in Chelmesford and Boreham for £60, leaving the present occupant in possession for her lifetime but with a remainder to himself and several old associates, his nephew, Sir Gilbert Talbot, Sir Thomas Montgomery, Sir Henry Vernon and John Neel, master of the house of St. Thomas of Acre.⁸⁶ These men were regularly involved in Ormond's acquisitions of land around Chelmesford and Boreham usually appearing as feoffees to hold the land to Ormond's use. By the end of his lifetime, Ormond was one of the foremost magnates in southern Essex, and continued to purchase whatever land came on the market in the region.

Despite his focus on Essex, Ormond did not ignore the rest of his landed wealth in England or in Ireland. Like most magnates, Ormond was ready to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. He showed that he was not above using his family to secure land as evidenced by a letter to one of his sons-in-law proposing a marriage between one of Ormond's granddaughters and a man possessing a manor that bordered one of Ormond's in Worcester.⁸⁷ Ormond also showed himself willing to prune his lordship of extraneous manors when he sold Wardour castle with its manor and park, the only lands he held in Wiltshire, for £500 on 4 July 1499.⁸⁸ Near the end of his life, Ormond negotiated the purchase of all the lands held by Thomas Cumerford in Newport Pagnell and Tickford in Buckinghamshire for £85, on 12 June 1513, indicating that Ormond was

⁸⁴ P.R.O. E41/29; *Cal. anc. deeds*, v, A13127, p. 491

⁸⁵ P.R.O. E41/420; *Cal. pat. rolls, 1485-94*, p.367

⁸⁶ *Cal. anc. deeds*, iv, A7720, A7726, pp 204, 206

⁸⁷ P.R.O. SC1/51/141/i

⁸⁸ P.R.O. E40/12065

also attempting to expand his presence in Buckinghamshire as he had secured a quitclaim from Fulk Bermingham for all the lands he held in the same area as early as 26 June 1494.⁸⁹ It is clear that Ormond took advantage of opportunities as they appeared to expand the extent of his landed holdings but that with the exception of his holding in Essex, there was no overall plan for the enlargement of his lands.

However, Thomas Butler's time as earl was not one of unbroken expansion. During the reign of Edward IV, he had worked to regain and restore the lands that had belonged to his wife before 1461 and, with much less success, to regain his brother's lands. Despite good relations with Edward III, Ormond had to wait until the accession of Henry VII to regain the lands formerly held by his brother. Ormond's recovery of the Berkshire lands marked the high point of Butler landed wealth in England in the fifteenth century. For a period of some three years, Ormond held the ancestral lands of the Butler family, the lands bequeathed by his grandmother, Joan, Lady Bergavenny, his wife's lands, and all of the lands held by his brother's first wife, Avice Stafford. Taken together these lands represent an extremely large lordship, scattered throughout most of the counties of southern England, with major concentrations in the south west, the west midlands and in Essex. It was also an extremely transitory group that would not remain together beyond Ormond's lifetime.

Obviously, the main reason for the transitory nature of Ormond's holdings was the fact that he had no sons. Without a son, Ormond could not combine his wife's lands and his own into a single valuable inheritance for his progeny. While Ormond did remarry in 1495, to Lora, widow of Ormond's associate, Sir Thomas Montgomery, who was also the widow of Sir Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, there was no real chance of offspring from this marriage, and none came before Countess Lora's death on 31 October 1501.⁹⁰ Instead, these lands would be divided between Ormond's daughters, each receiving a substantial inheritance of some two to three dozen manors. Each half of the inheritance would be a great advantage to his sons-in-law, who both came from gentry families, but it is questionable whether either half of the inheritance was enough to support an earldom. Nevertheless, this was not an immediate problem in 1485.

⁸⁹ P.R.O. E40/12188

⁹⁰ B.L. Royal 2.B.xv, f. 2

What was an immediate problem was the legal challenges that arose from Ormond's possession of the Stafford inheritance as the heir of the earl of Wiltshire.

The central problem of the Stafford inheritance was that Avice Stafford had connived with her husband to circumvent the laws of inheritance. In October 1445, Avice had transferred her lands to Wiltshire's long term servant, Henry Filongley, who in turn enfeoffed the couple.⁹¹ The terms of the new enfeoffment were set so that the heirs of James and Avice would hold the land, and that failing any issue of the two of them, the lands would revert to her rightful heirs. However, there was also a clause that stipulated that should Avice die without an heir of her body, then the 'premises wholly shall remain to the right heirs of the said James.' However, nothing in the enfeoffment stipulated that the right heirs of Wiltshire had to be of his body and, by 1485, Wiltshire's heir was his brother, Thomas. Wiltshire still held the lands at his death in 1461 and they were among the lands resumed to the crown. Most of these lands were granted to the king's brother, the duke of Clarence, although some were given to the king's uncle by marriage, Henry Bourchier, earl of Essex. To further complicate matters, the lands in question had been resumed into the crown several times during Edward IV's reign before being restored *en masse* to Thomas Butler, earl of Ormond in 1485, with the exception of those lands that had been granted to Wiltshire's widow, Eleanor Beaufort as her dower.

As the wife of one of the king's mortal enemies and a member of the Beaufort family, Eleanor Beaufort had not fared well during Edward IV's reign. She had no lands of her own and had to live on the king's generosity. The king resolutely ignored her claims for her dower and jointure until 20 July 1470, when he granted her the sum of 100 marks per annum from the manors of her jointure.⁹² Even this was too much for the duke of Clarence, who regained all of the countess' jointure by 1473.⁹³ It was only on 16 May 1478, after Clarence's execution, that the countess was granted her jointure by the king and she regained possession of the

⁹¹ E. A. Fry & G. S. Fry, 'Dorset Feet of Fines', p. 322-3

⁹² *Cal. pat rolls, 1467-77*, p. 211

⁹³ P.R.O. E379/176 m. 5

manors of Kingesdon, and Somerton Erleigh in Somerset, and Bucknowle and Toller Porcorum in Dorset.⁹⁴ The problem was that all of these manors belonged to the Stafford inheritance and were subject to the same claims as the rest of the inheritance.

The legal action against Ormond brought out anybody who had even a remote claim to the inheritance. Ormond, Wiltshire's heir by virtue of the enfeoffment of 1445, Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland as the heir general, Sir Edward Poynings, a cousin of Northumberland's, and by virtue of another enfeoffment, heir to some of the manors and Sir Thomas Seymour, who had no claim to the manors, but was involved because of confusion over the genealogies involved. After three years of legal battle, a settlement was reached on 16 December 1488.⁹⁵ In some respects Ormond can be seen as the loser in this case as he had possession of all the lands in question but his claim was based on a legal manoeuvre of questionable validity. He retained three manors, Lunday Isle and Northam in Devon and Lower Kentcombe in Dorset and a reversion of the manors held by the countess of Wiltshire, although he was to pay her £50 annually. The heir general, the earl of Northumberland, gained the most from the transactions but even then had to wait for the death of Sir Edward Poynings to finalise the agreement.

It is clear that Ormond abided by the terms of the agreement. He had gained some manors that otherwise he would not have held. He made regular payments of 40 marks to Eleanor, countess of Wiltshire, and her husband, Sir Robert Spencer at St. Paul's, London, until her death in 1511.⁹⁶ It also appears that by the end of his life, Ormond had decided that his claim to the manors was faulty and began the process of transferring them to the earl of Northumberland. On 17 March 1511, Ormond granted three manors, Northam, Haselbury Bryan and Lower Kentcombe to Anne Percy, a daughter of the fourth earl of Northumberland and her husband, the earl of Arundel, with a reversion to her brother, the fifth earl of

⁹⁴ *Cal. pat. rolls, 1476-85*, p. 106

⁹⁵ W. Campbell, *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII*, ii, pp 380-3; for a full discussion of this case see J.M.W. Bean, *Estates of the Percy family, 1416-1537*, pp 119-26

⁹⁶ *Cal. anc. deeds*, i, C913, C1145, C1700, pp 477, 500, 558; *ibid.*, v, A1306, pp 548; P.R.O. C46/8206, 9993-5

Northumberland.⁹⁷ The remainder of the Stafford lands were transferred after Ormond's death in 1515 to Northumberland's possession by Sir Gilbert Talbot, one of Ormond's executors.⁹⁸ It appears that Ormond was taking extraordinary steps to ensure that his heirs in England would have no outstanding legal battles pressing, although it was unlikely that Northumberland would actually challenge Ormond's possession of the eight manors from the Stafford inheritance after Ormond had held them unchallenged since December 1488. However battles for possession of Ormond's lands and title were almost certainly at the forefront of the earl's mind in 1515.

The potential for confrontation between the heirs of his body, led by Sir Thomas Boleyn, and his heir male in Ireland, Sir Piers Butler, had been explicit since 1505 and implicit from the day Thomas Butler had been recognised as earl of Ormond in June 1477. Ormond had two legitimate children, Anne and Margaret, who married Sir James St. Leger and Sir William Boleyn, respectively. Of his two sons-in-law, Ormond appears to have enjoyed much closer relations with William Boleyn, a relationship that started almost purely as a business arrangement, but grew into a marriage alliance and regular contact. Perhaps central to this close arrangement was the hopes that both men had for Ormond's namesake, Boleyn's eldest son, Thomas, who was born in 1477. William Boleyn continued on the path started by his family, rising from merchant to gentry. He was knighted with his father-in-law at the coronation of Richard III and began to make connections with one of the king's main supporters, John Howard, duke of Norfolk.⁹⁹ Boleyn began to appear on commissions of array and as a JP. for Norfolk during Richard III's reign.¹⁰⁰ Boleyn was shielded from his Yorkist connections when Henry VII came to the throne in 1485 by his connections to Thomas Butler and served on a commission of array in Norfolk in 1487 and 1491 and was appointed sheriff of Kent in 1490.¹⁰¹ Both Boleyn and Ormond joined Henry VII's

⁹⁷ M.W. Bean, *Estates of the Percy family, 1416-1537*, p. 125

⁹⁸ P.R.O. E326/5652

⁹⁹ A. Sutton & Hammond, *The coronation of Richard III*, p. 274

¹⁰⁰ *Cal. pat. rolls, 1476-85*, pp 397, 490, 566-7

¹⁰¹ W. Campbell, *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII*, ii, p. 135; *Cal. pat. rolls, 1485-94*, p. 357

short-lived invasion of France in September 1492.¹⁰² Ormond and his son-in-law also appear at the festivities surrounding the creation of the king's son, Henry, as Duke of York in November 1494.¹⁰³

Boleyn continued to acquire land both through inheritance and purchase after 1485 and Ormond appears to have allowed him the use of his manor of Rocheford as one of his principal residences, while Ormond concentrated on the rebuilding of his manor of Newhall.¹⁰⁴ Boleyn continued his close connection with the Howard earls of Surrey and in a move reminiscent of his own marriage to a temporarily out of favour Thomas Butler, arranged the marriage of his son and heir, Thomas, to Elisabeth Howard, the eldest daughter of Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey, in 1501. This marriage probably owed as much to Ormond's patronage as it did to Boleyn's connections to the Howards but it does show that Ormond and William Boleyn were working to give Thomas Boleyn as many advantages in life as possible. The younger Boleyn had served the king with his father during the rebellions in the summer of 1497 and with his grandfather's patronage was ready to begin a life at court. He was probably already known to the king through his grandfather, and known well enough that the king would stay at the house of 'Mr Boleings' on 22 August 1498, possibly just after his marriage to Elizabeth Howard.¹⁰⁵

Both William and Thomas Boleyn begin to appear regularly at court in the first decade of the sixteenth century, benefiting from their connections to the earls of Ormond and Surrey. Thomas Boleyn emerged as the head of his family after his father's death on 10 October 1505 and served as co-executor of his father's will with Ormond.¹⁰⁶ Boleyn held no formal court position under Henry VII, but he was known to the king, by whom he was appointed one of the esquires of the body before the king's death in 1509, a position he retained under the new king.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² D. Hay (ed.), *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, 1485-1537*, p. 52

¹⁰³ L. & P. Rich. III & Hen. VII, ii, pp 402-03

¹⁰⁴ W. Dean, 'Sir Thomas Boleyn', pp 19-20; *Cal. anc. deeds*, ii, C1990, p. 470

¹⁰⁵ W. Dean, 'Sir Thomas Boleyn', pp 22-3

¹⁰⁶ N. H. Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusa*, ii, 465

¹⁰⁷ L. & P. Hen. VIII, 1509-14, i, pp 12, 20

Advancements and preferences from the new king followed quickly, but without his grandfather's place at court, it is doubtful whether Thomas Boleyn would have ever been known to Henry VIII. Moreover, it is clear that Thomas Boleyn received more of his grandfather's support and attention than his cousin, Sir George St. Leger.

Boleyn's place in his grandfather's heart can be seen in a bequest by Ormond in his will, which was made on 31 July 1515, some four days before Ormond's death. In the will, Ormond says,

Item wher my lorde my ffather whose soule God assoyle left and delyvered unto me a lytle whyte horne of ivory garnysshed at both thendes with golde and a corse thereunto of whyte sylke barred with barres of gold and a tyret of golde thereuppon the wych was myn auncetours at fyrst tyme they were called to honor and hath sythen contynually remayned in the same blode for wych cause my said lord and ffather commaunded me uppon his blessing that I shuld doe my devoir to cause it to contynew styll in my blode as forsucth as it myght lye in me so to be doone to the honour of the same bloode. Therefore for the accomplysshment of my said ffathers wyll as farre as in me is to execute the same I woll that myn executours delyver unto Sir Thomas Boleyn knyght sonne and heire apparaunt of my said doughter Margarett the said lytle whyte horne and corse he to kepe the same to thuse of thissue male of his body laufully begotten and for lacke of suche issue the sayd horne to remayne and be delyvered to Sir George Seyntlyger knyght sonne of my said doughter Anne and to thissue male wych successyvely shall come of the same George and so to continew in thissue male of the bodies of the same Dame Margarett and Dame Anne as long as shall mowe fortune any suche issue male of their bodys to be and else for defaute of issue male of the body of eny of my said doughters the said horne to remayne and be delyvered to the next issue male of my said auncetours so that it may contynewe styll in my blode hereafter aslong as it shall please God lyke it hath doone hytherto to the honour of the same blode.¹⁰⁸

This bequest may also indicate Ormond's personal wishes for the descent of all his lands and titles, both in England and in Ireland. The *hurn*, which tradition said had been given to Theobald Walter by Henry II, had been in the Butler family for over three hundred years by 1515. The *hurn* also had further connections to Thomas Beckett, with whom the

¹⁰⁸ P.R.O. PROB11/18

Butlers claimed a blood connection in the fifteenth century. Despite this, Ormond was willing to see it leave the Butler family, skip over his eldest grandson, Sir George St. Leger and pass to his favourite, and chosen heir, Sir Thomas Boleyn. Only if Boleyn's male line died would it pass to St. Leger and his heirs male, and would return to the Butlers only if all the male heirs of Ormond's daughters died out.

Based on this highly symbolic bequest, Ormond's preferences for the inheritance of his lands and titles, both in England and Ireland, would seem to lie with his grandsons, rather than with his Butler heir male, Sir Piers Butler. This would be in accord with the common law, which would have Ormond's lands divided between his daughters. The title earl of Ormond would then pass to his heir male, Piers Butler but, without lands, the title was effectively worthless. Thomas Boleyn appears to have taken the lead in the legal battles to secure his grandfather's lands, and given his place at court and his friendship with the king, half of the Ormond inheritance would almost certainly have been enough to provide the basis for the further rise of the Boleyn family into the peerage. However, for this to happen, Boleyn would have to come to terms with Piers Butler, a man who had worked all of his life to secure his place as the heir to the Butler inheritance in Ireland and who would not give up his inheritance without a fight.

The period 1471-1515 saw the resurrection of Butler interests in England once the Butlers came to terms with Edward IV's government in the early 1470s. The rehabilitation of the sixth earl of Ormond was hindered by the king's desire to placate his brother, the duke of Clarence, which meant that he was reluctant to restore the English holdings of the earl of Ormond to John Butler. Nevertheless, Ormond's relations with the king do show a certain degree of familiarity on the king's part which culminated in the restoration of the earldom of Ormond and its Irish lands in the summer of 1475. Ormond's brother and successor, Thomas Butler, completed the recovery of the lands of the earl of Wiltshire in Ireland but not until the ascension of Henry VII to the throne in 1485. Nevertheless, Thomas Butler's career does serve to illustrate the opportunities available for a magnate who was not always held in high favour by the crown. The Butler-Boleyn marriage served both parties well, giving the Boleyns a connection to the highest levels of society, while

providing Ormond with financial support during the 1470s when he was rebuilding the fortunes damaged by a decade in exile.

Ormond's prosperity and place at court during the reign of Henry VII restored much of the position built by Wiltshire in the 1450s, but the significant lack of a male heir created potential problems for Ormond. However, Ormond appears to have worked to minimise these problems by fostering the career of his grandson, Thomas Boleyn, in the 1490s and 1500s, with the intent of making Boleyn his designated successor rather than his heir male Piers Butler. Ormond's activities in this respect are a salutary reminder that while the importance of a magnate's lineage cannot be underestimated, neither can his willingness to promote the interests of his own personal bloodline. The conflict between personal family and lineage, as represented by Sir Thomas Boleyn and Sir Piers Butler, did not fully emerge until after Ormond's death in 1515, but Ormond was almost certainly aware of their almost incompatible ambitions and attempted to throw his support behind his grandson rather than the man who had come to act as the earl of Ormond in all but name in Ireland.