THE FAMILY OF SIR THOMAS REMPSTON, KG (d.1406)

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ABSTRACT

Foremost amongst the adherents of Henry of Bolingbroke and richly rewarded after the latter seized the English throne in 1399, surprisingly little seems to be known of Sir Thomas Rempston's ancestry and background. This article brings together what is known of his antecedents and putative father, already covered in a series of published sources, and raises a possible identification of his mother, together with an examination of how these family connections may have impacted his career. It also provides a synopsis of his immediate family.

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Introduction

The Rempston family apparently took their name from their seat at Rempstone [*sic*], a village of no particular historical significance or renown in south Nottinghamshire. No ancient ecclesiastical fabric remains, and thus no local monuments or other clues to the family remain in their ancient domain.

Thomas Rempston first appears on the historical stage in 1381, when he served as one of the knights of the shire for Nottinghamshire in the Parliament that dealt with the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt.[2] Having attached himself by 1386 to the service of John, Duke of Lancaster, his rise was steady, although at first not meteoric: he served as sheriff of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire in 1393-4 and had further terms as a parliamentary knight. His time seems to have been spent chiefly in military activities abroad, where he clearly formed a close personal relationship with Lancaster's son and heir. When the latter became king in 1399, Rempston suddenly found himself at the centre of power. He was appointed Steward of the Household and Constable of the Tower of London that year, and was admitted to the Order of the Garter in 1400; appointment as Admiral of the West followed in 1401.[3]

Two good, albeit short, biographies of Rempston have been published in recent years: the more detailed by Roskell,[4] and another in the ODNB.[5] The first of these asserts that "*Although of great antiquity, his family was not particularly affluent*" and tentatively identifies his father as *"John Rempston of Rempstone"*, an assertion made a century earlier in a brief biographical note.[6] The second, which is derivative from the former to some extent, merely states that he *"was the first of the family long established*

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1 *Contact email:* mjcar@btinternet.com

2 J S Roskell *et al., The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1386-1421,* **4** (1992), 189.

3 Roskell *et al., op. cit*. (1992), 189.

4 Roskell *et al., op. cit*. (1992), 189.

5 By S J Payling; this substantially revises the article in the original DNB which suffered to an extent from a conflation of Sir Thomas with his son and namesake, and benefits from Roskell's biography cited above.

6 Nicholas Harris Nicolas, *The Controversy Between Sir Richard Scrope and Sir Robert Grosvenor in the Court of Chivalry* **2** (1832): 199-202, presumably the ur-biography of this subject.

at Rempstone in Nottinghamshire to enjoy a career of any significance" and makes no mention of his parentage or immediate ancestry.

Ancestry

An overview of the family history was attempted by Thoroton, showing that they had been settled at Rempstone for several generations before the time of Sir Thomas.[7] His account mentions one Geoffrey [*'Galfr.'*] de Rempston who had a son Hugh,[8] without assigning dates or references, and begins a cohesive pedigree with Robert de Rempston, who had issue by two wives. The resultant stemma, confirmed with additional sources by Crook,[9] is as follows:

1. **Robert de Rempston**, living in 1254 when he had an exemption from serving on juries and the like, at the instance of William de Grey,[10] and in 1267[11] married firstly **Alice de Snayton,** daughter of Walter de Snayton; married secondly [possibly **Agnes**, living in 1280] by whom he was father of:

2. **Sir Thomas de Rempston**, knighted by 1280;[12] died as the result of an assault on 31 January 1292[13] and his lands taken into the King's hands;[14] married by 1290 **Cecily de Stokes**, daughter of Seman de Stokes [who afterwards married John Lymar and had further issue[15]]; by whom he was father of:

3. **John de Rempston**, a minor at the time of his father's death in 1292;[16] held a quarter of a knight's fee at Rempston of Henry de Grey, 1302-3;[17] had the same holding (as *"Johanne filio Thome"*), 1346.[18]

Father

Thoroton, the earliest published source to address the issue, also suggests that the father of Sir Thomas, the Garter knight, was "possibly" John son of Thomas de Rempston.[19]

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7 John Throsby, *Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire* **1** (1790), 58-62.

8 Could these possibly be conflations with the family of Hugh and Gilbert [*sic*] de Rampan, who held interests in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire during the 12th century, per *DD*, 656-657?

9 David Crook, "The Mysterious Death of a Nottinghamshire Knight in 1292", *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire* **107** (2003): 95-103.

10 *CPR, Henry III, 1247-1258*, 304.

11 Crook, *op. cit.* (2003), 97.

12 *CChR,* **2**: 238.

13 Crook, *op. cit.* (2003), 95.

14 *CFR,* **1**: 315.

15 Throsby, *op. cit.* (1790), 80.

16 Crook, *op. cit.* (2003), 97.

17 *Inquisitions and Assessments Relating to Feudal Aids* **4** (1906):102.

18 *Feudal Aids*, *op. cit.* **4** (1906):123.

19 Throsby, *op. cit.* (1790), 58-62.

However, since the former was active between 1381 and 1406 (indicating a potential birthdate of *c.*1350), and the latter was born no later than 1292, and probably before then (although no earlier than 1271), it is more likely that there is a gap of one generation between the two.

The National Archives holds a document from the Ancient Deeds series relating to the will of "Sir John de Rempston" which names the manor of Rempstone and dates to 1360[20] – this presumably refers to the father or grandfather of Sir Thomas (d.1406).

Mother

One admittedly late source, whose own underlying sources are unrecorded, may give an indication of the identity of Sir Thomas Rempston's mother. This is a pedigree of the family of Woodford, of Brightwell in Burnham, recorded in the heralds' visitation to Buckinghamshire in 1634.[21]

This pedigree *inter alia* records details of the Folville family of Ashby Folville, Leicestershire, and alleges a marriage between *"John Ramston of Ramston, Notts"* with the eldest of the four daughters of Sir John Folville and Mabel de la Mer; the other daughters are said to have married *"Geffrey Skevington of Skevington,"* [22] *"Sir William Marmion, knight, lord of Newton Marmion"* and *"John Folvile [sic] of Roresby"*. Since Agnes, the widow of Sir William Marmion, is attested as living in 1394,[23] and the son-in-law (Sir Hugh Browe, MP) of the sisters' brother, Sir Christopher Folville, was born in 1346,[24] it would be reasonable to assign a mid-14th century date to this part of the pedigree. This would be roughly consistent with the expected timescale of the parents of Sir Thomas Rempston. Was his mother a Folville?

Apart from the nature of the source, there are two other notes of caution to strike in relation to this account. Firstly, the husband is called a *"Ramston of Ramston, Notts"*; as well as Rempstone, there is also a Nottinghamshire village named Rampton, which could be intended here, and which has no connection with the Rempston family.

Secondly, Sir Thomas Rempston's arms are recorded as part of the Cheney pedigree in the Heralds' Visitation of Cambridgeshire:[25]

"*Argent, a chevron sable, in the dexter chief point a cinquefoil of the last*."[26]

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20 TNA, Public Record Office, Calendar of Ancient Deeds, Series D, E210/6939.

21 W Harry Rylands, ed., *The Visitation of the County of Buckingham made in 1634*, pedigree of Woodford of Brightwell in Burnham, (1909), 223.

22 Betham, *The Baronetage of England* **4** (1804):184, sub Skeffington of Skeffington: *"Sir Geoffrey de Skeffington married Mabel daughter of Sir John Folvile of Ashby Folvile by Mabel daughter and heir of Sir Geoffrey de la Mere."*

23 TNA, Public Record Office, SC/8/126/6263: Agnes widow of William Marmyon sues for recovery of the manors of Galby and Cold Newton [*ie* Newton Marmion] which she held by a feoffment with her husband, *c.*1394; plea mentions John de Skeffyngton and Richard de Skeffyngton.

24 J S Roskell *et al., The History of Parliament, The House of Commons, 1386-1421* **2** (1992), 384.

25 John W Clay, ed., *The Visitations of Cambridgeshire made in 1575 [etc.]*, (1897), 118-119.

26 Burke's *General Armory*, 838, essentially repeats this blazon but cites *"Roll of Knights, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, Edward I"* for "Sir Thomas Ramstone".

These arms formed one of the quarterings of the Cheney family, by virtue of their descent from one of Sir Thomas' granddaughters and eventual coheirs.

The arms assigned to "*John Ramston*" in the Buckinghamshire Visitation, possibly by an editor, are clearly different, being blazoned as "*gules, three rams' heads erased or*" [27] – presumably canting arms based on the name 'Ramston'. If these arms are historically accurate, then it would seem that "John Ramston" was most likely not a member of the Rempston family.

Nevertheless, if this record does reflect an historical fact, and applies to the father of Sir Thomas Rempston, this would suggest a connection to Leicestershire families of greater influence[28] than his own paternal line hitherto possessed, and may help account for his rise, if the connection with the House of Lancaster at a time of social upheaval was not sufficient on its own, or at least for the start of that upward climb.

One further possible glimpse of Sir Thomas' mother may be found in the Leicestershire Fines, which show that Ellen de Rempston held a virgate of land for life at 'Oleby' [Welby, Leics], apparently of the inheritance of James Belers, knight[29] in 1381-2; this may in turn indicate an earlier, childless marriage to a member of the Belers family and a second (*ie* Rempston) widowhood by 1381 (which would of course be consistent with the position of Sir Thomas' mother at that date).

Proposed Pedigree

The foregoing enables a more detailed tentative pedigree to be presented:

Pedigree 1: Rempston of Rempstone, 1254-1406

Robert de Rempston ff 1254-1267, married (2) [?Agnes]
|
Sir Thomas de Rempston, died 1292, married Cecily de Stokes
|
John de Rempston ff 1293-1346; ?left a will dated 1360
|
[John de Rempston, dead by 1381, married [?Ellen] daughter of Sir John Folville]
|
Sir Thomas Rempston, KG, died 1406

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27 *cf* Burke's *Complete Armory*, 838: Ramston: *gules three rams' heads cabossed argent* [*sic*].

28 Or, in the case of the Folvilles, notoriety – see Stones, "The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville, Leicestershire, and Their Associates in Crime, 1326-1347", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 7 (1957).

29 Leicestershire Feet of Fines, CP 25/1/126/68 #14, dated 24 May 1381 and 15 June 1382, translated and published by Chris Phillips at http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/fines/abstracts/CP_25_1_126_68.shtml

Death

Sir Thomas Rempston's death in 1406 was a dramatic one, as his *Inquisition Post Mortem* records:

"On Sunday the last of October the said Thomas Rempston got into a boat with his servants at Paul's Wharf in the ward of Baynard, intending to row under London Bridge to the Tower; that the tide being strong and against them, the boatmen told him they dared not row under the bridge, when he commanded them to proceed on pain of losing their heads". Nicolas continues, *"In endeavouring to pass, the boat ran against one of the piles of the bridge, which Rempston tried to take hold of; and in doing so, he upset the boat, and was thrown into the water and drowned. The Jury added that he was the cause of his own death"*.[30]

Marriage and family

Nicolas identified Sir Thomas Rempston's wife, Margaret, as the daughter and heiress of Sir Payn Villiers, of Kinalton, Notts.[31] This seems to be incorrect: Roskell asserts she was the daughter of Sir Simon Leek (d.*c.*1383) and sister of Sir John Leek (d.*c.*1415) of Nottinghamshire.[32] Payling, on the other hand, considers her the daughter of Sir John Leek.[33] Chronologically either seems possible, although given that she was first married at a young age to Godfrey Foljambe (*c.*1367-1388), and that Sir John Leek's eldest son was active as an adult by 1390,[34] the latter seems more likely. The *Visitation of Cambridgeshire* identifies her as *"Margarett d of John Leek."*[35] She survived to what must have been a great age, dying on 21 April 1454.[36] According to her will, dated at Nottingham, 14 November 1453 and proved at York on 5 May 1454, she desired to be buried with her second husband in the chancel of the church at Bingham, Notts.[37] They had at least three sons: Sir Thomas the younger, Robert,[38] and William, a cleric who was incumbent of the parish of Bingham.[39]

The younger Sir Thomas Rempston also had a military and parliamentary career, dying on 15 October 1458 and leaving by his wife Alice Bekering three daughters and coheiresses: Elizabeth, wife of Sir John Cheney; Isabel, wife of Sir Brian Stapleton, and Margaret, wife of Sir Richard Bingham.[40] Between these three the Rempston estates were divided.[41]

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30 Nicolas, *op. cit*. (1832), 200.

31 Nicolas, *op. cit.* (1832), 201, citing the Towneley MSS and Nichols' *Leicestershire*, iii, 197.

32 Roskell *et al*., *op. cit.* (1992), **3:** 583; **4:** 189-190.

33 Simon Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Great Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (1991), 239.

34 Roskell *et al*., *op. cit.* **3** (1992), 585.

35 Clay, *op. cit.* (1897), 119.

36 Renshaw, Mary A., *Inquisitions Post Mortem relating to Nottinghamshire, 1437-1485*, Thoroton Society **17** (1956), #40.

37 Raine, James. *Testamenta Eboracensia* **2** (1855), 224.

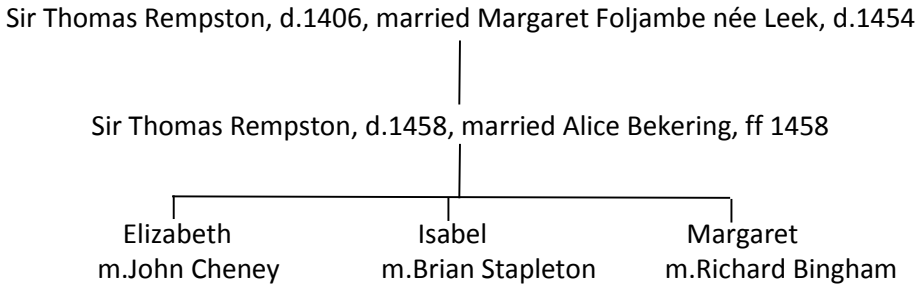
38 Named in his mother's will.

39 Named in the probate records of Sir Thomas Chaworth, per Raine, *op. cit.* (1855), 224.

40 Roskell *et al., op. cit.* **4** (1992), 192-194.

41 TNA, Public Record Office, PSO/1/64/31, dated 16 Nov 1458, in which they are called the daughters and coheiresses of Alice, widow of Thomas Rempston (this also shows that Alice outlived her husband). Current descendants of Elizabeth (Rempston) Cheney include HM Queen Elizabeth II.

Pedigree 2: The family of Sir Thomas Rempston, KG



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