THE KING'S CHAMBERLAIN, RICHARD RUFFUS, *C.*1140S – 1202, AND HIS FAMILY

by Dorothea Rowse [1]

ABSTRACT

The Ruffus name, which was to spread into many counties of England during the 12th and 13th centuries, arrived in Wiltshire in the mid 12th century in the person of Richard Ruffus, the King's Chamberlain. The family was to live in the county for the next two centuries and was an example of a family with a forceful and successful founder whose activities did not convert in later generations into a continuing or increased level of financial or political success. Richard was possibly the most ambitious and entrepreneurial of the Ruffus men of his generation and created a considerable inheritance for his family. There are many scattered references to his career but he has become largely invisible. Like Herbert Ruffus he started out at court in a fairly menial position but his career provides an interesting example of the success that could be achieved in 12th century England by the upwardly mobile.

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Introduction

Richard Ruffus, who lived from about the 1140s until 1202/03, was Henry II's Chamberlain. There is no documentary evidence for Richard Ruffus's ancestry or place of origin but circumstantial evidence points to his membership of the large west midlands kin group many of whom used the surname Ruffus from a very early period. Several groups of people using the name Ruffus had settled in north Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, some early enough to be mentioned in Domesday Book as tenants of the Bishop of Lincoln. By the middle of the 12th century they were well established in the church and in the mint in Lincoln and some were beginning to create estates and hold knight's fees.

This genealogical study of the life of Richard and his family is part of a much bigger study of a number of Ruffus/Rous kin groups which provides some fascinating evidence of the attempts of Norman families of fairly modest social status to improve their status once settled in England. The family which was established by Richard and his brother Roger is of particular interest in that its successes and failures are typical of kin groups whose fortunes were tied to the successes of an individual.[2] Richard left the family in a very good position to advance further socially and financially – but they failed to do so. This study goes some way to explaining why.

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[2] The family was described in some detail in Henry D G Liveing's Records of Romsey Abbey (1906). Most of the other references to Richard, his career and family are scattered.

Richard Ruffus's career

Richard may have started working at court in a fairly menial position but his arrival in the Chamber occurred in about 1166 when he was included in a list of Chamber staff who witnessed a charter for the cordwainers guild in Oxford.[3] In that same year he was listed as holding a half knight's fee of the Great Chamberlain.[4] There may be a link between the careers of Richard Ruffus and of Herbert Ruffus, the king's servant of the mid 12th century.[5] It is possible that Richard was intended to succeed Herbert as the king's servant, since his arrival in the Chamber and the date of the latter's departure occur at about the same time.

Existing documents for Richard's career as chamberlain suggest that his activities were focussed on personal service to the king, which would have reflected the service provided by Herbert Ruffus. He occasionally witnessed documents such as a grant of £10 to St Julian's in Le Mans and a charter for Godstow Nunnery in December 1181.[6] He made purchases for the royal family, such as a robe for the wife of the Young King in 1174/1175 [7] and he inspected the improvements being made to royal residences.[8] He probably ceased to be the King's Chamberlain in about 1181/82 and was succeeded by Turpin, but he continued to hold his lands by a serjeanty held in the Chamber.[9]

Some indication of his success in using his position in the Chamber can be seen in his acquisition of the highly lucrative grant of the honour of Berkhampstead in 1177. The honour had been held by a number of men who were close to the king such as Thomas á Becket, who is reputed to have created a lavish residence there. While the grant signalled the high esteem in which Richard was held by Henry II, it is also possible that it was intended to provide an extension of the services that the royal family had come to expect from him. The Pipe Rolls provide evidence of repairs being made to the castle of Berkhampstead during his tenure.[10] The castle was used as a royal residence. Queen Eleanor was held there in semi-confinement in 1184, and her daughter Princess Matilda and her family lived there for part of 1185.[11] Richard lost this prized appointment in 1189 when Richard I granted it to Queen Berengaria as dower land.

The serjeanty by which Richard held property in Wiltshire was created by the King in about 1176 and was confirmed on a number of occasions. It included the very rural properties at Imendon (or Imber North), Imber South, Edmeston and a house in

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3 CChR, Vol. II, 1260, p.34. This was a confirmation of the 12th century charter.

4 Hubert Hall, ed. The Red Book of the Exchequer (1896), 330, 45.

5 For the career of Herbert and his family see my article in Foundations (2007) 2 (4):219-227. It has been suggested that Richard may have been Herbert's son. Herbert did indeed have a son of that name, but he was Chamberlain to the Duke of Saxony and then returned to Walsall to supervise the estate of his infant nephews.

6 R W Eyton, Court, Household and Itinerary of King Henry II (1878) [1974], 245.

7 R W Eyton, op. cit., (1878) [1974], 190.

8 Pipe Roll 29, 130.

9 J E A Jolliffe, "The Camera Regis under Henry II Pt 2," English Historical Review, LXVIII (1953): 341.

10 Pipe Roll 29, 8.

11 D D R Owen, Eleanor of Aquitaine: queen and legend (1993); Pipe Roll 34, 36 and "Introduction"

Devizes.[12] There was also a wood at Seend, and more farmland at Horton and Homanton (Maddington). The lands at Imendon and Horton had been confiscated from Hunfridus Franceis during the king's retrieval of demesne lands early in his reign. The anger felt by the deprived family was to haunt the Ruffus family for a number of years as they tried to reclaim the property. Imber South was held of the Abbey of Romsey which granted the lands in 1171 in return for an advance payment of £110 to free the Abbey from Jewish lenders.[13]

He obtained other properties – tenements in the parish of St Nicholas in London which he granted to Bradenstoke Priory, and possibly land in "St Benedict-by-Thames parish" from the convent of Christchurch.[14] He was also said to have had an estate in Kilby in Leicestershire and there may have been more. By the standards of the time this was a modest collection of estates but given that he seems to have had little in the way of an inheritance it was a good start.

Being granted the management of estates in the hands of the king was one of the prizes for the men at court. One of the less appealing aspects to Richard's personality was the blatant way in which he extracted the maximum out of estates in his care. On the estates of the late William de Say and those of the de Camville family in Oxfordshire he systematically raided the timber and underwood, the stock and the income for his own benefit.[15] In 1190 he was fined for the mismanagement of the de Say estates and rendered his account for £1000 for having the favour of the king. He paid £800 immediately and the other £200 in instalments shortly thereafter – proof, if needed, of the considerable fortune he had acquired.[16] Fines for waste, assarts and forest pleas on the de Camville estate at Stanton while it was in the hands of Richard Ruffus were pardoned by the king.[17]

Probably the most interesting aspect of Richard's career as chamberlain is the evidence it provides for quite extensive patronage at court. For about fifteen years in the 1170/80s there was a noticeable increase in the number of men in royal service with the surname Ruffus and one must assume that Richard was finding places for Ruffus kinsmen. His nephew Richard became a chamberlain while his other nephew Thomas Ruffus received an appointment as a surveyor. During the 1180s numerous other young men called Ruffus were found places, mainly in the court of Prince John with whom Richard Ruffus may have had a good relationship. Ralph Ruffus, Henry Ruffus and Godfrey Ruffus had roles in the service of King John in the management of the king's harness and wardrobe or as horsemen. Ralph later became known as Chamberlain, probably to Prince John. King John arranged for grants of land and money for all three.[18] Robert Ruffus, who was in the service of King John from the late 1180s, served John as prince and king becoming his Chamberlain in about 1191 and received a grant of land in Navenby.[19] Two further recipients of Richard's

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12 Pipe Roll 55, Carta Antiquae, Vol.1, p.45/46, no.79.

13 Janet Stevenson, ed., The cartulary of Edington Monastery (BL Landsdowne MS 442) (1987), 101/102, no.373.

14 VCH Wiltshire, vol.3, p.284; E40/1485 (TNA).

15 Pipe Roll 35, Rotuli de Dominabus, p.xxvii – xxix; Hubert Hall, op. cit. (1896), 330.

16 Pipe Roll 39, 121.

17 Pipe Roll 44, 143.

18 J E A Jolliffe, Angevin Kingship (1955), 262; Pipe Roll 32, 1182/1183; William Farrer, Honors and Knight's Fees (1925), Vol.1, 231.

19 T D Hardy, ed., Rotuli de Liberate… (1844), 55; J Caley, ed. & R Lemon, comp. Calendarium Rotulorum Chartarum… (1803), 20; Navenby is about 12 miles south of Lincoln.

patronage were Hugh Ruffus and Turbert Ruffus, appointed as surveyors.[20] Master Benedict Ruffus, an officer of the Exchequer, in about 1210/1212, and Nigel Ruffus, one of two Keepers of the London Exchange in about 1195/6, may also have been beneficiaries of his patronage.[21] While nepotism at the court was quite common, the interest in these appointments, probably facilitated by Richard, is that patronage this extensive, given to people at a fairly lowly level, is not often visible.

Richard Ruffus was dead by Michaelmas 1203, then aged about 70 years.[22] He had demonstrated a prodigious capacity to work his way up the rungs of the court organisation, from the position of a servant at the very bottom of the pile to a close personal relationship with Henry II. He had amassed a fortune with ruthless efficiency and certainly made some enemies. Towards the end of his life the vigour and acrimony with which a number of churchmen pursued the tithes on land held by him may have owed more to the men's relationship with Richard than to the size of the sum involved.[23]

Richard's nephews, Thomas and Richard

Richard was probably unmarried and certainly left no children. He had one known brother, Roger Ruffus, who appears to have been in the service of the Earl of Salisbury, witnessing grants of land made by the earl during the decades prior to 1196.[24] His sons Richard and Thomas were the heirs to Richard's estates. Thomas was given Imber, Seend Wood and the burgage in Devizes, the lands which carried the serjeanty in the Chamber.[25] Richard was given land in Homanton, Horton, and Imber South which was confirmed on July, 1203.[26] Richard Ruffus junior followed his uncle into the Chamber at Court. He was in Germany with Godfrey de Louvain on the king's service in 1195 and he may have travelled quite considerably during his years of service.[27] He was married to Emma and had at least two sons.

The Ruffus family probably lived at Devizes and Edington when they were in Wiltshire, while the farmlands were probably used only for agriculture. Imber was extremely remote even in 1906: "Soon after leaving a farmhouse just above Edington the road ceases and a traveller must proceed across the turf as best he can. About four miles from Edington, in a fold or depression of the down, he will come upon the ancient village of Imber." [28]

Following Richard's death the brothers jostled over the serjeanty. Richard jnr. was working in the Chamberlain's department as early as 1199 [29] and it is possible that he believed himself to be the most suitable of the brothers to succeed his uncle.

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20 Pipe Roll 45, 9.

21 Hubert Hall, op. cit. (1896), 473; Pipe Roll 45, 19; Pipe Roll 4, 151.

22 Pipe Roll 47, 3, quoting Pipe Rolls, 5 John, 1203, where p.21 records Thomas Ruffus son of Roger paying 300 marks to have the lands of his uncle Richard Ruffus.

23 CRR, 21, 2 John, 1200/1, 426.

24 Vera C M London, ed., The cartularies of Bradenstoke Priory… (1979), 94, no.276; 97, no.288; 187, no.642.

25 T D Hardy, Rotuli Chartarum in Turri Londinensi asservata (1835), Vol.1, part 1, 107b; J Caley & R Lemon, op cit. (1803), 19.

26 T D Hardy, op cit. (1835), Vol.1, part 1, 109; J Caley & R Lemon, op cit. (1803), 19.

27 Pipe Roll 51, 105, quoting the Norman Pipe Roll of 1195.

28 Henry D G Liveing, Records of Romsey Abbey … (1906), 159/160. Imber no longer exists, having been absorbed into the military training district on Salisbury Plain.

29 Janet Stevenson, op. cit. (1987), 102, nos.374a, 374b.

Eventually Thomas prevailed but following his death in 1221 Richard appeared to be holding the serjeanty again, possibly because Thomas's son was at that time a minor.[30] Thomas may have had a wife named Gunnilda as someone of that name appears with him in a rental for Homanton. In 1212 Olympia Willington, the granddaughter of Hunfridus Franceis, tried again to retrieve the land at Imber.[31] This caused Thomas great grief and in 1214 he was imprisoned in London, having excused himself from an appearance at court. The case was still dragging on at the time of his death.[32]

John Ruffus, *c.*1205 – 1247

The succession of a minor heir was an occurrence that was to haunt future generations and the estate spent considerable periods of time in the care of others. Thomas's son John was in his late teens at the time of his father's death and after a period in the wardship of Thomas Fitz Reigny, he succeeded to the estate in 1221.[33] During the 1230s the Willingtons were back, still laying claim to Imber. A hearing probably went in John's favour since the lands and the serjeanty remained in the family.[34] In 1240 Seend Wood was lost to a successful challenge.[35] Little is known of John's career. He continued to hold the serjeanty in the Chamber but there is no documentary evidence for service at court.[36] He probably died in 1247, once again leaving a minor heir.

Contemporary family service at court was represented by the career of Richard Ruffus who served as King's Clerk and Wardrobe Clerk from the 1240s to his death in 1269.[37] He may have been the father of another long-serving royal domestic clerk – William le Rous who served during the 1260s and 1270s and had brothers Richard and Gilbert.[38]

Thomas le Rous, *c.*1230s – *c.*1291

There was a further inheritance by a minor when John's son and heir Thomas, probably in his late teens when his father died, was in the custody of Robert Walerand, a neighbour in 1249.[39] He had taken over the family lands by 1254/55 and had married Maud de Baynton, an heiress from Edington. Her inheritance at Baynton later descended with the estate at Imber.[40] Thomas played an active part in the life of the county, serving on juries of his peers, such as the trial of Sir Thomas de

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30 Pipe Roll 64, 81, 76/77.

31 CRR, Vol.57, 1212, in D M Stenton, ed., Pleas..., vol.iv, p.296, no.4611; p.305, no.4686; p.307, no.4697.

32 CRR, Vol.59, 1214, 5.

33 T D Hardy, ed., Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum ... (1839), Vol.1, 474; Pipe Roll 86, 163, 167.

34 CRR, Vol.XV, 17/18 Henry III, 154, no.741;188, no.889.

35 CRR, Vol.XVI, 25 Henry III, 490, no.2476; VCH Wiltshire, Vol.7, 100.

36 CCR, Vol.6, Henry III, 1247, 12/13.

37 Tout, T F, Chapters in the administrative history of mediaeval England:... (1920-1933), 271; CPR, Henry III, Vol.6, 1267-1272, 371.

38 CPR, Henry III, Vol.6, 1267-1272, 452, 456.

39 H C Maxwell Lyte, ed., Book of Fees (1920-1930), 1420/1; Charles Roberts, ed., Excerpta e Rotulis Finium...(1835/36), vol.II, 90.

40 VCH Wiltshire, Vol. 8, 242.

Turberville; by February 1288 he had become a Justice and was later appointed coroner for Wiltshire. In 1277 Edward I called up his forces to attack Wales and Thomas sent the son of a neighbour, Walter Danesy, as a substitute.[41] He died in November 1291.[42]

John le Rous, died 1330

Thomas's activities in public service served as an example to his son who was even more active. He served on juries and he became a Knight of the Shire for Wiltshire, attending Parliament in 1311.[43] He and John Turpyn were the two collectors of the Scottish scutage in Wiltshire in 1324.[44] In the same year he was recommended for appointment as Keeper of Alien Goods in Wiltshire.[45] Like his father he avoided military service himself, sending a substitute, and finally obtained a writ of exoneration in 1315.[46]

John's establishment of a chapel at Baynton, possibly for family use, was the start of an ongoing problem for the family. A claim for the local tithes by the incumbent clashed with those of Romsey Abbey which claimed all tithes in the parish for the Prebend of Edington.[47] In 1313 John gave up the family's long held right to present two veiled nuns to Romsey Abbey.[48]

He was probably married twice, with Isabella as the first wife and Ela de Grimstead, the sister of John de Grimstead the elder, as his second wife.[49] The Grimstead family was based in the Wiltshire parish of Bemerton although John Grimstead's marriage to a Spileman heiress brought him estates in Hampshire, which descended to the Rous family. When John died in 1330 he left a son John and a second son Richard, b.c.1321, probably the son of the second marriage, both of whom succeeded him. There were also two daughters - Christian who married Roger Tropenell of Whaddon and Combe, and Ellen, a nun at Shaftesbury Abbey in 1345.[50]

John le Rous, *c.*1306 - 1346

John's elder son, another John, succeeded to the properties aged 24 years. He did not follow his father into service to the county and seems to have been totally involved in managing his estates. He was married to Alice who probably brought the lands at East Garston in Berkshire into the family, but he left no legitimate heirs.[51] The dispute over tithes at Baynton turned nasty in 1339 when the incumbent of Baynton chapel, backed by John le Rous, came into conflict with the Prebendary of Edington

41 Henry D G Liveing, op. cit. (1906), 157.

42 CFR, Vol.1, Edw I, 1272-1307, 2 November 1291.

43 Henry D G Liveing, op. cit. (1906), 157.

44 Feudal Aids, vol.5, 213/219.

45 SC 1 Ancient correspondence, 36/24A, 31 October 1324. PRO.

46 W H Stevenson, ed., Calendar of various Chancery rolls ... (1912), 112.

47 VCH Wiltshire, vol.8, 248.

48 E327/699, TNA.

49 Henry D G Liveing, op. cit. (1906), pedigree on unnumbered page facing p.158.

50 CPR, Edw III, Vol.VI, August 1345, 539.

51 Henry D G Liveing, op. cit. (1906), 158.

and a man was killed in Baynton Field.[52] John died in about November 1346.[53] Alice held a life interest in Imber until her death in 1361.[54]

Richard le Rous, *c.*1321 – 1374

The traditional estate was more or less intact when handed on to John's brother Richard who was married to Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir John Huntercombe. In 1361/62, described incorrectly as the son and heir of John le Rous, he offered security to the escheator for the estate.[55] Tithes continued to haunt the family. In a legal case during 1362 to 1364 the Edington community claimed that the family had held back tithes owned by the community; the family had to pay 52 marks in reparation.[56] Richard appears frequently in the Edington cartulary and seems to have had a long association with William de Edington, Chancellor of England, Bishop of Winchester and founder of Edington. Richard died in 1374; the king granted dower lands in Westbury Leigh to his wife.[57]

John le Rous, *c.*1367 – 1413

Inheritance by a minor once again played a part in the fate of the estates. John was only aged seven but was already married when his father died in 1374. His wife, Isolde, was the daughter of Philip Fitz-Waryn who was also his guardian.[58] John and Isolde had two sons, William and John.[59] The family landholding was extended in this generation by the inheritance from John's mother of Huntercombe manor with other lands in Buckinghamshire, and Efford manor in Hampshire through his grandmother Ela Grimstead. A day before his death in December 1413, John granted the manor of Baynton and the advowson of the church there to his younger son John.[60] He died on 2 December 1413 aged about 46 and was succeeded by his elder son, William.[61]

William le Rous, *fl.*1416 – d.1452

After several generations of quiet and unspectacular consolidation of the family's landholding and position in Wiltshire society, the succession of William Rous marked the beginning of the end for the family. He was described in fairly contemptuous terms by contemporaries – "alwey occupied in lechery and avowtry and took no heed to sew" [ie sue] for his inheritance.[62] He was married firstly to Margaret Thorp the daughter of Henry Thorp, Lord of Boscomb, but he repudiated her and then failed to pay the promised annuity from the income from Great Chalfield manor.[63] He then married

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52 VCH Wiltshire, vol.8, 249.

53 CPR Edward III, vol.8, 202.

54 J Caley & J Bayley, eds., Calendarium Inquisitionum post mortem sive escaetarum (1806), vol.ii, 241, no.46, dated 35 Edw III.

55 Anon., Rotulorum originalium… (1805), Vol.2, 263.

56 Janet Stevenson, op. cit. (1987), 17/18, nos.31/32.

57 VCH Wiltshire, Vol.15, 206; Anon., Rotulorum originalium… (1805), Vol.2, 337.

58 CIPM, Vol.14, p.83.

59 J S Davies, The manor and church at Great Chalfield (1900), 211.

60 Janet Stevenson, op. cit. (1987) 165, nos.643-5.

61 CIPM, Vol.20, 1-5 Henry V, 2, no.6/7.

62 VCH Wiltshire, Vol.7, 61, note 46.

63 C1/1514/5, TNA.

Isabel but there were no children to succeed him. He did, however, have an illegitimate son by Margaret Millett his mistress.[64]

William's maternal inheritance was the basis for a rather flamboyant final event in the history of the family. In 1416 Constance Fitz-Waryn settled Great Chalfield on her grandson William. In 1425/6 William claimed the constableship of Trowbridge castle, a position appointed by the Duchy of Lancaster, on the basis that the office pertained to his ownership of Great Chalfield manor.[65] William's energetic claim to this position had the strong support of the Duke of Gloucester, who was, at that time, involved in encouraging opposition to Cardinal Beaufort who was in charge of government. The consequences of this claim, which was denied, had a disastrous effect on William's finances. He had lost his inheritance, much of it to a kinsman Thomas Tropenell, by the time of his death in London in August 1452; he may have been buried in Grey Friars, London.

John le Rous, d.1453

William was succeeded briefly by his brother John, known as "of Baynton". He was married twice – to Joan Ashley and Ann Gowayn, both the daughters of local landowners - but he left no legitimate heirs. He seems to have been the only member of the various Rous kin-groups in England to serve at Agincourt – as a member of Lord Hungerford's retinue. In 1444 he granted the manor and advowson of the church at Baynton together with other lands to Edington Priory.[66] He died in 1453 and was buried at Edington in the south aisle of the choir.

Conclusion

The direct line of the Rous family in Wiltshire died out with this generation. When seen in comparison to the other Ruffus kin-groups in this study this family is typical of those families who started out strongly, often in the short term in the service of the king, who became their patron, but failed to find a successful long-term patron and floundered as a consequence. There were too many minor heirs, the families were small and despite some increases in landholding by marriage, there was a failure to marry important heiresses. Successive generations made very little headway in the move up the county preferment ladder. One became coroner for Wiltshire and his son was knight of the shire for the county but none of them were able to take the next step. William's attempt to participate on the national stage was a complete failure and the family largely disappeared from the county record.

64 Harley, 88, fo.1, TNA.

65 VCH Wiltshire, Vol.7, 132.

66 Janet Stevenson, op. cit., 166, no.646.

Table I. Table of descent for the Ruffus family.

a. Ruffus
- b.1. Richard Ruffus, King's Chamberlain; dsp 1202/03
- b.2. Roger Ruffus, worked for the Earl of Essex
  - c.1. Thomas, [?m. Gunnilda]; d.1221
    - d.1. John b.c.1205; d.1247
      - e.1. Thomas, m. Maud de Baynton
        - f.1. John, m.1. Isabella;
          - m.2. Ela/Ellen Grimstead; d.c.1330
        - f.2. [?Thomas, fl 1287]
          - g.1. John, b.c.1306; m. Alice (d.1361); dsp 1346
          - g.2. Richard, b.c.1321; suc 1361;
            - m. Elizabeth Huntercombe; d.1377
              - h.1. John, m. Isolde Fitz-Waryn; d. 1413
                - i.1. William, b.c.1389; dsp 1452
                - i.2. John, d.1453
          - g.3. Christian, m. Roger Tropenell
            - h.1. John Tropenell fl 1340/43; m. Agnes Lye
              - i.1 Harry Tropenell m Edith Roche
                - j.1. Thomas Tropenell
          - g.4. Ellen, nun at Shaftesbury Abbey
      - [d.2. ? Richard, King's clerk and Wardrobe Clerk fl c.1243;d.1269]
        - [e.1. William, King's domestic clerk 1260s and 1270s]
        - [e.2. Richard]
        - [e.3. Gilbert]
  - c.2. Richard Ruffus, m. Emma dau of Adam and Isabel de Cricklade;
    - d.1. [Robert le Rede of Homanton, fl 1220/1225]
    - d.2. [Ralph Red of Homanton, fl 1220/1225]

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