

The Wake family

AND THE MANOR OF BOURN

Bourne in the Middle Ages consisted of two separate manors, those of Bourn and Bourn Abbots, the latter appearing with the foundation of the Abbey and having successive abbots as its lord. The Manor of Bourn, which for a substantial part of the medieval period was in the hands of the Wake family, was formed from separate holdings such as those described in the Domesday Book. In the time of Henry I, William de Rullos was the Lord of Bourne but soon afterwards, the manor passed to Baldwin Fitzgilbert who had married his niece Adelina and thus came into possession of Bourne by the right of his wife.

The daughter of Baldwin and Adelina was Emma and on her marriage to Hugh Wake he became Lord of Bourne by 1166. The manor remained in the possession of the Wake family until the 14th century and among the various members who held lands at Bourne are names which figure prominently in our national history. The most conspicuous was Thomas Wake (1297-1349), a baron who played a significant part in the political affairs of his time. He succeeded his father when he was only three years old and for some years was a royal ward, though the king, Edward II, eventually allowed him full possession of his lands when he was twenty years old. He had large estates in Lincolnshire as well as some manors in Rutland. He married Blanche, daughter of Henry of Lancaster, and great-grand-daughter of Henry III.

Thomas Wake was one of the barons who opposed the Despensers, the favourites of Edward II, and joined with Queen Isabella and Mortimer against the king. When the Despensers were captured in 1326, Wake was among the judges who sentenced them to death. When the king himself died in 1327, Wake became increasingly hostile towards his earlier patrons, Isabella and Mortimer. He was now constable of the Tower of London, having charge of the political prisoners who were held there, and responsibility for the peace and defence of the city.

He joined a rising against Isabella and Mortimer in 1328 but after Mortimer had seized Leicester and confronted his enemies with great force, Thomas Wake was obliged to surrender and was then fined and deprived of his offices. In 1331, after the fall and death of Mortimer, he was restored to his lands and offices. He was also, for a time, governor of the Channel Islands. It appears that he did not always find favour with the new king, Edward III, for he was imprisoned in 1340. For the remainder of his life, he seems to have figured less prominently in national affairs, but it is clear that he was a man of power and influence in his day.

It is hardly likely that he would spend much time at his manor of Bourne, but there is a tradition that on one occasion he received a very eminent visitor at Bourne Castle when King Edward III was his guest in the spring of 1330. However, it is difficult to reconcile this date with the fact that Wake was out of favour with Isabella and Mortimer after 1329 and was not restored

to his lands and offices until 1331. Though the young king Edward III was certainly antagonistic to his mother and Mortimer, would Thomas Wake be able to receive him at Bourne in 1330, or had he not been deprived of his Bourne estate? **(note from NTH - This is now a fact after evidence coming to light of the exact date of the Kings visit which was in August 1330 and not in the spring of that year. Even so, Thomas Wake had fled to France and therefore was not present during the visit. In fact, Thomas had his manor and castles returned to him in the year 1330 as stated in the Calendar of Close Rolls and not 1331)**

After the death of Thomas Wake in 1349, his widow Lady Blanche lived on for many years. She seems to have been a person of strong will and independent spirit, illustrated by the following incident which has been related concerning her. In 1358, a Dominican friar called John Lyte lodged a complaint with the Holy See in Rome regarding Lady Wake and her council at Bourne. She had, he alleged, done many wrongs to him and his church at Ely. The Pope therefore issued some rather gruesome instructions to the Bishop at Lincoln saying that "he should curse all that did the wrong and that those who were dead and guilty in this matter should be dug out of their graves and cast out of sanctuary".

Lady Blanche, aware that this order had been given, sent out men to spy on the bishop and to report when the Papal command was being sent to Bourne. Thus, when the servants of the bishop were approaching the town, they were waylaid by Lady Blanche's men, and "much manslaughter was caused by the matter for those that brought the command were for the most part killed". What action was taken by the clerical powers, after this violent affront to their authority is not known.

Thomas Wake's sister Margaret had married twice, her second husband being Edmund of Woodstock, Earl of Kent. He had been executed as early as 1330, leaving two sons. But both of these had died by 1352 and their mother, Margaret, was also dead by this time. The next in succession was Margaret's daughter, Joan "The Fair Maid of Kent". She had married Sir Thomas Holland and later the Earl of Salisbury but this second marriage was set aside in 1349. Soon afterwards, she became Countess of Kent and Lady Wake of Liddell in her own right. Sir Thomas died in 1360, and the following year Joan achieved permanent renown by marrying Edward, the Black Prince. As one might gather, the "Fair Maid" was noted for her beauty, and it is interesting that quite unwittingly, she left a memorial to posterity.

An old story, now supported by strong evidence, tells how after his victory at Crecy in 1346, Edward III desired to create an Order of chivalry dedicated to Saint George and to consist of the king and twenty-six of his principal knights. For the badge of the new Order, the king chose a lady's garter, dropped accidentally at a ball at Calais by "the Fair Maid of Kent". As he fastened it round his knee, the king is said to have uttered the immortal words *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, meaning Evil be to him who evil thinks and which has now entered the language. When he returned from Calais, he obtained for himself and the first knights of the Order, twelve garters of royal blue embroidered with the words and with the cross of Saint George.

Joan, as Princess of Wales, lived in France with her husband for a number of years and even when she was in England had little contact with Bourne whose lands came into her possession after her aunt, Lady Blanche, had died in 1380. This was towards the end of Joan's own life, for she died in 1385. After this, the Manor of Bourne passed into the family of her first husband, Sir Thomas Holland, although it remained with his family for a comparatively short time. By 1445, it was in the hands of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Somerset and then it passed to Henry VIII and some time later it came into the possession of William Heckington, whose

daughter married Richard Cecil. By this marriage of Richard Cecil and Jane Heckington, the Manor of Bourn passed into the Cecil family and has remained in the hands of successive Earls of Exeter down to modern times.

NOTE: This is an edited version from A History of Bourne by J D Birkbeck, published in 1970.