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# The Bedfordshire Society

THE TIE OF PLACE is a powerful link. However far afield he may roam, the true Bedfordian is still bound by invisible but well-forged bonds of affection for the county he has left. Letters from our readers abroad often express the love and nostalgia they feel for their home county. As Sir Frederick Mander said at a meeting called to consider the formation of a Bedfordshire Society, 'Bedfordshire is not merely a geographical name: it is even more a state of mind'. The proposal to form the Society was warmly approved at an inaugural gathering of public men called together by Lord Luke. The Lord Lieutenant was elected president and Lord Luke chairman of the acting executive committee pending its formal establishment.

It will meet a real need. Its objects are to encourage cordiality and fellowship among Bedfordshire men and women; to promote the spirit of county and local patriotism—'that righteous and God-given

# The Builder of Ampthill Castle

By MARY S. F. GEORGE

'A MAN OF GREAT FAME in outward warres and very rich', Sir John Cornewall, Knight of the Garter, later Lord Fanhope, brother-in-law of Henry IV and one of the heroes of Agincourt, had close associations with fifteenth-century Bedfordshire. He erected a castle on the hill above the little town of Ampthill and laid out and enclosed the park. He was the first lord of the manor to live within its bounds. The rectories of Ampthill and Millbrook had been reduced to vicarages and impoverished by Beaulieu Priory; Sir John purchased the advowsons, restored the rectories, and largely rebuilt the two churches. His arms, within the blue ribbon of the Garter, appear in the clerestory window at Millbrook, and the east window of the manor chapel (now the north aisle) at Ampthill Church once contained a representation of Sir John and his wife, 'both kneeling and respecting one another' according to Thomas Dinely, writing just before the Great Rebellion. Hollar's engraving of the window dated 1667 survives. Fragments of the glass remained until the nineteenth century, when they are said to have been purchased by Sir George Osborn of Chicksands.

John Cornewall was descended from the holders of the vast barony of Burford in Shropshire. The Cornewalls claimed descent from Richard Plantagenet, Earl of Cornwall, second son of King John, who was crowned 'King of the Romans'—little more than a titular dignity. He squandered much of the wealth he had accumulated from his exploitation of Cornwall's mineral resources in a vain attempt to secure the throne of the Germanic Empire. His son Edmund, who in 1276 founded the first English house of the Bonhommes at Ashridge, Hertfordshire, succeeded his father as Earl of Cornwall but failed in his claim to the title of King of the Romans. Geoffrey de Cornewall, a descendant of Richard, married Margaret de Mortimer, an heiress who brought him the great Shropshire estates. He was the first of the Cornewalls, barons of Burford.

John Cornewall, with whom we are concerned, was the son of a younger son who held office abroad. His father, anxious that his child should be born in England, sent his wife to Cornwall, but the boy was born at sea as the ship was nearing St Michael's Mount. He was baptized in Marazion Church.

Apparently he did not inherit the good looks and great stature of his ancestors, but his intelligence and courage were well above average. As a youth he excelled at 'tilting', a pastime favoured by well-born youths, and was soon competing in knightly tourney. By 1401 he had acquired such fame in the lists that he was chosen as a combatant in the great tournament at York, which was witnessed by Henry IV and his sister, the widowed Princess Elizabeth, Countess of Huntingdon.

Cornewall's entry must have been impressive. He was popularly



*By permission of the British Museum*

*A fifteenth-century joust, from an illumination in Froissart's Chronicle*

known as the 'Green Cornewall' from his adoption of green as his colour, some said because of his birth at sea; the bordure of his coat was green and gold, his helmet was surmounted by a green plume, and his charger and attendants were resplendent in the same colour.

In the jousts he vanquished first a French knight, then an Italian knight, in spirited encounters, and won not only his spurs but also the heart and hand of the Princess Elizabeth. She, no doubt, presented to the young victor the trophies he had won. She may already have been acquainted with him at court, but it was not until after the York tournament that the king gave his assent to her union with Cornewall, whom he invested with the Order of the Garter.

The Princess was not in her first youth. She had married John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon, in 1387, and had borne him several children. Holland, a loyal supporter of Richard II, was murdered by order of the usurping Bolingbroke, but Bolingbroke as Henry IV treated the widow, his sister, with some consideration.

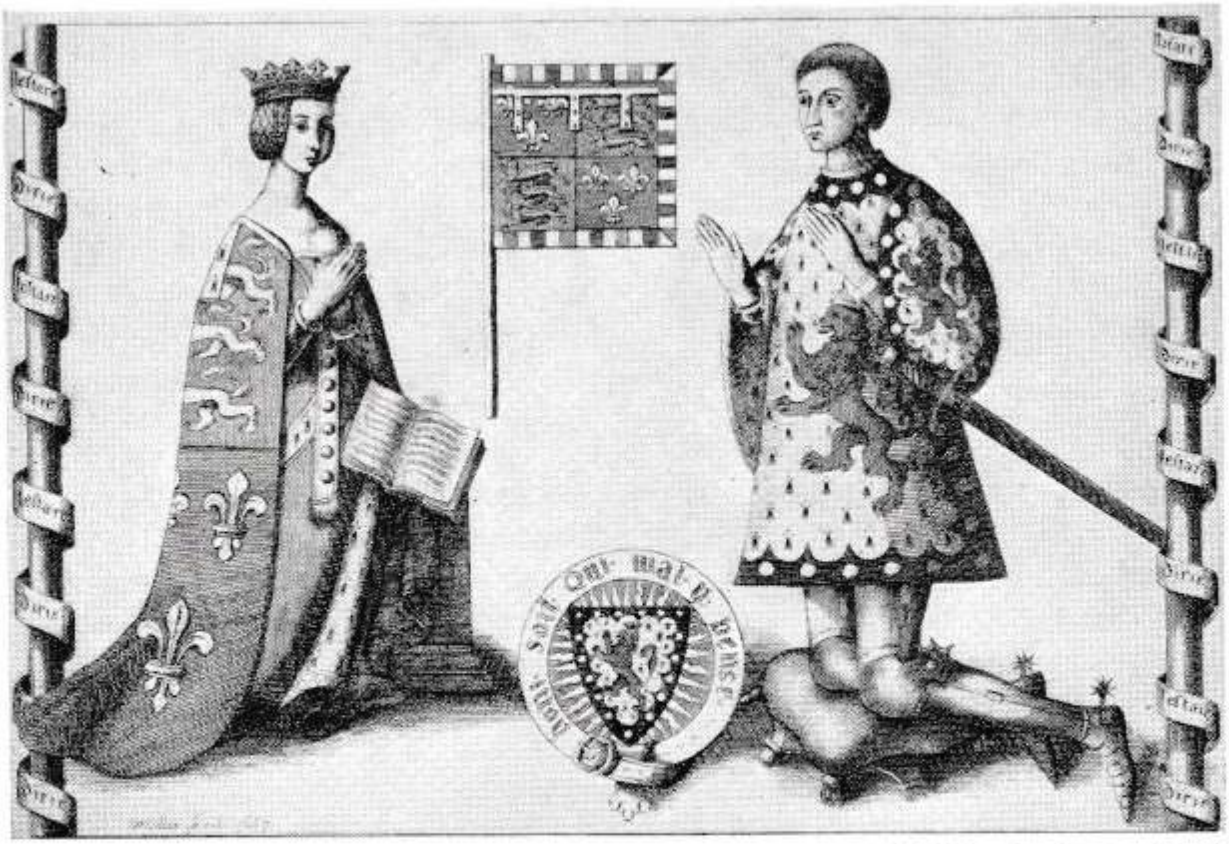
The young Sir John Cornewall had made a most advantageous marriage. As the king's brother-in-law he received royal grants and was singularly favoured by Prince Henry, heir to the throne. When the prince, as Henry V, became involved in war with France he took

Cornewall with him as a military leader. At Agincourt Sir John was second-in-command of the right wing of the English Army under the Duke of York. York was killed but Cornewall rallied and inspired his troops and took prisoner the Count of Vendôme. After the battle he was given charge of the army remaining in France. He returned to England with rich spoils of war, a large ransom for the captured count, and an unsullied reputation as a soldier.

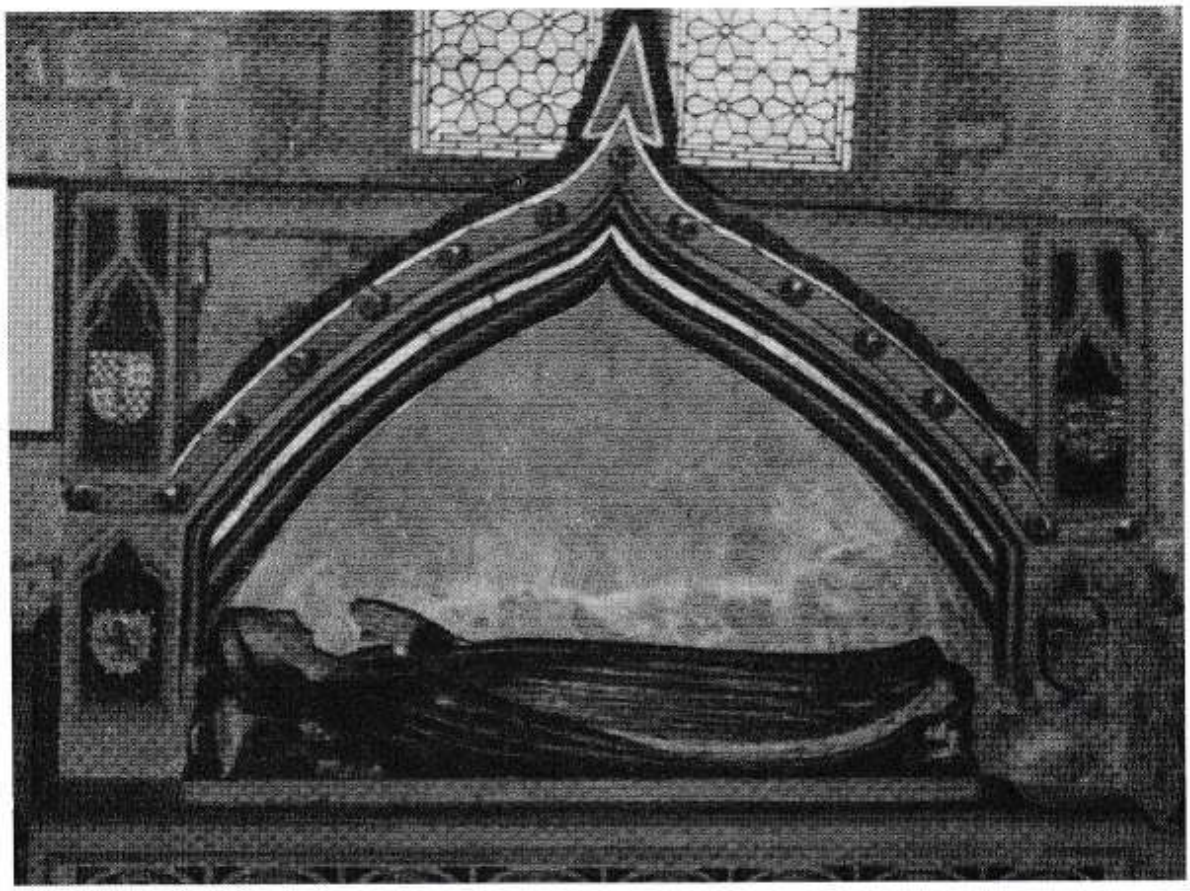
With his great wealth he began to buy land in various parts of England, but it was in Bedfordshire, at Ampthill, not many miles from the home of his comrade-in-arms at Agincourt, Sir John Wenlock of Luton, that he chose to build a castle 'meet for his Royal spouse'. Leland, in the sixteenth century, says that it was 'standing stately on a hill with foure or five faire Towers of stone in the Inner Warde, beside the Basse Court', and Parry saw a model of it made for the Earl of Upper Ossory from Leland's description and from outlines still visible in the eighteenth century. There were two gatehouses, one on higher ground being flanked by towers. The main entrance overlooked the ponds which still remain. From the walls projected nine half-pentagons, and the chapel, in which Leland says there was heraldic glass, may have been placed in one of the two lateral projections between the front and back courts.

Henry V had great trust in Cornewall. When he was absent on his campaign to obtain sovereignty over France he left 'the defence of these parts' in Cornewall's hands, and Sir John and the Princess entertained the king to a sumptuous banquet on his triumphant return with his bride Katherine of France.

Ampthill Castle had not reached completion when tragedy befell the



*Hollar's engraving of a stained glass window formerly in Ampthill Church, showing Lord Fanhope and his lady 'kneeling and respecting one another'*



*Princess Elizabeth's tomb at Burford*

Cornewalls; their only son and heir John, a valiant youth of eighteen, was killed fighting for Henry in France. Five years later the Princess Elizabeth, his mother, died, and Sir John took her body to Burford for burial. On her fine tomb reposes a life-size effigy, beautifully executed. The shields of arms displayed are (1) France and England quarterly, (2) Cornewall (Fanhope), (3) Holland of Huntingdon and Exeter impaling France and England (first marriage), (4) Cornewall impaling Holland and England and France (second marriage). The inscription reads: 'Here lyeth the body of the noble lady Elizabeth, daughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, own sister of King Henry IV, wife of John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon and Duke of Exeter, after married to Sir John Cornewall, K.G., and Lord Fanhope. She died in the fourth year of King Henry VI, A.D. 1426'.

In 1430 Cornewall gave to St Alban's Abbey 'out of the mammon of plunder which he had taken from our enemies in the war and by violence, one chasuble of a gold cloth with a strong green ground and having a gold fringe; also two tunicles of the same piece . . . and three hoods for the singers in the choir', and later 'one compleat vestment with three capes and a compleat dress for the altar, worth £40.'

In 1433 he was created Baron Fanhope, of Fownhope, Herefordshire. He seems to have resided a good deal at Ampthill Castle after the death of his wife, and had considerable influence in Bedfordshire affairs. In 1437 he was in conflict with Lord Grey of Wrest, who had married one of his stepdaughters. With Sir John Wenlock, several justices, and some armed men, he arrived in Silsoe to hold a jury.

Grey objected to the village being selected for the session and some altercation ensued, but Sir Thomas Wauton persuaded the two noblemen to submit the dispute to arbitration.

In 1439 rioting between rival justices of the peace took place in Bedford. Cornewall marched into the town with sixty supporters armed with 'thickk doublettis and swerdis and bukelers' and attempted to supplant the justices, who were holding a jury, with others of his own choice. Failing, he and his supporters created great disturbance, and as a result several gentlemen who had represented the shire in Parliament were examined in the Star Chamber and fined.

In 1442 he was made Baron Millbrook. He had bought the manor, which together with many other manors in the Ampthill district that he had purchased, were to form in 1542 the major portion of the Royal Honour of Ampthill.

In 1443 he died. He was buried in the Chapel of the Friars Preachers in London. In the disputes about the disposal of his estates it is recorded that in 1453 the Duke of Exeter, his step-son (he had regained a title forfeited by his father, John Holland) entered into a bond to accept the arbitration of Sir Thomas Bourchier. Cornewall mentioned in his will two sons, Thomas and John. They were both natural sons and it has been supposed that Thomas was connected with the Wenlock family with whom Cornewall had long been friendly and who, like the Cornewalls, originally hailed from Shropshire. In her account of the Bedfordshire Knights of the Shire, Miss Marjorie Bassett mentions a certain Sir Thomas Wenlock, whose family background is vague. He fought at Agincourt, and in spite of seeming obscurity represented Bedfordshire in Parliament in 1422, 1423 and 1425-6. Can he have been Cornewall's son, born before his marriage to Princess Elizabeth?

By 1524 the manor had passed to the Greys of Wrest. A little later Henry VIII seized the estate under the pretext that it should have lapsed to the Crown. He was a fairly frequent visitor to Ampthill Great Park and toyed with the idea of erecting an elaborate hunting-lodge in place of the neglected castle, which he partly demolished. He sent Queen Katherine of Aragon there as a virtual prisoner during the divorce proceedings. Other royal visitors included the Princess Mary, Anne Boleyn, Queen Katherine Howard, and the Princess Elizabeth and her young half-brother Edward.

By the seventeenth century even the ruins had disappeared, the great stones perhaps serving for the foundations of the Lodge in the valley which was built for the Keeper of the Park and stood on the site of the present mansion. A cross on the summit of the hill marks the Castle site today; but it commemorates the unfortunate Katherine of Aragon and not Sir John Cornewall, Lord Fanhope. Some of the men stationed at the military camp in Ampthill Park during the 1914-18 war used to declare that on several occasions after darkness had fallen the figure of a phantom knight in armour mounted on a charger slowly descended the castle hill and disappeared in the direction of Millbrook. Can 'the defence of these parts' still have been the concern of the long-departed hero of Agincourt, as it was in the fifteenth century?