

Thomas Dudley's Paternal Ancestry

<https://groups.google.com/g/soc.genealogy.medieval/c/HPKIQo7v3lg/m/UiiL-1oRRMIJ>

A response from Marshall Kirk:

Dear group ~

Over the last century and a half, perhaps a dozen hypotheses have been uttered as to the parentage of Capt. Roger Dudley, Gov. Thomas's father. Almost all are demonstrably false, or at least very implausible – e.g., the early and widespread idea that Roger was a grandson of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland ... which, on grounds of the devolvement of titles, among many other points, simply cannot be, unless Roger was a bastard, in which case Gov. Thomas didn't use the Dudley arms legitimately to begin with, and any argument predicated on the otherwise well-supported supposition of his personal probity (described in uglier terms by his enemies, but amounting, in practice, to the same thing) collapses. (The same may be said, and more forcibly, of the hypothesis that Roger was son of John Dudley, "Sergeant of the Pastry," who is highly unlikely to have had a legitimate son named Roger, as his will is in fact extant but mentions neither Roger, who would have been his eldest son, nor Thomas.) Other hypotheses, including Adlard's, founder on the reefs of chronology; still others merely pick out a known Thomas of the baronial Sutton-Dudleys and declare him Roger's father, apparently for no other reason than that Roger named his son Thomas (which, as evidence goes, is a very modest piece).

The hypothesis that Capt. Roger Dudley's father was Capt. Sir Henry Dudley, son of John Sutton, Baron Dudley (better known as "Lord Quondam [colloquially, 'has-been']" ... because, being something of a dolt and a natural-born patsy, he lost both castle and title to his cousin, the Duke of Northumberland), was originally suggested by Prof. David H. Kelley of Calgary, and intensively examined and somewhat extended, in the 1990s, by me. (A similar hypothesis was published ca. 1970 in Anne Bradstreet: The Tenth Muse by Elizabeth Wade White, who suggested that Roger's father was Henry's younger brother, George. Many of her reasons, which she presented with admirable lucidity, were taken up by Kelley, but he felt, and I agree, that those reasons {a} fit Henry even better than they do George, and {b} can be considerably strengthened by taking into account certain additional facts not explicitly noted by White. {I hasten to note that the question of Roger's filiation was at most peripheral to White's main subject, and that I imply nothing pejorative as to her skills as a researcher, which seem actually to have been quite good.})

Tho' Kelley would like me to, I've never published my conclusions, primarily because I haven't been able to drum up either the time or the energy. (This may or may not change.) In thumbnail, tho', I was able to demonstrate to my

personal satisfaction – after amassing and studying a two-foot-high stack of photocopies – that

(a) the “Capt. Sir Henry” hypothesis fits all the relevant facts, and often nicely explains them – including the ur-hypothesis that Roger was a grandson of Northumberland, which would seem to be a confusion stemming from the fact that there were multiple coincidences of name, title, date, and circumstance that virtually guaranteed conflation of Capt. Sir Henry, son of John, Baron Dudley, with Capt. Henry and Sir Henry, homonymous sons of John, Duke of Northumberland (and eventually Baron Dudley himself);

(b) Lord Quondam had several brothers and several sons (among the latter, Henry) of whom little is known but that they existed, and – in one or two cases, by sheer chance – that they grew up, married, and left a male-line descendancy, so that there are plenty of ways in which Roger could have been a recent scion of the baronial house without our expecting to have heard anything about it from the standard sources;

(c) Capt. Sir Henry was apparently married, and by the right time to have sired Roger;

(d) Thomas Dudley’s employers in early life (as a page, then a household steward) were aristocrats closely connected to the Sutton-Dudleys by blood, and in one important respect to Capt. Sir Henry by naval command, so that any supposition that Thomas was misinformed as to his immediate ancestry, if indeed it was baronial, would be hard to sustain; and

(e) the harshly straitened circumstances of Capt. Sir Henry’s life, and of the lives of those closely associated with him, were such that – ironically – the hypothesis is, if correct, probably quite unprovable, the principals having died in debt, exile, or both, in no known case leaving any sort of testamentary or other ‘probate’ documentation (there having been, among other reasons, no estates left to dispose of).

In short, my position now is what it was in the mid-1990s: that Capt. Roger Dudley very probably descended, and in quite near degree, from the baronial Sutton-Dudleys; that if he did, he very probably did so from a brother or son of John, Lord Quondam; and that by far the most ‘explanatory’ among the candidates is Capt. Sir Henry. I stress that this is, and remains, a hypothesis only, and claim nothing more for it than that it is the best hypothesis yet advanced, and has a lot to recommend it. Neither proof nor disproof has been forthcoming, or is very likely to be, tho’ any further evidence would, of course, be most desirable. (And most likely to be elicited, I must admit, by my publication, in full detail, of the evidence and reasoning to date. I sometimes think of doing a series of articles, as the subject falls naturally into four or five segments.)

A final observation: the contemporary documentation concerning Lord Quondam,

his wife, and their sons – who pursued improbably melodramatic careers – makes enjoyable reading, and would make a fine basis for a period novel. (As just one example of the potential for verisimilitude and human interest, consider the fact that they all wrote whining letters to Thomas Cromwell, bemoaning their poverty in florid terms and trying to wangle a little preferment out of him. Amusingly, Cromwell's household papers include a list of people not to be let through his door ... among them Capt. Sir Henry Dudley.)—This was a fun family to work on.

—Marshall Kirk

P.S.: the reasons for supposing, in the first instance, that Roger Dudley descended from the baronial family can be summed up as follows:

1—As noted above, he was taken on as a page, and later as steward of the household, of two families closely associated with the baronial Sutton-Dudleys.

2—Gov. Thomas was a "Mr." from as early as we meet him, and clearly belonged to the class of *generosi*, which meant rather more then than it does now.

3—Altho' he is not recorded to have stated or implied anything about his ancestry during his lifetime, he sealed his will with the Sutton-Dudley arms, differenced with a crescent (typically indicating descent from a 'second son' -- note that this doesn't mean, simply, 'second son by order of birth,' but 'second son by order of birth who left a descendancy').

4—Reasons for supposing it quite unlikely that he was not acquainted with his own ancestry, if baronial, are given above.

5—Reasons for supposing that he knew the legal significance of using the Sutton-Dudley arms in a formal document, and would not have used them without what he believed to be warrant, are implicit in his legal training, and in his universal reputation for integrity (according to his friends) or rigid, self-righteous intolerance and zealotry (according to his enemies — they're much the same qualities, differently described). Furthermore, the use of the arms on his will, after a lifetime of apparently never raising the issue, seems more significant than any ostentatious use of the same arms during his lifetime would have been; and the fact that they were pressed into wax with a seal pretty much implies his possession of such a seal, which presumably came with him from England.

6—Cotton Mather wrote (ca. 1690) a detailed account of Dudley's life, describing Dudley's character as — and here I quote from memory, so double-check me! — "suitable to the family he was, through his father, descended from." Since the Dudley family in question isn't further identified, and since the unqualified remark could hardly have been expected by an author of the period to be taken by his readers as referring to any other family but the baronial Sutton-Dudleys — if it did refer to some obscure

Dudleys, and he didn't say so, the remark would have been either misleading or cryptic — this amounts to oblique near-contemporary evidence of the descent.

7—Anne (Dudley) Bradstreet, in the first published version of a lengthy and rather turgid poem in praise of Sir Philip Sydney (whose mother was a Dudley), exclaimed that "the self-same blood" ran in her veins. I don't think she meant to imply that she had Sydney blood. Altho' the second edition changed the reading to "English blood," there seems no particular call to regard this as a retraction; it was one of many scores of changes, and, literarily, a good one, as the original line sounds, to my ear, inappropriately and distastefully boastful. Her subject, after all, was Sydney's glory, not her own.

8—Gov. Thomas's eldest son by his second marriage, Gov. Joseph, used the Sutton-Dudley arms as well, tho' without a difference (which, in practice, seems to have been optional).

9—The family may have had some aversion to having its past raked up: one version of the Mather account remarks that its author had been informed that publication of a detailed biography would have been unacceptable to the family unless examined and approved by them first. This becomes rather more comprehensible if Roger's father was an attainted traitor and a bankrupt, and his grandfather not only a bankrupt but a half-wit and laughingstock. (A minor point, but all these points may be considered as part of a larger picture.)

10—The Dudley genealogist Dean Dudley (1823-1906) was told by the senior representative of Gov. Joseph's descendants that his father — who was, even according to his son, an impractical nitwit — submitted an ancestral claim in England, in the early 1800s, to Dudley titles that had fallen into abeyance. Such a claim wouldn't even have been heard, I suspect; the claimant can't have realized that Gov. Thomas had a much older son by his first marriage, who still had numerous descendants in northern New England; but it does seem illustrative of the family's belief.