

= Humphrey Stafford , 1st Earl of Devon =

Humphrey Stafford , 1st Earl of Devon (ca . 1439 ? 17 August 1469) was a dominant magnate in south @-@ western England in the mid @-@ 15th century , and a participant in the Wars of the Roses . A distant relative of the earls of Stafford , Humphrey Stafford became the greatest landowner in the county of Dorset through fortunes of inheritance . Later , Stafford was one of several men promoted rapidly through the nobility by King Edward IV , to fill the power vacuum left by dead or forfeit Lancastrians . In the West Country it was particularly the forfeitures of the Lancastrian Courtenay family that benefited Stafford . In 1469 he received the Courtenay title of earl of Devon .

Stafford held the comital title for only three months . In July he was sent north to quell a rebellion instigated by the discontented Earl of Warwick . Even though he escaped the disastrous Battle of Edgecote , he was executed by a mob at Bridgwater on 17 August 1469 . Considered an overambitious man by many , Stafford was nevertheless a capable administrator , who enjoyed the absolute confidence of the king .

= = Family background = =

The Staffords of Hooke in Dorset and Southwick in Wiltshire were a cadet branch of the earls of Stafford and later dukes of Buckingham . Humphrey 's grandfather was another Humphrey Stafford , called Sir Humphrey " of the silver hand " (d . 1442) . His heir was a grandson ? yet another Humphrey Stafford ? who died childless in 1461 . This left Humphrey Stafford , the future Earl of Devon , heir to the family lands , the greatest part of which was in Dorset and the rest mostly in Somerset and Wiltshire . Humphrey 's father , William , was already dead by this time , having fallen victim to Cade 's rebellion on 18 June 1450 . William 's uncle , and Humphrey 's great uncle , was John Stafford , Archbishop of Canterbury (1443 ? 1452) .

The inheritance of these family lands made Stafford the greatest landowner in the county of Dorset . Through his mother Katherine , he was also heir to the possessions of her father John Chidiok , another major south @-@ western landowner . At some point ? definitely after 21 June 1450 ? he married Isabel , daughter of Sir John Barre of Herefordshire .

= = Service to the House of York = =

In the late 1450s , Stafford might have been in the service of his distant relative John Stafford , Earl of Wiltshire , son of Humphrey Stafford , Duke of Buckingham . His association with James Touchet , Baron Audley ? one of Wiltshire 's men ? implies so . If so , this represent a short episode of loyalty to the House of Lancaster over the House of York in the ongoing civil war . In 1460 the two were sent to Guînes to relieve the English garrison there . Bad weather forced them into the harbour of Calais , which was held by the Yorkist leader Richard Neville , Earl of Warwick . Here they were both recruited for the Yorkist cause .

Stafford took part in the Battle of Mortimer 's Cross , where the Yorkist forces under Edward , Earl of March , won a major victory on 2 February 1461 . After the Battle of Towton on 29 March that year , Stafford was knighted by Edward , who had by now been pronounced King Edward IV after the deposition of Henry VI . Later that same year , on 26 July , he received a summons to Parliament for the first time , as Lord Stafford of Southwick . Over the course of the following years , the king granted him numerous lands and offices . In 1461 he was appointed steward of the Duchy of Cornwall and constable of Bristol , and in 1462 he received the greater part of the Devon estates of Thomas Courtenay , Earl of Devon , who had been captured at Towton and executed . In 1464 he was made keeper of Dartmoor , and in 1467 he was granted more of the Courtenay manors .

Stafford repaid the king 's generosity by serving him faithfully as a local commissioner , in a part of the country that had up until that point been fiercely Lancastrian . Throughout the 1460s he presided at Quarter Sessions and other courts all over the West Country . His activities were not limited to legal commissions ; in 1461 ? 2 he performed military service against the Scots , and in 1468 he

conducted diplomacy with Brittany . In 1469 he was admitted to the Royal Council , and served on the commission that convicted Henry Courtenay , Thomas Courtenay 's brother , for treason . According to the chronicler John Warkworth , Henry 's downfall was due to the machinations of Stafford , who was rewarded with further land and the earldom of Devon on 17 May 1469 . However , the king himself took great interest in the trial against Courtenay , and it is more reasonable to see the decision as a result of Edward 's need for a loyal agent in the region .

= = Death and aftermath = =

Stafford 's quick rise did not go unnoticed among the established aristocracy . In 1468 , the discontented Warwick named the Earl of Devon as a courtier with undue influence on King Edward . Warwick and Devon were later reconciled , but the next year Warwick repeated his accusations once more . In an act of rebellion by proxy , Warwick instigated an insurrection in Yorkshire led by a " Robin of Redesdale " . At the same time Warwick ? together with George , Duke of Clarence , King Edward 's brother ? staged an invasion of the country from Warwick 's stronghold of Calais . Devon , together with William Herbert , Earl of Pembroke , was ordered to gather troops to quell the rebellion .

The royal army under Devon and Pembroke intercepted the northern rebels ? on their way south to meet up with Warwick and Clarence ? by Banbury in Oxfordshire . It is not clear what happened after this . According to Warkworth , Devon and Pembroke quarrelled over billeting arrangements , and Devon took off with the majority of the archers . The next day , on 26 July 1469 , Pembroke met the rebels at the Battle of Edgecote , but without artillery support he was thoroughly defeated . When Devon finally arrived , he was either unable to engage his troops , or too late to make a difference . The French chronicler Jean de Waurin , however , gives a different account . According to Waurin , Devon left the field of battle once he heard news that Clarence was arriving with reinforcements . In either case , Pembroke was captured and executed on Warwick 's order . Devon managed to escape , but was later captured by a mob at Bridgwater in Somerset , and executed on 17 August .

Humphrey Stafford had been Earl of Devon for exactly three months at the time of his death . He and Isabel had no children , so when he died his title became extinct . It was restored the next year for John Courtenay , the brother of Thomas , the last Courtenay earl of Devon . Stafford was buried in Glastonbury Abbey , and a dispute over his lands followed between his cousins .

Stafford was considered over @-@ ambitious and unscrupulous by many contemporaries . This can be seen both by Warkworth implicating him in the downfall of Henry Courtenay , and Warwick targeting him as one of King Edward 's evil councillors . This thread has also been picked up by modern historians ; Charles Ross calls him a " greedy and ambitious man " . At the same time , his skills as an administrator can hardly be doubted , as evidenced by King Edward 's heavy reliance on him . He could also show a more human and sympathetic side . Michael Hicks describes his activity , from 1467 onwards , in adding codicils to his will " to right the wrongs that he was conscious of committing " ? the last of these he added as he faced his own execution .