

INTRODUCTION

General

This section comprises the title deeds of the Conquest family's estate in Houghton Conquest and adjoining parishes. The Conquests had been established in the parish from mediaeval times and were lords of the manor of Conquest Bury. In the early 18th century the head of the family moved away from Bedfordshire and although the estate here was retained for a while, it was eventually sold to Lord Gowan in 1741. Most of the 18th century documents here relate to mortgages and to the conveyance to a trustee for Lord Gowan of the remainder of the long terms of years on which these had been raised.(RO5/307-70). The picture is less clear during the 17th century; it appears from the original numeration of the documents that many items are missing * and recitals in existing deeds and abstracts of title which appear in other collections ** show clearly that many other deeds, which might perhaps have clarified the situation, are not included here. A few documents survive from different lawsuits in which the family was involved. It is likely that much of the difficulty springs from the problems met by the family during the civil war, when estates were in the hands of the Bedfordshire Sequestration Committee and its poverty extreme; from then onwards the family seems to have experienced financial difficulties and the estate was often heavily mortgaged

* It is possible that some 17th century items in this collection bear original numbers which were not noticed because of the poor state of the document and subsequent endorsements

** see AD.1031 and AD.3166

This collection is chiefly remarkable, however, for the number of early deeds it contains; there are some 160 before 1500 (the earliest dating from the beginning of the 13th century) and over 100 for the 16th century. At some point, apparently in the mid-17th century, the deeds were arranged in date order, brief extracts of their contents endorsed (often inaccurately as the person concerned struggled with unfamiliar mediaeval handwriting) and numbered in sequence. As the order of these deeds has now been rearranged a list has been made giving the original numbers and the number given to each deed in this catalogue, [list at end]. Some numbers in the series are missing and bundle labels found with the deeds (perhaps dating from the late 18th century) list these; after 1600 the gaps are more frequent and can probably be attributed to deeds being passed on to the purchasers when parts of the estate were sold, it being impossible to distinguish which of the earlier deeds were relevant, once many small purchases had been amalgamated for many generations and these early deeds were left behind. In some cases this is clearly what has happened. For example, the conveyance of the estate from the Conquest family to Lord Gowan in 1741 does not include any land in Wilstead and yet 14 mediaeval deeds for Wilstead (RO5/217-30) are included here. The process by which deeds could be "left behind" when a sale was made is illustrated by the group of deeds relating to Wootton. Alexander Kirk owned an estate in Houghton Conquest, Wootton and Marston which passed on his death in 1528 to William Kirk (his son or possibly grandson) who conveyed it to Edmund Conquest in 1545 (RO5/238). Edmund appears to have retained the portion of the property which was in

2f.136d) Houghton Conquest but conveyed the lands in Marston and Wootton to Lord Mordaunt in the following year. However, there remain in this collection, not only deeds of title to Kirk's Houghton property but also to land in Wootton (RO5/236-7). A similar example is afforded by a group of deeds relating to the manor of Norwoods in Silsoe. The reversion of this manor was mortgaged to Edmund Conquest c.1540 and the mortgage was never redeemed. Edmund's widow Joan subsequently sold it to Sir Henry Grey but a few documents relating to this property in the 1530s remained with the Conquests.

Many of the late 15th century and early 16th century deeds in this collection are in very poor condition and clearly have been for some time as the endorsements on these are uninformative; this has complicated the sorting as it is likely that in some cases they could have provided a link between early groups of deeds and the Conquest family. In many cases faded documents have been read under ultraviolet light which has often proved helpful. Many of the earliest deeds are remarkably well preserved and several have interesting seals which are noted in detail in this catalogue.

Order

As far as possible this catalogue has attempted to reconstruct the original archival order of these deeds, listing together documents relating to the same property. Groups of documents or single deeds are arranged in the order of the date when the property concerned was acquired by the Conquest family, (RO5/1-119). Inevitably there are many documents for which no link with the Conquest family can be found. The most likely reason for this is that further documents relating to the property have been lost at some stage or, as mentioned above, been passed over to a later purchaser, leaving earlier documents behind. Possibly some deeds may relate to premises subsequently acquired by the Conquests through marriage with an heiress and thus the land could have passed without a conveyance. Often it proved possible to link together several documents without tracing any connection with the Conquests; such groups have been listed together (RO5/120-157) in order of the last date in the group as it is presumed that they passed to the family subsequently. Some deeds appear totally unconnected to others in this collection and these also have been listed together in date order (RO5/158-206). The vast majority of the deeds relate to Houghton Conquest but there is a small number relating to Haynes, Wilstead and Wootton and a few other places; these have been arranged under parishes, in the same way as the Houghton Conquest deeds – connected groups first, followed by others which appear unrelated. Although not ideal this proved the best arrangement since so many deeds could not be placed; a considerable amount of time was spent while the collection was being sorted in attempting to fit in "stray" deeds but further research may possibly solve some remaining problems.

The Conquest Family in the Middle Ages.

The earliest known reference to the Conquest family is in April 1219 when Hugh of Hotot made a grant of land to Geoffrey Conquest on his marriage

with Hugh's daughter Nichola, (RO5/1). An undated deed, clearly of the same period as the above, records a grant made by Simon of Pateshull to Geoffery Conquest, son of Randal Rinegale, of land which Simon had of the gift and grant of Hugh of Hotot, (RO5/3). The meaning of this can only be a matter for surmise; possibly Geoffery's mother was a Conquest heiress or he inherited land as heir of a childless uncle on his mother's side or perhaps he was Randal's bastard son and took another surname. The meaning of the surname Conquest is not certain although it has been suggested * that it derives from residence on an estate won by fighting. It seems probable that persons of this name are all descended from the same family.

BHRS VI 263 A few years later, in 1224, Geoffery and Nichola were involved in a law-suit with Isabel of Hotot, Nichola's mother, over one third part of wood of Calewellehill in Houghton which Isabel held in dower and which formed part of the inheritance of Nichola. They complained that Nichola was causing waste, expense and sale in said wood; finally it was agreed that Isabel should be entitled to "reasonable estovers"*** in the wood for "housebote and hedgebote"*** and no action would be taken over the waste and sale already committed but that in future Isabel would not alienate by sale or otherwise any part of the property which she held and that after her death it would revert to Geoffery and Nichola and the heirs of Nichola.

* Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames, by Charles Wareing Bardsley, London, 1901. Bardsley suggests that it would be derived from "de la Conquest" [in fact this form has not been found although "de Cunquest (BRHS II pg 251) and "le Conquest" (Bedfordshire Subsidies) occur but the early deeds in this collection always give the form simply as "Conquest"]

** Allowances of wood made to tenants, for repairs of house & hedges

A Geoffrey Conquest is mentioned early in 1246 when Warden Abbey relinquished its right to common of pasture in three fields in Houghton, which Warren Blunt had by charter of Hugh of Hotot; the charter was duly handed over to Geoffery "and if another such charter shall be found it is to be void" (RO5/6). Two years later Geoffery is mentioned as the guardian of John, a minor and son and heir of Nichola of Hotot and grandson of Hugh of Hotot.

BHRS XXI This could be the son of Geoffery and Nichola, who was his mother's heir, or it could be that Geoffery had died leaving a son Geoffery and Nichola had remarried, had a son and been again widowed, her first son Geoffery becoming the guardian of his infant step-brother.

BHRS II pg.25 It is possibly Geoffery's son who is John de Cunquest given in a list probably c.1260 of "those who can be inquired into anew by inquisition, who have fifteen librates of land in the counties of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and are not knights". It is likely that he had been under age when an earlier list had been compiled in 1255. A John Conquest, probably the same as the one mentioned above, held the office of coroner for Bedfordshire from some time during the year 1289-90 until his removal by the King for insufficient qualification on 27 Jan 1292 when a writ was issued for his replacement. He died in 1298 seised

of the manor of Houghton Conquest
 IPM iii and of a messuage and a carucate of land in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire.
 no.451 His son and heir John also held public office; between 1306 and 1309 he was
 several times appointed to assess and collect subsidies in the county. In 1309
 BHRS he attended a tournament at Dunstable with his serving men, his shield bearing the
 XXXII Conquest arms. These are first mentioned in the time of Edward I (the last
 quarter of the 13th century) in a list of Bedfordshire Knights, where the arms of
 Sir John Conquest are described as “quartile de argent e de sable a un label de
 goules”. John took office as coroner sometime in 1310-11 acting chiefly in the
 south of the county but on one occasion in the north.
 He resigned his office
 c.f.BHRS on account of paralysis in 1319 but appears to have taken up his duties again until
 XXXII 28 sometime in 1323-4. He was appointed conservator of the peace for the county in 1314.
 XLI 22 In 1316 the manor of Houghton Conquest was settled on John Conquest and his wife
 VCH III Alice and this collection contains two deeds of the same period in which John
 and Alice are mentioned, (RO5/8-9) Alice outlived her husband and by 1330 was
 Fasti married to Thomas Morris who in 1337 as “the lord of Houghton Conquest”
 presented William Conquest to the living.

The Conquest family undoubtedly occupied an important position in Houghton
 by the early 14th century which is the date at which their name first formed
 part of that of the place where they lived. Its early forms were Hocton, Hohton
 or Houton(RO5/2,3,5,158). The form “Hogtone Conquest” is first found in this
 collection in a deed dated 1321 (RO5/10) and thereafter, despite variant
 spellings, this form is almost always used. Earlier examples of this form are
 found in 1309 in the Bedfordshire Subsidy (Houghton Conquest) and Feudal
 Aids, 1316 (Houghton Conquest). The family had probably held the patronage
 of the mediety of the living from the early 13th century (see RO5/1); certainly
 by 1289 Sir John Conquest, knight, was the patron. In 1285 Geoffery
 Conquest [possibly Sir John’s son] who had been
 Fasti presented to the living while a minor, was instituted. In 1289 it is recorded that
 the living was vacant because the said Geoffery had neglected to cause himself
 to be ordained priest within a year; evidently he did so in due course for in
 1302 master Geoffrey Conquest, rector of the church of Houghton, leased from
 Henry of Flamvile a capital messuage in Houghton with land belonging, at an
 annual rent of 16 quarters of corn, 6 quarters of barley, 6 quarters of mixed oats
 and barley and 7 quarters of beans and peas, which, the lease specifically
 states, were to be “pur, dry and good” (RO5/7). The document bears
 Geoffery’s seal in black wax; his name appears around the edge while in the
 centre there is a clear impression of a dog with its tail between its legs, possibly
 the rector and his pet dog were a familiar sight in the village. Geoffery died in
 1312.

It was possibly the only son of John and Alice Conquest who was the Thomas
 Conquest listed in the levy for Cressy in 1346 amongst “those who have a
 hundred shillings of land, tenements and rents a year in Bedfordshire” – he was
 to provide one bowman. He died seised of the manor on 26 April 1360,
 IPM x leaving as his heir his son Roger, aged 18, who apparently died without an heir shortly afterwards,
 no.571 to the manor of Houghton Conquest, dated 1372, Henry Conquest, son and heir
 of Sir Thomas Conquest, knight, formally states that he will not take any legal

action against trustees who had been holding the manor of Conquestbury for him,(RO5/14). Henry granted Conquestbury to trustees in 1384 and died that year leaving his son John a minor. In 1400 the King granted custody of the property to William Wetaway during the heir's minority and in 1404 the surviving trustees granted Conquestbury and the avowson of half the church to John Conquest on his majority. A few years later, probably in 1412, John married Elizabeth daughter of Ralph Bateman, (RO5/19). Several deeds mention John's parents as being Henry Conquest and his wife Lora, who is undoubtedly the Lady Alionora Conquest "who was the wife of Henry Conquest, knight" and

Monumental a brass in Flitton church; perhaps she came of a Flitton family which could explain
 Brasses, G. her burial here rather than at Houghton. The arms of the Conquest family as given
 Isherwood in the 1566 Herald's Visitation are quartered, amongst others, with those of the
 Fitz Richard family. On the south porch of Flitton church the arms of Fitz
 Richard of Newbury in Silsoe occur on an early 15th century shield near those
 of Grey of Ruthin. Possibly, then, Alionora was a Fitz Richard and it was
 following this marriage that the Conquests quartered their arms with those of
 her family. By will in 1467, Margaret Bate, (widow of Ralph Bate, citizen and
 taylor of London), orders marble stone to be placed on the tomb of her mother
 in Flitton; she refers to Richard Conquest (and wife, Elizabeth), son of her
 brother.

Evidence about the family during the rest of the 15th century is rather scanty.
 John Conquest was patron of the living in 1452 when Ralph Conquest resigned as
 rector and also in 1457 when John Dey was presented to the living. A deed in
 this collection, dated 1459 (RO5/193) is a grant of land made by John
 Conquest and his wife Mariona; this is probably the same John as above. The
 Grey of Ruthin Valor, dated 1467-8, records that 6s was owing to Lord Richard
 Conquest for the rent of Barnaculfeld; from the context it appears that this is in
 Little Cainhoe (in Clophill) but it is probably Barnacles in Houghton Conquest
 which is meant.* From this point there seems to be no information about the
 family at all until the 1480s when there are several references to a Richard
 Conquest.** An additional difficulty is that the deeds covering this period are
 in poor condition and in many cases are only partially legible, (RO5/40, 133,
 194-5, 230).

Fasti

BHRS
 XLVI pg.97

* see RO5/41-3 for dispute between Henry Grey of Wrest and Edmund Conquest
 over Barnacles, 1544-5

** He was Patron of the living in 1483 when Thomas Yerburgh was presented.

The Conquests under the Tudors

With the beginning of the Tudor era more information is available. The church at
 Houghton Conquest contains a brass to members of the Conquest family, placed on
 a brick altar tomb with a Purbeck marble top. Unfortunately the inscription is
 ambiguous and is variously interpreted by different authorities.*** The inscription
 reads: "Here lies John Conquest, esquire, late lord of Houghton and Richard
 Conquest son and heir of the same John and Isabella his wife". The two male
 figures are shown wearing early Tudor armour while Isabella, whose date of death
 is given as 18 August 1493, is wearing a pedimental head-dress with tight fitting

bodice and sleeves and a flowing skirt. The couple's nine sons and five daughters are represented and in the corners of the monument are shown the symbols of an ox for St.Luke and an angel for St.Matthew. Another brass dated 1500 commemorates Richard Conquest, esquire, his wife Elizabeth, their six sons and two daughters; the husband and wife are dressed similarly to the figures mentioned above.

*** c.f. VCH III pg 295 and Monumental Brasses in the Bedfordshire Churches, G.Isherwood.

CRT
Ampthill
130 14

Pat.Rolls
ii pg.516

On Richard's death the estate descended to his son Richard who died three years later leaving his son, another Richard, a minor. At Ampthill memorial court in October 1503 it was presented that Richard Conquest had died since the last court and held at death certain lands in the parish of Ampthill called Lymbottseys at a rent of 6s per annum; Richard Conquest was his son and heir who was under age and in the wardship of the King. The wardship was subsequently granted to John Mordaunt and after his death, granted in 1506 to his executors William Mordaunt and William Gascoign. Mordaunt was still the guardian of Richard Conquest in 1509 when Thomas Hunne was presented to the moiety of the rectory which was in the gift of the Conquests. Richard probably came of age in 1514 and he appears as a witness to a deed with his brother Edmund in 1517. Beyond this, very little is known of his life; according to the Visitation of Bedford (1566) he married Elizabeth Jellybronde – certainly his wife was an Elizabeth and after his death she married Thomas Beston of Nassington, Northamptonshire. (RO5/52A). Richard died in 1541 leaving no heirs and his estate passed to his brother Edmund.

BNQ iii
pg.25
[see also
RO5/45]

Pat.Rolls
Ed VI

pr PCC f.41.
Populwell

Edmund inherited property in his own right from his uncle Edmund who by will dated 1531 left to his wife Joan a tenement in Chapel End and one in Keeble End for her life and then to his nephew Edmund. There are several deeds in this collection referring to further acquisitions of land by Edmund (RO5/47-8, 63, 66). On Richard's death the trustees of his will conveyed to Edmund the "place or tenement in Perewhiche [in Houghton] wherein the said Richard Conquest in his lifetime did inhabit". In the same year Edmund purchased from John Gascogn the alternate right of patronage to half the church of Houghton (Gildable) – the Conquests already held the patronage of the other half, the franchise and had done so from the 13th century. In 1547 Edmund was appointed royal escheator for Bedfordshire. He made his will in May 1549, shortly before his death, leaving to each of his six daughters £66 13s 4d on her marriage "after the lawes of holy Churche". His four sons, Edmund, William, Richard and George were all under age at their father's death.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries and the suppression of colleges and chantries, at the beginning of Edward's reign enquiries were made into all the goods of parish churches, which in 1551 were ordered to be taken into the King's hands. This action was motivated partly by religious conviction and partly by the King's financial need. Many local inhabitants took the opportunity of helping themselves to items from the churches, sometimes because of their intrinsic worth, sometimes out of love for the old ways. It would be charitable to assume that

The Edmond Conquest fell into the latter category! After his death his widow, Joan, Edwardian had to pay for “ii challasses of silver one coate of crymysen velvet called Jhus cope Inventories one payer of organs one sute of vestment of white damaske one cope of blewe for Bedford- velvet one crymysen velvet cote with juelles called our ladyes coate one belle shire clapper one Cth wayght of leade and xl^{lib} waxe of the seid church goodes taken F.C.Eeles away by Edmond Conquest her late husband”. The white damask was valued at pg.24 £10, the chalices at £8, the blue velvet 40s and Our Lady’s coat 26s 8d. In February 1556/7 it was reported that Joan had given plate and ornaments to the value of £32 6s 8d; she also paid for the services of a tiler, a carpenter and a painter in the parish church and she provided a service book, a Bible, two psalters and two other books, a silver chalice worth £5 “the church being robbed and not one lefte in ytt”, a green velvet vestment, “one very fayre coope of whyte dammaske poudred with spred egles of gold and bordred round about with clothe of bawdkyn” and another “of crymsen velvet also poudred with flowers of golde”, two great standing candlesticks and an altar frontal of red “brauched dammaske”.

Alumni Two of Edmund’s sons, Edmund and Richard, matriculated from Trinity Cantab. College, Cambridge at Easter in 1552. Edmund went on to be admitted to Lincoln’s Inn in 1556. He had succeeded to the estate on his father’s death while still a minor and in 1551 the King granted to Francis Russell, knight, Pat.Rolls. Lord Russell the custody of the lands in Ampthill, Houghton and Haynes or Edw.VI. elsewhere in Bedfordshire with issues to the yearly value of £14 13s 8d in the iv 110 King’s hands by the minority of Edmund Conquest, son and heir of Edmund Conquest, esquire, deceased. There is no record that Edmund ever married; certainly on his death in 1570 he left no issue and the estate passed to his brother Richard.

Richard married Dorothy Hewett about this date and the first of their ten children was baptised in 1572. During the last twenty years of the century Richard made several small purchases of property in Houghton to add to the estate, (RO5/90-93). From about 1582 he held office as Justice of the Peace and on 22 November 1596 was appointed one of the quorum.

He held office as High Sherriff of Bedfordshire twice, once in 1582-3 and again I 1596-7.

In 1595 the Queen granted him by

AD 997 Letters Patent the reversion of the manor of Houghton Grange and various lands see list of for 31 years after the death of Edward Ratcliffe (RO5/255). County officials

Richard, who was patron of Houghton Conquest, in 1589 presented to the living Thomas Archer of Trinity College, Cambridge. Trinity was, of course, Richard’s own college and his son, Edmund, had matriculated there two years previously. Archer had been made a fellow of Trinity in 1583 and in 1588 was appointed public preacher to the University. He appears to have become closely associated with the Conquest family and resided with Richard for over twenty years. Both in his commonplace book and in the parish register Archer recorded details of national events and of births and deaths amongst the local gentry, including, of course, the Conquests, and records the texts of funeral sermons he preached. In P.11/28/1 BPRS XLI 1602 on the death of Richard’s wife Dorothy, his text was: “And I saw a great white throne and one that sat on it”. He preached three times before the King and was

made one of his chaplains. He was buried in January 1630/31 after over forty years of service to the parish.

In 1603 Richard received a knighthood and two years later King James spent two nights at his house, Houghton Bury (the Queen lay at Haynes) and heard service and a sermon at Houghton Church. By the time of Sir Richard's death on 28 November 1617 his three sons, Sir Edmond, Sir Richard and Lewis were all well established in the world and his daughters had made good marriages. Some of the items mentioned in his will indicate the style of life at Conquest Bury in his life-

pr.PCC
1617
120

time, for he mentions "a silver basin and ewer, 2 of my great silver bowls, 2 of the lesser wine bowls, one sack cup and one gilt pot; also my best carpet and my best Weldon tablecloth with damask work with all the napkins and towels thereunto belonging". Archer preached at his funeral on 18 December, taking as his text: "Oh that men were wise, then would they understand this and they would consider their latter end." Sir Richard was buried in the chancel as he had requested in his will, in the same tomb as his wife.

Sir Richard, who succeeded to the estate on his father's death, had been educated at Trinity, as had his father and brother, and had been admitted to the Middle Temple in April 1589. In 1595 he married Elizabeth Sandes of Eaton Bray and two years later the first of their ten children was born. In 1618-19 he held office as High Sherriff of Bedfordshire. He died in 1634.

The Conquests as Recusants

There is little firm evidence of any recusant sympathies being held by members of the Conquest family before the mid-seventeenth century but there are one or two scraps of information which suggest that they may have had such leanings. At some time early in the seventeenth century Sir Richard Conquest sheltered "one Adkynson an olde papyste preste" as did also one William Hewett, keeper of Ampthill Little Park, who was probably Richard's brother-in-law. Further evidence of the recusant sympathies of the Hewett family is supplied by the minutes of the county Sequestration Committee during the Civil War; the question concerned a deed

BRHS 49

of trust to Thomas Daniell of certain lands of Richard Conquest in Houghton Conquest. The Committee refused to allow possession of the land to Mr. Daniell "because they are not satisfied that all the persons (who Clayme) in the said deed, to whom the money and profit of it was assigned by Mr. Hewett, are bred up in the protestant Religion, he the said Mr. Robert Hewett (their Grandfather who lent the money) being of the Romish religion, and breeding up his owne Children in that religion: and for that divers of the said Children are bred beyond the sea, and no account given of their breeding in the protestant Religion". The exact relationship between this Richard Conquest and Robert Hewett is not known but they were probably distant cousins.

ABP/W
1591-2/96

Richard's sister-in-law Audrey in her will dated 1588 left to a friend "my booke of the woorkes of Sir Thomas More" – surely a good indication of where her sympathies lay. Yet Sir Richard's brother George, who was keeper of Houghton Park, appears to have remained loyal to the parish church, for Archer, the rector,

P11/28/1 records: "Mr. George Conquest during his tyme ever with his hole howse repaired
f 44 to the Church of Houghton wher they christned, received the sacraments and wear
buried...
and he allowed us breade and drink as we passed by him in our precession".

CRC 132/28 Sir Richard's nephew, John King, Bishop of London, was rumoured to have been converted to Catholicism on his death-bed; this was hotly denied, particularly by his son Henry, Bishop of Chichester but there could well have been some truth in the story as two of his kinsmen (not Conquests) were martyred for their faith. It is tempting to believe that his mother Elizabeth, sister to Richard Conquest, may have shared her brother's sympathies and influenced her son during his formative years although this is, of course, mere speculation.

Richard's daughter-in-law Elizabeth was described by Archer, in his will dated 1630, as a "religious lady" although of course this gives no clue to her convictions

With the marriage of Richard Conquest to Elizabeth Thimelby in 1626 the family's loyalty to the recusant cause became clear. Elizabeth came from a staunch Catholic background – the Thimelby family of Irnham Hall in Lincolnshire – and was one of the ladies of the bed-chamber to Queen Henrietta Maria in 1634. Her grand-father John Thimelby embraced the faith in the 1570s and "was so constant therein that for more than 50 years...he suffered persecution". His son Richard (Elizabeth's father) shared his convictions and was described by his daughter Winifred, a nun at Louvain, as "a harbourer of priests and religious men". His son John, who eventually succeeded to the estate, was later described as "an obstinate follower of the Roman religion".

Cttee. for It is reasonable to assume that Richard Conquest was himself already a
Compounding- recusant to have married into such a family, although it was later alleged
Cases, pg 1821 that he was not recusant at the time of the composition of his estate
Cttee. for [1648]* From this point onwards there is more firm evidence about the
Advance of family's convictions.
Mon Money-
Cases, pg 1193 * He was in fact indicted as a recusant in 1640

The Conquests on the Eve of the Civil War

Richard Conquest succeeded to the estate on the death of his father Sir Edmund in 1634. It seems that the family was already in some financial difficulty for within a few months Richard raised £500 on the security of a small part of the estate (RO5/290). In the following year Richard's sister Dorothy was claiming against him in Chancery for the payment of her portion of £500 provided for her by their father; in fact the matter was not settled for some twenty years. (RO5/374). Richard appears soon to have found himself heavily in debt for a deed made in 1637 (RO5/291) transfers to manor and lands to trustees for the payment of debts, duly listed, totalling almost £5000. At the same time Richard's uncle, Sir Richard, was experiencing similar difficulty and was raising money by mortgages from his brother Lewis (1631) and his nephew George Duncombe (1637)

Over the next twenty years men were to look back on the 1630s as a period of peace and prosperity but at the time they were clouded by a growing awareness of dissatisfaction in the country. The King's attempt to govern without parliament led to the use of new expedients to raise money, particularly the notorious levying of Ship Money on inland as well as coastal counties, widely regarded as of doubtful legality. Initially the sums collected in Bedfordshire came near to the sum assessed but in 1638 this fell off sharply. A list of 1638 giving the names of those in Bedfordshire in arrears with the payment of this tax lists Sir Richard Conquest as owing £1 19s for property in Haynes, 2s for property in Maulden and 2s for property in Clophill; Richard Conquest of Houghton Conquest was assessed at £3 9s for his estate there.

The Conquests during the Civil War

Even as it became evident that Civil War was inevitable division between local families was slow to develop and some hesitated, hoping to avoid committing themselves. Bedfordshire was basically under parliamentary influence and its representatives in Parliament all supported this cause. Gradually lines of division became apparent; generally papists were inclined towards the King and members of the Conquest family became active Royalists.

The Parliamentary Commander, Sir Samuel Luke, wrote to an unknown correspondent on 30th April 1644:

BRHS XLII “... I am sorry there should be so great a distance between Sir Richard Conquest and myself, but seeing he will make it, I shall cherish it, and not look after Sir Richard but his lady*, who I honour for her own worth first and next for the family she has relation to. That she may not go with one coach-horse I have written to my Lord's secretary to procure the restoring of him. When you have received the letter and perused it, seal it up and let your servant go with it”

* [Sir Richard's second wife, Elizabeth; surname unknown]

Later in the same year Sir Samuel wrote to Sir Oliver Luke;

“... On Sunday seven-night, Sir R. Conquest desired your falconer to lend him a pheasant. His man said he had a leash of good ones that were saleable, and therefore he would desire one that would sell. It is a great pity but that such knights should hawk everyman's woods and that will keep Newgate Market full of dainties”

BRHS XLIII Sir Samuel continued to keep in contact with Lady Conquest for he wrote to her on 31 May 1645:

no.648 “Your zeal to God and in behalf of the poor parish of Haynes will be acknowledged by all. Go on in the work and service...”

Bedfordshire's royalists, although numerically a minority, were not insignificant and some held important commanding positions in the royalist army, although most of their activities took place outside the county. At the beginning of the war Richard and his wife Elizabeth were living in the London area and were indicted there as recusants on 4th December 1640.

CRC 134 Richard Conquest, at this time in his mid-forties, held the rank of colonel in

no.8 the royalist army and although there is not sufficient evidence to build up a picture of his activities during the war, an account by Sir Samuel Luke survives of an encounter in which a party of Conquest's men was involved:

Luke to Earl of Essex
BHRS XLII
94

“... when they came to Buckingham they found the enemy drawn up in a body where there was 3 parties of them met together – one of Lord Hopton's regiment, another of Colonel Conquest's regiment and a third, Colonel Weston's, which 3 made up 150 horse. Your men charged them, killed 4 on the place, took some prisoners and forced them to a disorderly retreat.”

6 Nov 1644

The royalist cause put a great strain on the pockets of its supporters and undoubtedly the Conquests did their utmost to provide funds for the King. The heaviest burden, however, came from the penalties imposed on royalist supporters.

BHRS 49 In 1644 Richard Conquest's estate was sequestered and the surviving minutes of the Bedford Sequestration Committee which cover the period May 1646 to May 1647 give some detail about the management of the estates during this period and show clearly that the family was in dire financial straits:

“1/5 part of Mr. Conquest's estate being desired for his children, and it being certified to us that they are in great necessity, and that the 6 younger children are very young, it is ordered that Captain Smith shall forthwith pay £40 to Edmund Wingate, esquire, out of said Mr. Conquest's estate for the maintenance of the said younger children and that Mr. Conquest shall have notice to send some person for credit to this Committee at their next meeting to inform them truly concerning the education of the said children, and then farther order to be given concerning the said 1/5 part of the last Lady Daye's rent or no. In the interim Mr. Floyd to enquire whether we are debarred by ordinance of Parliament to grant a fifth part to the children of delinquents being Papist. It is ordered that the said Mr. Conquest's younger Children shall have liberty to live at his sequestered house in Houghton Conquest”

In desperation Richard Conquest returned home to attempt to collect money due to him as rent. When this came to the ears of the Committee, its solicitor was ordered to “desire Mr. Richard Conquest to declare the truth under his hand, what money he received of Goodwife Toach about All hallowtide was twelvemonth”. A servant of Goodwife Toach gave evidence “that about that time when the Cavaleers [went] to Newport Mr. Richard Conquest came to her house and demanded his rent of her ... swore he would destroy man, woman and child if he had it not; and about 2 or 3 days after the said Mr. Conquest came thither again and he and his man went up into the Chamber with Goodwife Toach, with their pistolles Cockt; and when he came down again he spake kindly to Goodwife Toach and bade her send the rest of his money by her husband to Newport, saying they should be no starters”.

By the autumn of 1646 the Committee had decided that 1/5 of Richard Conquest's estate could be allowed to his children and it was decided that £40 which had been paid to them in May should be reckoned as their 1/5 share of last Lady Day's rent, the money to be paid to Dorothy Conquest (their aunt) or Mr. Wyngate of Ampthill. Presumably this allowance was too meagre to cover more than the bare essentials, for an additional £20 had to be allowed to cover the “necessary repairs” of the family's house at Houghton Conquest and it was agreed that “such goods of

Mr. Conquest' as are yet remaining and not enjoyed by the State, being less than 1/5 of all his goods shall be allowed to said children's use".

He spent some time in prison, probably in 1645 on several executions for debt. In February he compounded for his estate at 1/10 and was told in March to pay a fine of £400. In the following month he begged for his fine to be reviewed as his whole estate had been seised into the Exchequer and delivered to Mr. Evelyn [see RO5/274-9 for a mortgage to Evelyn] and other incumbrances totalling £5000 were awaiting discharge – none of which had been taken into consideration when setting his fine. He pointed out that he had a wife and ten children. It is not clear whether the fine was in fact reviewed but in December he paid what was required and the estate was discharged.

Although Colonel Richard Conquest and his immediate family perhaps suffered most in the Civil War other members of the Conquest family were also affected. The estate of his brother Charles was sequestered but he was able to discharge it in October 1646 by taking the negative oath and National Covenant and swearing that the value of his estate did not amount to £200. He was then enabled to receive his annuity. On the following day the Committee agreed "that Captain Richard Conquest shall come on his parole to abide in the country, especially he being cleared of his Recusancy, and if he should prove dangerous or carry himself to the prejudice of parliament(which we believe he will not) we will forthwith certify it to Mr. Knightly that he may be remanded".

Who this Richard was is not certain; he could possibly be the son of Colonel Richard Conquest but from other evidence it appears that he would be too

see
pedigree in
CRT
190/95

young, probably being aged only about 11 at this date. It is perhaps more likely that he was the cousin of Colonel Conquest, the son of his uncle Lewis, who was aged about 24 at this time. A Richard Conquest went to Virginia in 1650 to join his brothers John and Lewis who had gone out five years earlier. These could possibly be three sons of Lewis Conquest, senior. His son Lewis was educated at Houghton Conquest school and admitted to Sidney College, Cambridge in May 1637; he graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1640-41. If it was he who went to Virginia he returned shortly afterwards, for he is described as "gentleman, of London" in 1655-6. His brother John would have been aged 11 in 1645 which seems rather young to emigrate without the rest of one's family.

Alumni
Cantab.

R. Houghton
Conquest;
Dd Bun.3
no.16

The Conquests under the Protectorate

The execution of the King in 1649 alienated most of the Bedfordshire gentry who had formerly been firm supporters of the Parliamentary cause. During the following years the royalists had to submit to registration and to having their movements closely observed, with good reason, for there were several attempted royalist risings. Financially royalist supporters found themselves in

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Cases, 1821

difficulties. In 1650 the minister of Houghton Conquest, George Bayly, and three others, informed against Richard Conquest as a dangerous malignant and papist, stating that his property was worth more than £800 per annum and that he had concealed a considerable sum of money. A couple of months later information was given by Colonel John Moore and Major Poe that Conquest had been a colonel for the King, was a recusant and had an estate of £1000 per annum and £4000

personally and had undervalued his estate on his composition at Goldsmith's Hall and only compounded to the value of £405 per annum. His estate was ordered to be seised. In defence Richard pleaded that his estate was in such a condition that there was no subsistence for himself, his wife, eight sons and five servants and for the maintenance of two brothers and two sisters for whom he was responsible. He claimed that the charges were untrue and were made because the informers wanted to live upon and waste his estate, rent-free, as they had done for eight years. Francis Theobald of Gray's Inn, husband of Richard's aunt Judith, early in 1651 obtained a judgement against Conquest's estate for £400 debt, incurred by the great expense of Conquest's lawsuits. There seems to have been some confusion at this point as to whether the estate was in fact under sequestration; following the above judgement the under-sheriff of the count took possession of the manor from the state's tenants and was himself ordered to appear in court to answer charges of molesting the estate during seisure but was discharged on declaring that he did not know of the seisure. Richard's sons John and Richard requested the return of goods and stock of theirs taken when their father's estate was secured and petitioned for the release of the estate if he gave further security; he himself was in prison at this time (April 1651) but in June was granted freedom from arrest and leave to attend the hearing of his case. In October of the same year it was reported that he was so ill that it would endanger his life to travel from Houghton Conquest to London. The case was heard at Haberdashers' Hall in November and it was ordered that everything was to be restored to him that was taken at the first seisure. Richard himself, however, was arrested "at his going out of the gate of Haberdashers' Hall... after his case had been determined" and was "carried away by 4 or 5 persons with drawn swords". He was again imprisoned for a couple of weeks this time by the order of the Committee for Indemnity, on a charge of having beaten an officer and wounded his assistant while resisting arrest some eighteen months previously. He was, however, released shortly afterwards.

RO5/285 Once his estate was free from sequestration Richard was able to raise funds by mortgage and in December 1652 he obtained £3000 at 6% per annum. In fact this was to cause trouble in the years ahead and eventually led to a great reduction in

RO5/374-5 the size of the estate. On the whole the uneasy peace of the Protectorate meant a gradual return to normal life; in 1656 a Conquest family lawsuit, commenced in 1635, was brought to judgement and in the following year another family cause was commenced which was to drag on for another ten years. Financially times were still hard for royalist supporters, already impoverished after the upheaval of the previous decade, were subjected to a special tax called a "decimation" which

B.N.Q.I. was a levy of 10% on those with £100 per annum from lands and £10 per annum

pg.199 on those with £1,5000 personal estate; in 1655 Richard Conquest had to pay £120 under this tax.

AD 1032 A brief particular of part of the Conquestbury estate, with an annual rental of £248 survives for 1657 when it was proposed as security for £1000 for 2 or 3 years, with the following note:

"Mr. Abbott if you please to get me this with speede you shall doe me a greate courtesie and engage me to asmuch thankfullnesse howsoever Sir I am your friend and servant, R. Conquest"

AD 3989 Another brief survey of Mr. Conquest's estate, dated 1658, listing the annual rent of each part of the property (totalling £575 10s) is likely also to have been compiled with a view to obtaining an advance on its security
For a Catholic family, however, there were still restraints on a normal way of life and in 1653 Richard Conquest sent his second son, Richard, aged 18, and his third son, 13 year-old Henry, abroad to continue their education at Douai in the Netherlands, the centre of political and religious propaganda of the English Catholics. Richard's eldest son, John Thimelby Conquest, apparently remained at home and in the following year (1654) married France Hall with whom he received a marriage portion of £2000 – doubtless urgently needed! Frances was the daughter of Benedict Hall of Highmeadow near Coleford in the Forest of Dean. The Hall family had been recusant from the 16th century and suffered persecution and disabilities under Elizabeth and James I. During the Civil War Benedict made his house a royalist garrison and was actively involved in the war in that area. In 1644 following Parliamentary successes in the area, his family, presumably including Frances, had to take refuge in Bristol while he himself fled to Raglan and later to Hereford. He survived the war and died at Cambrai in April 1668 aged 78. Clearly this was a suitable family background for John Thimelby's wife and the marriage took place in the spring of 1654.

P.11/28/2 It was through this union between the Conquest and Hall families that the name Benedict came into the Conquest family. Benedict Hall derived his Christian name from his uncle, Benedict Winchcomb of Noke, in Oxfordshire and this remained a traditional name in the Hall family. John Thimelby Conquest and France had only one son, whom they named Benedict and the name occurs in the next two generations of the family until the male line died out. The Rector of Houghton Conquest in 1873 writes that the name "Benedicta" doubtless bestowed in honour of Benedict Conquest, still survived in the parish.*

*see BPRS XLI marriage of Benedicta Heron to John Rizeley, 1721

The Conquests at Stevington

There are no deeds for any Conquest property at Stevington in this collection but some evidence can be collected from various sources about the family's connection with that place. Stevington is first mentioned in connection with the Conquests in an account for arrears of Ship Money in 1637-8 when Mr. Conquest [presumably Richard] was assessed at 13s 4d for land in Stevington. From the Sequestration Committee Minutes in May 1646 it appears that it was he who first acquired the property there:

"It is ... ordered that Sir Thomas Alston shall be desired to produce the trunk of writings and survey of Stevington which he had of the said Mr. Conquest's house in Stevington, unto this Committee at their next meeting"

and in September the following entry was made:

"Memorandum: Mr. Daniell minister of Stevington says he would have bought £8 per annum of Mr. Richard Conquest senior copyhold land in Stevington and the said Mr. Conquest could not sell the same because the said £8 per annum and all the copyhold land in Stevington was bought in his son Richard's name and his said son was entered tenant to it; he has heard Mr. Conquest senior say he must be accountable for the profits of the

copyhold land which he received unto his son Richard. Ordered Richard Conquest junior shall enjoy copyhold lands in Stevington. Sir Thomas Alston to be consulted concerning the value and particulars of it and to be desired to bring in the copies; provided this is intended to be no prejudice to Sir Thomas Alston's title to it."

Richard Conquest, junior, was probably aged about eleven at this time, for he was eighteen when he went to Douai in 1653 to complete his education. In 1657 a lawsuit between father and son was commenced in Chancery, which was to drag on for another ten years. It is not clear what point was at issue until 1661, by which time the cause had been complicated by the introduction of further bills and by the fact that Richard Conquest, junior, was now dead*, leaving a son Richard by one Mildred Copledick, of whom it was said that when Richard Conquest, junior, "first became acquainted with her she was of very evil fame and reputation and was given to keep company and to do things that was [sic] very uncivil and that she was then reported to be with child" further it was alleged that she and Richard were never lawfully married.

The question seemed to be over the ownership of the land of Richard, junior, both in Houghton Conquest and Stevington; at least some of the deeds were in the hands of Mildred who had come to the house of Richard Conquest the father, "got by indirect means into [the] closet where the ... writings were" and "took away and kept the same". The tenants William Knight and Ralph Harvey were reported to be ten years in arrears with their rent and were likely to become insolvent. Apparently Richard Conquest the father resorted to violence in an attempt to eject them, for he was reported to have attacked Knight at Stevington. When Knight was ordered to appear in court bringing some of the money he owed, he did not appear and could not be found. ** Eventually it was ordered that the premises and the deeds should be handed over to Richard Conquest the father, who presumably continued to hold the land until his death.

* He appears to have died between 20 Oct.1658[X 117/10] and 9 Oct.1661[RO5/377]

** A William Knight and a Ralph Harvey appear in Stevington Hearth Tax BHRS XVI; for Harvey, see also BHRS IX pg. Ci

ABC 7 An Archdeaconry Court Book shows that in 1668 Richard Conquest refused to pay 9s assessed on him for repair of Stevington Church; in the following year he refused to pay 10s 2d for the same purpose and the entry is marked "he lives in London". The 1671 Hearth Tax does not list any Conquests at Stevington but as this tax was assessed on occupiers not owners it merely shows that none of the family lived there at this date.

Richard Conquest probably died c.1670s and it is likely that he bequeathed his lands in Stevington to his son Kenelme, who was certainly living there twenty years later. The Stevington Parish Register records that "Mr.Conquest's son Kellum died August 19 1696 ⁺ and when Kenelme (the father) made his will in October of the same year he described himself as "of Stevington, gent." ⁺⁺ and left his freehold and copyhold lands to his wife Alice. A Stevington deed of 1699 mentions Mrs.Conquest as the owner of adjoining land but nothing is known of the

AB/W
1697/140

GA 1113

family's connection with the parish thereafter – probably the land was sold on Mrs. Conquest's death or passed to her daughter Winifred

⁺ BPRS IX. He was buried at Houghton Conquest 21 Aug. (BPRS XLI)

⁺⁺ Houghton Conquest Register (BPRS XLI) records the burial of “Kenlham” Conquest, gent. 2 July 1697

From the Restoration to the Sale of the Bedfordshire Estate.

Information on the history of the Conquest family during the latter half of the 17th century is very scanty. In 1668 Richard, Kellum, George and Philip Conquest were presented at the Archdeacon's Court for refusing to attend church at Houghton Conquest. Where John Thimelby Conquest, Richard's son and heir, was at this point is not known although he could be the John Conquest, M.D. who was indicted as a recusant at Middlesex Sessions on 15 December 1668. John inherited the Conquestbury estate on the death of his father, c.1670s. The 1671 Hearth Tax lists “Thimblesby” Conquest at Ampthill with 4 hearths; probably he later moved to Houghton as he is referred to as of Houghton Conquest in later deeds (RO9). In 1670 his 11 year old daughter Mary went to a Benedictine Convent at Cambrai and was professed there in 1677. Her sister Theresa was also a Benedictine nun and two other sisters went to the Blue Nuns in Paris for their education in 1678. Kenelme Conquest, who probably held land at Stevington, was at the time of the hearth tax in 171 living at Houghton Conquest where he is listed as having six hearths. In 1680 he and his wife were presented at the Assizes as recusants and in the summer of the same year Richard Conquest “being over 18” was presented for not attending church at Houghton Conquest. Other members of the family, living in the London area, were presented as recusants at the Middlesex Sessions**

** Dorothy Conquest, widow, 12 Jan. 1674; Charles Conquest of Bow Street doctor in physic, June 1692 (C.R.C. 134/8)

It seems likely that the family never fully recovered financially from the upheavals of the Civil War and sending the children abroad for their education must have imposed an additional burden. Benjamin Conquest, who appears not to have shared the religious convictions of some other members of the family for he was a Justice of the Peace in 1687 and it was stated that “his principles are of the Church of England” bequeathed by his will made in 1690, £300 “to my poor cosen Thimble Conquest”.

In 1695 the family estate was considerably reduced as a result of an agreement made with Maurice Thompson to whom it had been mortgaged. The problem stemmed from a mortgage for £3000 initially entered upon in 1652; part of the capital was paid off but the interest payments fell behind and the mortgagee took possession. Following a lawsuit in Chancery in 1661-2 the mortgage was assigned to another mortgagee, apparently acting for Maurice Thompson who already held some other Conquest property on mortgage (RO5/280). The situation did not become any easier and the Conquests continued to fall behind with repayments, particularly in 1673 (RO9/2) and the position was further complicated by a dispute over what property was intended to be included in the mortgage. Thompson entered into part of the

premises but both sides freely admitted by 1695 that the property he held was not really worth the vast sum (£13,593. 8s) for which it was now standing security. It was finally agreed that the Conquests would ratify the Thompson's possession of part of the estate and the Conquests would continue to hold the remainder. This transaction greatly reduced the size of the family estate as

RO9/2
1st schedule the premises passed to the Thompsons comprised over 500 acres of enclosures, 145 acres of open field land and six dwellings including a capital messuage called Chapel End House and a house called The Vine Tree.

On the death of John Thimelby Conquest in 1700 the estate passed to his son Benedict who certainly lived in Houghton, at least from this date. He married Anne, the daughter of the Rev. John Birch, rector of the parish and the baptisms of most of their children were entered in the parish register, in one case the Bishop's Transcript adds to the entry "by one F.Greenwood a Romish priest". One of their children at least was sent abroad to be educated for their daughter Mary went to Cambrai in 1718 at the age of thirteen; she did not become a nun but returned in due course and married. It is likely that a John Conquest who went to Douai in 1733 was her brother; he died young and was buried at Irnham in 1736. It appears that during this period the family was still in serious financial difficulty and various sums of money were raised on the security of the Houghton Conquest estate during the lifetime of Benedict Conquest (RO5/322-370). In 1717 a portion of the estate, comprising 35 acres of old enclosures, 30 acres of open field land and 2 cottages, was sold to Thomas Armstrong for £1219 thus paying off the mortgages of the property concerned and at the same time, the opportunity was taken of consolidating remaining mortgages on other portions of the estate. At his death it appears that over £3900* was due on various mortgages, which were paid off shortly afterwards.

*[computed from RO5/326, 351, 356, 364-5, 367, 369]

With the death of Benedict Conquest, senior, at Houghton Conquest on 2nd February 1733 the family's real connection with Bedfordshire was ended, for his son and heir, Benedict, was already living in Staffordshire and subsequently moved to Irnham Hall in Lincolnshire. In 1739 he raised £6000 (RO5/307-18) principal money on the security of the estate. It seems likely that at this point he realised that the estate was in fact so heavily mortgaged that the best solution was to sell it, paying off the mortgagees out of the purchase money. It appears that £1000 had been put forward by Benedict's sister Mary and was apparently interest-free; £5000 had been put up by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was also a landowner in the parish and there was now due to him a total of £6208.18s principal and interest. The estate was first offered for sale to the Archbishop at £9000; Lady Gowran, who had not previously heard that the estate was to be sold, was in August 1740 asked not to bid against the Archbishop. In fact the asking price was more than the Archbishop was willing to pay and so the estate was offered on the open market. The Duke of Bedford's agents were interested but were also discouraged by the price: Samuel Davis [the Woburn steward] wrote to Robert Butcher [the chief officer of the estate] on 16th September 1740:

R.3/55 "I am now inpercut of the Purchasing Conquests Estate which is now to be sold but they ask such a Monstrous price for it that I Question whether we shall Buy it or not".

In fact, of course, they did not and it was eventually sold to Lady Gowran for £10,000. Although the actual conveyance to Lord Gowran was dated 11 May 1741 to all intents and purposes the purchase was settled in November 1740 when one of the mortgages was paid off by Lady Gowran and she agreed to pay £1500 out of the estate for the portions of Benedict's sisters. It appears, however, that it was rumoured locally that she had not conducted herself quite properly in the affair and after the conclusion of the purchase she wrote to the Archbishop in some indignation to justify her action:

MIC 117 (full transcript in MIC catalogue)

“ My Lord,
Mr.Potter having taken some Liberties in talking of me with regard to the purchase of Mr.Conquest's estate, I thought it necessary for me to trouble your Grace upon his head in order for me to justify myself; and when the whole affair is stated to your Grace in its true light, I make no doubt but you will admit that I am not so much to blame as Mr.Potter everywhere gives out.
About the beginning of August Mr.Potter applied to me, and desir'd that I would not bid against your Grace for Mr.Conquest's Estate; at that time I had not hear'd that it was to be dispos'd of nor did I authorize any person whatsoever to treat about it.
The beginning of October I wrote to your Grace, but before you could receive my Letter my agent in Bedfordshire was inform'd by Mr.King who was intrusted by Mr.Conquest with the disposal of this Estate that it was offerr'd to your Grace, and to Mr.Potter at 9000li., but that Mr.Potter told Mr.Conquest at Irnham, and to Mr.King in Bedfordshire that your Grace would not give more than seven and twenty years purchase and Mr.Potter told my ...[damaged]..ght offer it to whomsoever he pleas'd, accordingly before any person employed by me took any step whatsoever Mr.King acquainted the Duke of Bedford agents that they were at Liberty to bid for the Estare, and a time was appointed by his Grace for Coming to see it, but King being oblig'd to go to London on that day the Duke did not come. I was made acquainted with this, and I thought that as Mr.Potter told King he might offer the Estate to any person whatsoever, I might bid for it as well as another..... I think it would be very hard then to tye me down from bidding, when by Mr.Potter's own consent every body else was to be at Liberty to treat – I assure your Grace if Mr.Potter had not given King leave to offer the Estate to sale where ever he pleas'd no consideration whatsoever could have induc'd me to meddle with it tho' it were ever so convenient or necessary for my son: and I will take upon me to say that you may depend upon Lord Gowran's doing everything in [his power to acco]mmodate and oblige your Grace”

From 1741 the Conquestbury estate formed part of a larger unit, the Bedfordshire estate of Lord Gowran (later Earl of Upper Ossary) which descended to his son, on whose death in 1818 it passed to a nephew, Lord Holland. After his death his executors sold his estate in 1842 to the Duke of Bedford who added it to his already extensive Bedfordshire estate.

The Conquests at Irnham

The marriage between Richard Conquest and Elizabeth, daughter of Richard Thimelby of Irnham Hall, Lincolnshire, which took place in 1626 was to have a profound influence on the history of the Conquest family over a century later. The

Thimelby family was firmly committed to the recusant cause and had made Irnham a centre for Catholicism in the area. The last male heir of the family John Thimelby, died in 1712 but his wife Dorothy survived him and held Irnham to her death in 1720 at the age of 85 when the property passed to their daughter Mary, the widow of Thomas Giffard of Chillington, a member of another staunch recusant family. Although their blood relationship was by now fairly distant there seems to have remained a bond between the Conquest and Thimelby families and Benedict Conquest, son and heir of the Benedict who held Conquestbury at this time, appears to have settled at Long Birch, Staffordshire, by 1733 after returning from Douai where he was educated. His younger brother John Thimelby Conquest was buried at Irnham in 1736 and a few years later (1738) Benedict himself was certainly living there.

Mary Giffard was living at Long Birch in 1741 (R>O>5/300) and died there on 13th February 1753 when Benedict, who was her second cousin once removed, inherited the Irnham estate. In July of that year he registered the property, as recusants were required to do by law; he had an extensive estate in Lindsey, Corby and Irnham, the annual rental of which amounted to almost £2400. In fact he can have held the property only for a few months as he died in October of that year; his son Benedict was a minor at his father's death and died in 1761 shortly after attaining his majority.* The property was inherited by his sister Mary Christina Conquest who in 1763 married Henry Arundell, 8th Baron of Wardour. She died in 1813 outliving her husband by five years and the property passed to her daughter Eleanora Maria, wife of Charles Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, whose son sold Irnham in 1853. It is likely that the mid-eighteenth century chapel at Irnham which was destroyed by fire in 1887 was built by the Conquest family.

Conquestbury

slide
no.1732

The deeds in this collection give virtually no information about the manor house of the Conquests usually known as the Conquest Bury. The mediaeval deeds concerning the manor make no reference to the house, which is first mentioned in a marriage settlement dated 1595 (RO5/256) as "the manor house called Conquest Burye" and appoints that Burt Wood is to be used for the maintenance of the said manor house and barns. It is likely that at this date it was a house of some substance as James I stayed there for two nights in 1605. By this date it may already have been built for as much as a century for a watercolour of the house made about 1820 by Thomas Fisher shows a brick and timber building with carved eaves which appears to be early Tudor.

Some information about the internal lay-out of the house is afforded by the will of Richard Conquest, knight, made in 1617. He left to his eldest son Sir Edmond "all the furniture of 4 chambers in my dwelling house as they are now furnished, viz: the chamber over the great parlour and the little chamber thereunto adjoining, the chamber over the hall and the little chamber thereunto adjoining". Edmond was also to have all tables, forms and stools about the house "the table in the parlour excepted" and also all implements in the kitchen, larder, bakehouse, "yielding house" and milkhouse.

During the Civil War the Conquest's estate was taken into the hands of the Sequestration Committee which in September 1646 allowed £20 "to the necessary

AD 3989
BRHS XVI

repairs to Mrs. Conquest's house in Houghton Conquest". A survey of Mr. Conquest's estate made in 1658 describes it as "a fair house with a dovehouse and other convenient outhouses". It was clearly fairly sizeable for the Hearth Tax returns of 1671 list the house of Richard Conquest as having 13 hearths.

Following the death of Benedict Conquest, senior, in 1733 the family ceased to live at Houghton and the Bury was no longer regarded as important, probably becoming merely a farm-house occupied by the tenants of the large estates, first of Lord Ossory and subsequently of Lord Holland and of the Duke of Bedford, of which it now formed part. Richard Gordon's map of Bedfordshire, dated 1736, which illustrates the gentlemen's seats in each parish, omits the Conquest Bury. When Lord Holland's estate was put up for sale in 1841 the sale catalogue described Conquestbury farm as:

"A Brick and Tiled Farm House, containing Kitchen, Parlor, Wash-house, Pantry, Dairy, 4 Bed Rooms and Garret, a good Stable for 8 horses, and Pig-styes, part Timber with loft over, a Thatched cow-house, a Granary, Boarded and Tiled, and a Thatched Cart Hovel, very old Barn, Brick Nogged and Thatched, with a clay Floor in part, and part boarded, a Cow-house, Boarded and Thatched."

The tenants at this time were the Franklin family and William Franklin, in later years, recalled in verse a happy childhood spent at the Bury. In a poem entitled "Retrospective View of Houghton Conquest" written in 1855 in which he recalled the changes that had taken place in the parish over the previous fifty years, he wrote:

FRANKLIN, with filial love I tell,
Did at Conquest Bury dwell,
With DOROTHY, my mother dear, -
Their memory I still revere:
Unto the church yard they are gone,
As also is my brother, JOHN:
Throughout man's life, a sympathy
Will cling where scenes of youth may be:
My boyhood's days were happy there,
Dependent on my parent's care.
This retrospective view will show,
How transient are all things below:
And unto time's resistless sway,
Old Conquest House must now give way.

In another poem, written a year or so later, he again spoke of his native village;

"And there the CONQUESTS liv'd of yore;
Their ancient house is seen no more;
It has to time's resistless sway,
With all its gable ends giv'n way;
'Twas there I spent my infancy;
Spot ever dear to memory;
And there the ancient racks were seen,
Where the retainer's spears had been,
Telling of feudal times, and strife,
To save their own and baron's life;
In youth, a pleasant home, there I

Spent the vacations happily.”

The fullest information about the house is given in a common-place book kept by the rectors of Houghton Conquest, in which Dean Burgon wrote in 1873

“The Conquests, the ancient Lords of the Soil, who had been settled here for upwards of three centuries, inhabited their ancestral seat which stood within a stone’s throw of what is still called "The Bury Farm".”

He continues:

“ There were to be seen, at the time I speak of [c.1838] considerable remains of the old brick and timber homestead of the Conquest family; a picturesque moated residence with carved eaves, which was indifferently called "Conquest Bury" or "The Bury Farm"...What remained of the old house was demolished, to our extreme regret, in 1856; when the present farmhouse was erected on a slight eminence to the south-east of it, and much of the moat was filled in. A row of yews which yet remain mark what must have been part of the ancient garden. I may add that the old approach to Conquest Bury in London Lane is still clearly discernable. The drive up to the mansion remains; and the place where the outer gates stood, is distinctly to be traced. In what a pleasant hollow of hills did that ancient mansion lie, and how admirably had the site been selected for a residence! A belt of bright red gravelly sand is here, together with an abundant spring of excellent water which still wells out of the green hillside. Screened were the inmates of that dwelling from observation on the east and south and west by the rising ground: and before a little spinney was cut down (which doubtless represented a more considerable plantation), on the north likewise. It is a sweet secluded spot, in which for half a thousand years generation after generation of one single family grew up to maturity, disported themselves, and died; a very secluded spot! The hills immediately above it and around it command a capital view of all the country round”