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: Notes for re-enactment on 7th & 8th July 2010 :
: Compiled by Paul Mason, :
: Steward of The Retinue of Thomas Lord Burgh K.G. (1460 - 1496) :
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The Burgh Manor House is under attack from Lord welles.

Richard welles, Lord welles & willoughby, was descended from one of William the Conquerors knights, the welles family held their barony from 1299, named after the manor of well a small hamlet near Alford in Lincolnshire. The few houses that make up well today are all that mark the location of, what must have been, a very large and smart manor house, the family seat of one of Lincolnshire's most senior noble families, long since demolished and forgotten along with the name of it's lords.

The early 15th century saw Lincolnshire with a number of important nobility - Lord Cromwell, Lord Beaumont, willoughby d' Eresby, welles, and gentry families such as the Dymocks (hereditary kings champions), de la Launde (naturalised Flemish), Fitzwilliam, Hussey, Pinchbeck and others. After the battle of Towton, 1461, there was only one of the senior nobility left - welles, and they had backed the wrong side.

Lionel (Leo) 6th Lord welles had served Henry VI in France and in Ireland as lieutenant, he was a staunch Lancastrian who had been married twice, first to Joan (or Celia) waterton, and having seven children including his heir Sir Richard. Welles married secondly Margaret Beauchamp, dowager Countess of Somerset, mother to Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and mother to the future Henry VII. They had one child, John, who became Viscount after his nephew's succession. Lionel's large family attracted a wide range of marriages and it is worth covering them here; Richard, the eldest, married the heiress of Lord Willoughby de Eresby, Joan. Alianore married Thomas, Lord Hoo & Hastings. Cecily married Sir Robert Willoughby. Margaret married Sir Thomas Dymoke. Catherine married Sir Thomas de la Launde. Joan married William Denton Esq. Margaret (2) married Thomas Berkeley Esq.

Sir Richard welles was summoned to Parliament as Lord willoughby by the right of his wife in May 1455 and he also supported the Royalist Lancastrian party. Along with his father they fought at several of the early engagements of the 1450's and at the Battle of Towton where Lionel, Lord welles was killed, his son Richard was captured on the field, seemingly uninjured and spared his life but sent to The Tower of London to await the king's pleasure.

While Richard welles languished in the Tower his father was attainted and the Welles barony forfeited in the first Parliament of Edward IV. welles was pardoned of his life and limb at Christmas 1461/62 and allowed to go home with his lordship intact. welles appears to have patched up his differences with the Yorkists and to have thrown himself into supporting them, being present at the northern sieges and fighting at Hexham in 1464. The barony of welles was restored through the Kings 'especial favour' in 1465 and the attainder finally reversed in 1468. Richard welles was now back in position to re assert his families long standing position in Lincolnshire affairs, at the head of them. welles obviously thought that he had the Kings trust and, after all, he had been on an important embassy for him accompanied by his own Pursuivant 'Noir Lyon' in 1463 (Black Lion - a minor herald), and he was moving in court circles, probably under the earl of warwick's wing. There was only one problem. while he and his family had fallen from favour a new man had arrived on the scene in the county, who had rapidly established himself as the king's right hand man - Thomas Burgh

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Esq. of Gainsborough. Burgh was actually very well connected being the cousin of Lord Grey of Codnor and a relative, via his mother, of the Percy earls of Northumberland. His father died in France in 1432 and his mother married again to Sir William Lucy of Northampton, a member of the Duke of Buckingham's retinue in France at the time. Lucy was a very well known and respected man who was very often appointed as arbitrator between the developing factions in the early stages of The Wars of The Roses, being brutally murdered at the Battle of Northampton in 1460. Burgh was also initially a member of the Duke of Buckingham's retinue and was tasked by the Royal Lancastrian government to arrest Yorkists!

Burgh married the widowed Margaret, Lady Botreaux who's step father was the Duke of Somerset killed at St.Alban's and her older step-brother was Henry, Duke of Somerset, defeated and executed at Hexham in 1464 along with her brother, Lord Roos. Burgh had indeed used the Welles enforced absence to consolidate his position and, whereas people would have gone to the Welles for advice, support and patronage, they now happily went to Burgh. Along with political power and patronage went the Welles ability to buy manors and lands as well as arrange marriages; Welles son, Sir Robert Welles had married Elizabeth Bouchier, daughter of Lord Berners, a very well connected Yorkist and they had married their daughter Joane to, firstly Richard Pigot and secondly to Richard Hastings younger brother of William, Lord Hastings, Lord Chamberlain to King Edward IV.

It is Sir Robert's daughter Joane's first marriage to Richard Pigot that may really have sparked the feud between Burgh and Welles. The Pigot family owned the manor of Doddington which included several other manors along with lands, rents and advowsons; as part of the marriage settlement some lands and manors would have been granted to Richard and Joane. Richard had obviously died young and the Welles were keen to hang on to what they had and to add on to their lands with a major and cheap purchase from Dame Pygot, the vulnerable surviving widow. Sir Thomas Burgh, as he now was, snatched this glittering set of lands from under Welles nose, clinching a deal with Dame Pygot, for cash payments, despite the Welles having a real legal claim to first refusal.

This slight to Lord Welles son was of course picked up by the whole clan and it's various extended family members such as the Dymokes and de la Laundes, and coupled with the behind the scenes plotting with Warwick and Clarence, the King's brother, the feud was bent and moulded in to a way of getting rid of the King, using the feud as a cover. Whether the animosity gradually built is not known but there is nothing to support it in any records except for the ill starred attack on the manor in February 1470. The manor itself may have been still under restoration/repair and rebuilding as the Burgh's were spending on expensive brick, new wings and a tower, based on his friend, Sir Thomas Montgomery's manor at Faulkbourne in Essex. Nor were the Burgh family at home, they were in Derbyshire, probably staying at Codnor castle with their cousin, Lord Grey while Sir Thomas served on a Commission to deal with the recent Vernon vs Haddon quarrel, otherwise an attack and bodily harm to members of the family would have resulted in a great deal of paperwork and litigation!

What made the Welles family over confident about their plans to get Burgh out and then to initiate Warwick's plan for usurpation was the King's poor response to other feuds that were taking place. The Berkeley vs Lisle feud ended in a mini battle and had been brewing for some time, whilst the most famous is of course the Paston vs Norfolk/Mowbray and Suffolk/de la Pole feud, and the Haddon vs Vernon feud mentioned above. The King was un-willing or un-able to discipline his errant nobles and the lesser nobility saw Dukes getting away with so why shouldn't they?

With Warwick pushing them along the Welles were starting a train of events that would push the lazy King to rapid and decisive action in support of his knight of the body, master of the horse and personal friend - Sir Thomas Burgh.