

Sir Edmund Verney-DNB Article

Verney, Sir Edmund (1590-1642), courtier and politician, was born on 1 January 1590 in Drury Lane, London, the second son of Sir Edmund Verney, knight of Penley, Hertfordshire by his third wife, Mary Blakeney. By the 1460s, Sir Edmund's first well-documented ancestor, Sir Ralph Verney, a mercer, was appointed Lord Mayor of London. The family had also acquired property in Buckinghamshire, including the manor of Middle Claydon. Sir Ralph's descendants became courtiers through marriage and political alliances, and in keeping with this tradition, Sir Edmund became knight-marshal and standard bearer to Charles I.¹ In preparation for his career, he studied briefly at St. Alban Hall, Oxford², visited the French and Italian courts, and toured battle fields in the low countries. In 1611 he was knighted and sent to Madrid. He returned 'an accomplished gentleman'³ and joined his uncle Francis as a member of Prince Henry's household. After Henry's early, unexpected death, Sir Edmund, barely 23, was appointed a gentleman of the Privy Chamber in young Prince Charles's household. This boyhood connection with the future king engendered deep loyalty and would cause later divisions within the Verney family.

On 14 Dec 1612, Sir Edmund married Margaret Denton (1594-1611), receiving a L2,300 portion and 4 years room and board in return for a L400 jointure. The socially prominent Dentons of Hillesden lived near Middle Claydon, which at that time was leased to a tenant. Margaret and her 10 surviving children resided mainly at Hillesden, while Sir Edmund was attending Court. In 1622 he was made Lieutenant of Whaddon Chase and in 1623, he followed Prince Charles and Buckingham to Madrid where they were negotiating a Spanish match. Sir Edmund proved himself an ardent protestant by protecting a dying Englishman from a Catholic priest. In addition, he helped Prince Charles to extricate himself from the Spanish alliance, by providing him with a jewel paved with ten diamonds, which the prince used as a gift.

Sir Edmund's career as a courtier, however, did not produce the expected financial benefits. Never an astute business man, in 1620 he agreed to pay almost L4,000 to surrender the lease on his Middle Claydon estate, although it had only 15 years to run. Prince Charles promised to pay L1,000 per year for four years, but he appears to have made only one L1,000 payment in 1623. Sir Edmund now had a country seat but 'thereby', he 'became much in depte'.⁴ In 1624 Sir Edmund was elected MP for Buckingham borough, for Aylesbury in 1629, and for Chipping Wycombe in 1640 in the Short and Long Parliaments. When Charles became King Sir Edmund was appointed knight-marshal for life with a L200 pension and responsibility to preserve order within twelve miles of the court. He and his deputies were to 'continually ride, both in the day time and in the night, about our court' arresting anyone without proper credentials.⁵ He also had command of the Marshalsea Prison and its profits.

Throughout the 1630s, he rode with the King on long journeys, which aggravated his sciatica and lameness, despite visits to Bath. In 1639, he delivered a message from the king to the Scot's army, which led to a peace treaty. But his court and political duties required him to be in or near London. Thus, in 1634 he established himself in a great double house in Covent Garden Piazza with an annual rent of L160.

His expenses, however, were far greater than the income paid to him by the king, and his attempts to make money from patents, investments, and grants of offices ended in failure. His ventures included patents for hackney coaches and inspecting tobacco, investing in drainage projects in the fens, and buying confiscated Irish estates. He paid L1,000 to the Court of Wards to marry his son Ralph to an heiress, and in 1640 he loaned the king another L1,000. He hoped to provide for his family through a L400 annuity raised from the aulnage, a tax on sealing woolen

yarn. This source of income, however, proved disappointing. With only a life interest in his lands, he left his heir and executor Ralph saddled with debts. His three younger sons received only L40 annually and his six unmarried daughters were left with only L20 per year.

Sir Edmund's financial problems took place in the context of growing political unrest in Parliament and the Court. Sir Edmund's life clearly illustrates how families became divided during the Civil War and how individuals had to make painful choices between duties to family, religion, and king. Sir Edmund's younger sons, Henry, Edmund, and Thomas served in the royalist army, whose standard their father bore. At the same time, however, both Sir Edmund and his eldest son Ralph, were deeply committed Protestants, who disliked Laudian practices and desired simplicity in worship. They sat together in Parliament and wore their hair long, but they voted in opposition to Charles's wishes. 'The opinion, I see of the great ones most at the court', wrote second son Edmund to his brother Ralph, is that my father and you are all for the Parliament and not for the King. 'Indeed the world now account[s] it policy', wrote Sir Edmund's daughter Cary, 'for the father to be one side and the son the other'.⁶

Sir Edmund admitted his predicament to a Royalist friend: 'I do not like the quarrel, and do heartily wish that the King would yield and consent to what they desire ... my conscience is only concerned in honour and in gratitude to follow my master. I have eaten his bread, and served him near thirty years, and will not do so base a thing as to forsake him; and choose rather to lose my life ... to preserve and defend those things which are against my conscience to preserve and defend'. In explaining his motives, Sir Edmund openly placed religious issues as the cause of his opposition to his King. 'I have no reverence for Bishops, he stated, 'for whom this quarrel subsists'.⁷

When civil war came, Ralph sided with Parliament while his father Sir Edmund bore the Royalist standard at Nottingham in August 1642 and died in October on the battle field at Edgehill. Later, a family story arose of how the standard was found clutched in his dying hand, although the body was never found. Friends reported that he killed two men with his own hands and 'would neither put on armes or buff cote the day of battle', implying a desire to die.⁸ But if these tales were never confirmed, Sir Edmund was consistently described him as a man 'of great courage and ... confessedly valiant'. Contemporaries recorded the lack of Royalist organization at Edgehill, and Sir Edmund's regiment bore the brunt of the action.⁹ If he did not purposely expose himself to death, he stood his ground at the head of the army and died in the service of the king.¹⁰ His somber face can be seen at Claydon House in portraits by Van Dyke and others.

1.NRA 21959, S. Ranson, The Verney Papers Catalogued for the Claydon House Trust (1994), iii gives 1463 for Verney's mayoralty. R. Gibbs, Worthies of Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury, 1888), 385-9; G. Lipscomb, The History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham (1831), i. 174-98; M. Holmes, The Country House Described: An Index... (1986). The Verneys lived in London and Hertfordshire until 1620.

2.Foster, Alumni Oxon, Mar 1603/4

3.mems i,70

4.bruce 135

5. Bruce 115, 123.

6. Henry V/RV, Aug 22 1642, S.N Breda.

7. S. Gardiner, Hist of GCW 1642-49 Vol. 1 1642-44, p.5 Fn1 taken from Clarendon's Life ii, 66, quote this. chk PUL

8. Oct 27 1642 Ano-on the Hill, Sir Edward Sidenham/SRV, Horwood, 42 Other letters from countess of Sussex. RV Sussex, Oct 31 1642

9. Mems i, 72. Horwood 433 Desc by Gardiner, Hist of GWC, i.56

10. On Royalist side,

Clarendon, Warwick and Bulstrode memoirs, narrative in Carte's Original Letters 1.9, official statement = A Relation of the Battle (E.126,24) Letter of CH to Sancroft in Ellis's Orig Letters Ser II, iii, 301, another from Royalist in London (Harl MSS 3,783, fo.61) On other side Ludlow's Memoirs, Fiennes account (E.126,38) Holles and officers (E 124,26 and speeches of Lord Wharton and others (E 124, 32) Smith comes from Ludlow. Britannicae Virtutis Imago 1644 is diff story derived from Dugdale in which orange scarf disappears and Smith fight men guarding the scy and wounded 2/

“References to the Verney letters are to microform reel and document numbers in the British Library, followed by initials of writers and recipients and the date of the letter”.