

John Verney, 1640-1717)

Verney, John (1640-1717), overseas merchant, landowner, and politician, was born on 5 November 1640, the 2nd but 1st surviving son of Sir Ralph Verney, 1st Baronet of Middle Claydon, Buckinghamshire, and Mary Blacknall, heiress of John Blacknall of Abingdon, Berkshire. At age seven, John joined his family in Blois France, where they were in voluntary exile from the Civil War.¹ Because Sir Ralph feared any taint of popery, John was taught by Protestant tutors. John was 'a very ready witted child', but his scholastic progress was slow and he never saw himself as a scholar.² His life in France, however, exposed him to continental codes of civility and politeness. He penned beautiful letters under the tutelage of Claudius Mauger, later the author of epistolary manuals.³ He grew up to read Latin, French, and Italian and owned works by Descartes, Montaigne, and Cervantes, as well as classical and religious books.⁴ John also developed an intense interest in his lineage and spent countless hours annotating family letters and compiling volumes of genealogical material.⁵ With the help of the antiquarian, Browne Willis, he compiled a directory of baronets.⁶

When the family returned to England in 1653, John studied at the Barn Elmes School with James Fleetwood, later Bishop of Worcester. After it was closed by the authorities, he entered Samuel Turberville's school outside of London. He reluctantly mastered writing, grammar, 'an indifferent Latin', and French,⁷ but he was mainly interested in business. 'One must have some living now a days', he wrote, and 'I do verily think that I am a great deal fitter to be [in] some trade than to be a lawyer'.⁸ In June 1659, Sir Ralph sent him to Mr. Rich's school where he received a commercial education and learned merchants accounts. 'I would willingly give up all I have', he wrote his father, 'to be bound out' as an apprentice.⁹

On 31 December 1659, Sir Ralph paid £400 and signed a £1,000 bond to apprentice John to Sir Gabriel Roberts (1635-1715), an eminent Levant Company merchant.¹⁰ John hoped that his career would be 'no less satisfactory' to his father 'than if I had become an Inns of Court Gentleman'. I assure you (from my heart)', he wrote 'that I never delighted in ... anything else so much [as] this trade and also in hearing of business both inland and outland'.¹¹ John now spent his days in Sir Gabriel's warehouse learning to weigh, strip, and measure silks.

Finally, on 31 April 1662, John sailed on the Dover Merchant to Scanderoon, the port of Aleppo. There he joined the Levant Company and lived with other English merchants in the great Khan. After six years of struggle with little capital or connections,¹² on 28 July 1668, he received the company's liberty to trade for his own account. He eventually amassed a fortune large enough to set himself up as a London merchant. In 1674 when he returned to England, he claimed a fortune of £6,000.¹³

In London, John obtained his freedom of the Levant Company on 15 Dec 1674 and of the Vintners' Company on 21 November 1674 where he rose to liveryman and junior warden.¹⁴ He never held office in the Corporation of London, but served on tax commissions and grand juries. He was a governor of the Bridewell and a governor of the Royal Africa Company from 1679-81, 1686-8, 1691-2, and 1696-7.¹⁵

From 1674 to 1685, John sent English cloths to the Levant in return for silk and other imports, and invested in shipping and insurance.¹⁶ In 1680 John married Elizabeth, daughter of Ralph Palmer of Little Chelsea with whom he had four children: Elizabeth a spinster; Margaret, who married Sir Thomas Cave; Mary, who married Colonel John Lovett, and Ralph who married an heiress, Catherine Pachall of Great Baddow, Essex. His children's eighteenth-century alliances with landed families contrasted with John's three seventeenth-century marriages to **London**

women, whose fathers' profited from business affairs. In 1692, John married secondly Mary Lawley, daughter of Sir Francis Lawley, baronet and in 1697 he wed Elizabeth Baker, daughter of Daniel Baker, a London haberdasher. Their three portions injected £9,500 into the family estate.

After his first marriage, John chose not to live with his City colleagues, and he moved outside the walls to Hatton Garden 'that being in the middle between the Exchange and Westminster'.¹⁷ He enjoyed a varied urban social life in the West End with his Verney relatives as well as with city friends at the Exchange. In the 1670s, he frequented coffee-houses from Tom's to Garraway's and sampled services at the French Church and a Presbyterian meeting house. He also enjoyed the sermons of Dr. John Tillotson and Dr. Edward Stillingfleet.¹⁸ During the Exclusion Crisis, he was present at Parliament and at anti-papist spectacles. At the time of the Popish Plot, he attended state trials and amassed a large pamphlet collection, now at Cambridge University Library. As the century waned, John shed his early sympathies toward dissent and became immersed in high church and Tory party politics.¹⁹

In addition by 1690, the deaths of John's elder brother Edmund and his two young sons unexpectedly made John his father's heir. John continued to trade as late as 1692,²⁰ but he was shifting more assets into new financial investment alternatives including £1,900 in government funds from 1690 to 1693 and £5,400 from 1696 to 1702.²¹ He also invested in the East India Company, the Million Bank, and traded Bank of England stock and Exchequer bills.²² From April to July 1705 alone, he collected £757 from London investments, which were only a small portion of his city assets.²³

In September 1696, John succeeded his father as 2nd Baronet. He immediately plunged into Buckinghamshire politics, standing for the county seat in 1696, 1698, and 1701, and for Buckingham in 1698. With little local support or know how, he failed in each attempt. However, his candidacy helped the tory leader, William Cheyne, with whom John formed a valuable alliance. **While Cheyne was Lord Lieutenant, Queen Anne created John 1st Viscount Fermanagh and Baron Verney of Belturbet, Ireland on 16 June 1703.**

From 1701 to 1709, John refused to meddle in Parliamentary elections, but built a strong local interest as a Justice of the Peace, deputy lieutenant, and tax commissioner.²⁴ In 1710, Dr. John Cockman summarized John's transformation from London merchant to Tory politician: 'He lives now at an extravagant rate and gains ground in these parts'.²⁵

In 1710 at age 70, John stood for the county seat with Sir Henry Seymour against Whigs Sir Edmund Denton and Richard Hampden. He took first place with 2,161 votes and spent almost £800. Plagued by gout, stone, and deafness, his activity was restricted, but he attended most of his first session. A member of the October Club, he dined at the Fountain Tavern in the Strand in November. His name appeared on several lists as a Tory in 1710 and 1712. In 1713, with the help of his 3rd wife Elizabeth Baker, John again won the county seat with 2,018 votes, defeating both Whig opponents. In contrast to Sir Ralph's day, mobs of revellers filled Claydon House, sometimes with 400 people and 'everyday ... the noise of ... drums, trumpet, haut boy, pipes, or fiddles'. His expense were almost £500, and he also won a safe seat at Amersham.²⁶ He was fairly inactive due to ill health and age but he continued to vote by proxies and receive the 'votes'. It was 'a cordial to me', he declared, 'to see the Schism Bill passed'.

John's refusal to stand again in 1715 was one of the factors leading to a Whig/Tory Compromise in which one candidate from each party stood for the county. Although his excuse was old age, John 'did not think himself kindly us'd last time in relation to Amersham' which was not given to his son Ralph in 1713 as he had hoped. 'I, having been at above £100 charge', John

fumed, 'I think a relation of mine might have been the person'.

In 1715 John stood for Amersham unopposed.²⁷ Although his name appeared on a list of Jacobite supporters, John's Whig brother-in-law Daniel Baker considered him a loyal Tory: 'You have too good an estate and are too much a Protestant and lover of the country than to embark in any such wicked design as to bring in the Pretender'. One of John's last acts was to vote against the Septennial Bill and he died at Claydon on 23 June 1717.²⁸ His son Ralph inherited a healthy estate and won back his father's Amersham seat.²⁹ Thus it was a younger son and former Levant company merchant who enabled future generations to marry heiresses and buy land.

1.33-50,jv/rv,Sept 1 1679; 33-24,jv/rv,July 24 1679; 33-97,jv/rv,Nov 17 1679; 35-62,rv/jv,May 16 1681.

2.8-8,mbv/rv,Aug 10 1647; 11-9,lshe/rv,May 28 1651; 11-10,lshe/rv,July 9 1651; 11-12,lshe/rv,Aug 10 1651; M. Motley, 'Educating the English Gentleman Abroad: The Verney Family in Seventeenth-Century France and Holland', History of Education, 23 (1994), 243-56.

3.C. Mauger, Mauger's Letters Written Upon Several Subjects (1671) and French and English Letters... (1676); C. Bouton, Les Grammaires Francaises de Claude Mauger a l'Usage Anglais (Paris, 1972); Motley, 'Education of an English Gentleman', 251; K. Lambley, The Teaching and Cultivation of the French Language in England during Tudor and Stuart Times (Manchester, 1920).

4.Book lists: 49-486,[1697?]; 49-637,Apr 21 1697; 50-279, [1698?]; 51-455,[1701?].

5.38-11,munv/rv,Aug 31 1683; 35-85,nhob/rv,June 16 1681; CH 14/19-49 (July 9 1674), 68, 69; R. Grassby, The English Gentleman in Trade (Oxford, 1994), 177.

6.CH 15/6 'Faults in the Book of Mr Verney's of Descents of Baronets, Comments of Mr Le Neve', Sept. 24, 1694; CH 14/20-27, Notebooks, [c.1690-1715]; 55-337,wv/jv,June 17 1714. Although letters discuss the book, no title or copy has been found. I thank Mr Robert Yorke, Archivist of the College of Arms, London.

7.28-49,jv/rv,Sept 2 1675; M. Verney, Memoirs, iii. 358-60, 366-7; Bodl Eng Misc. MS c.2, fo. 3, B. Willis, Library Catalogue, 1710-20 cites a copy of Kersey's Algebra. 16-6,jv/munv,Apr 8 1659; J. Beckett, Coal and Tobacco (Cambridge, 1981), 16.

8.M.Verney, Memoirs, iii. 366-8.

9.16-13,jv/rv,July 6 1659; 16-16,jv/rv,Aug 10 1659. Levant merchant, George Boddington, born in 1646, also left his Latin school and learned accounts. GH MS 10,823/1, fos. 9. 19, 38, Boddington family personal papers; K. Thomas, 'Numeracy in Early Modern England', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 37 (1987), 111-112.

10.16-28,rbur/rv,Dec 13 1659; B. Henning, The House of Commons 1660-1690 (1983), ii. 760-4; J. Woodhead, The Rulers of London 1660-1689 (1965), 110; 16-31, Indenture, Dec 31 1659; 16-

30, 'Copy of bond of £1,000 sealed to Mr Roberts when Jack was bound apprentice', Dec 31 1659.

11.17-2,jv/rv, Feb 1 1660; 17-4,jv/rv, Mar 14 1660; Bodl MS Eng Letts E29, fo.24, Letter to Matthew Henry, May 7 1683; 21-8,rv/Monsieur Pappin, May 29 1667.

12.LCRO MS 7 fos. 15, 39, Assessments, All Hallows, London Wall, 1695; PRO PROB 11/545, fo. 57; K. Davies, The Royal Africa Company (1957), 386; J. Woodhead, The Rulers of London 1660-1689 (1965), 139. Appointed London Alderman by Royal Commission in 1687, he fined to receive a discharge. A. Beaven, The Aldermen of the City of London (1913), i. 77; ii. 111; GH MS 11593/1, fo. 153, Grocers' Company Register of Apprentices, July 1646; LCRO 92, fo. 293, Repertories of Aldermen, June 29 1687.

13.CH 4/5/21/25, Dec 31 1667; 21-5,jv/rv, June 10 1667; 20-2,rv/jv, Dec 19 1664; 22-3,jv/rv, Mar 25 1688; PRO SP 105/152, fo. 388, Court minutes; 33-114,rv/jv, Dec 4 1679.

14.'Mr. John Verney, Turkey Merchant was this day admitted into the freedom by redemption'. GH MS 15201/5, fo. 241, Vintners' Company Court Minutes, 1669-1682, Dec 21 1674. 'Livery fine of £31 13s.4d. received of Mr. John Verney for admission into the livery'. GH MS 15333/5-6, Vintners' Wardens Account Books, 1658-1712. In 1674, William Roberts gave £50 for building the hall. On June 29 1696, £25 was 'received of Sir John Verney for his fine ... of the younger wardens of the ... Company'. Yet Verney does not appear in GH MS 15212/1 A Book of Names of all the Persons admitted into the Freedom of the Worshipful Company of Vintners ... beginning in April 1658. Nor is he in GH MS 15208, Vintners' Company, Chronological Roll of Liverymen, 1683-1939.

15.PRO T70/100-101, General Court minutes, 1671-1720; PRO T70/76-88, Court of Assistants minutes, 1664-1713; PRO T70/107-111, Committee on Accounts, 1680-90; PRO T70/125, 128-30, Committee on Goods, 1680-82, 1692-1720. Stock ledgers and journals examined for references to Verney, Sir Gabriel Roberts, and others: T70/178-9; T70/185-191, 195, 197; T70/1613. PRO T70/78, 81-88 show that John attended the following number of Court of Assistants' meetings (with General Court meetings in parentheses): 1679, 74 (3); 1680, 79 (3); 1681 52 (3); 1686 53 (1); 1687 36 (2); 1688 49 (3); 1691 34 (5); 1692 42 (4); 1696 25 (2); 1697 22 (2). The total was 466 (28) meetings.

16.For example PRO SP 105/163, fo. 3.

17.53-193,jv/cl, Mar 17 1706.

18.Studies confirming religious centrality in this period include J. Champion, The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken 1660-1730 (Cambridge, 1992); T. Harris et. al., eds., The Politics of Religion in Restoration England (Oxford, 1990); M. Griffin, Jr., Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England, ed. L. Freedman (Leiden, 1992); I. Rivers, Reason, Grace, and Sentiment (Cambridge, 1991); J. Scott, Algernon Sydney and the Restoration Crisis 1677-83 (Cambridge, 1991); W. Spellman, The Latitudinarians and the Church of England 1660-1700 (Athens, Georgia, 1993); J. Spurr, The Restoration Church of England 1646-1689 (New Haven, 1991).

19.J. Spurr, 'Latitudinarianism and the Restoration Church', Historical Journal, 31 (1988), 62-82; 33-8,jv/rv,July 11 1679; 33-35,jv/rv,Aug 4 1679; 33-69,jv/rv,Sept 29 1679; 37-51,jv/rv,May 10 1683.

20.Verney is not included in a 1688 list of active merchants trading to Smyrna found in BL Trumbull Add. MS 95. I thank Sonia Anderson for this reference. In June 1685, Verney was the 54th subscriber for £100 in the Morea currants joint stock. In May 1687 he was still selling off proceeds of an earlier trade, and in November 1690 he told Ralph: 'I have goods which I would willingly sell before Christmas'. In 1691, he noted his £147 loss in two Russian ships taken by the French. As late as November 1692, John wrote of his £170 concern in Captain Humphreys ship that had been attacked on the high seas after it left Aleppo. 41-75, B.Saltonstall/jv Mar 24 1687; 44-49,jv/rv,Nov 26 1690; 45-17,jv/rv,Aug 3 1691; 46-190,jv/rv,Nov 9 1692, SP 110/154..

21.John invested £500 in 1690 (PRO E401/1986, fo. 236), £900 in 1691/2 (1988, fos. 182, 340), £500 in 1692/3 (1991, fo. 433), £300 in 1696, £600 in 1697/8 (2000, fo. 288), £1000 in 1698/9 (2002, fos. 536, 573), £1000 in 1700/1 (2006, fos. 298, 319, 327), £500 in 1701/2 (2008, fo. 413), and £2000 in 1702 (2009, fos. 94, 113, 120 and 2010, fo. 209). The 1696 amount does not appear in the PRO records but is found in 49-379,T.Cuddon/jv,Dec 16 1696.

22.52-215,rp1/jv,Apr 22 1703; 52-492,jn/jv,June 15 1704; CH 2/433a,b, Deed, June 29/30 1704; CH 1/228, Mortgage, July 1 1704

23.The £757 was from Royal Africa and East India Companies, Million Bank, lottery tickets, annuities and loans. 52-433,Account with Peter Lupart, July 1703-April 1705; John Broad, 'Gentry Finances' 198. CH 4/6/9, British Merlin, 1689-1711 records John's rent receipts c.1704-09. John never stopped investing in the city and continued to have interests in shipping.

24.51-548,T.Smith/jv,Sept 2 1700; HL EL 10751, fo.4, Account of the Buckinghamshire sessions, 1702; 52-231,lc/jv,June 14 1703; Bodl Carte MS 79, fo. 694, [n.d.]; CH 14/2, Letters Patent, Grant to John Verney, June 16 1703. John's title was not as prestigious as that of an English Viscount and was probably arranged by Lord Cheyne, who was the first to congratulate him.

25.BL Add. MS 33225, fo. 17; 53-631,ea/jv,Aug 3 1708; 54-53,llit/jv,Apr 17 1709; Bodl Ballard MS 21, fo. 123. I thank Stuart Handley and the Parliament trust for data.

26.55-117,ebv/jv,May 11 1713; 55-173,T.Prior/jv,Aug 11 1713; CH 4/5/64/8,cc/jv,May 17 1713; CH 4/5/64/11,cc/jv,May 24 1713; CH 4/5/64/22,cc/jv,June 25 1713.

27.22-1,jv/lc,received 20 Nov 1667; HL EL 10705,ebv/lc,Sept 21 1714; 55-132,jv/rv2,June 4 1713; 55-281,jv/rv2,Mar 9 1714; Sedgwick, ii. 129; HL EL 10705,ebv/lc,Sept 21 1714; 55-313, S.Harcourt.jv,June 3 1714; 55-311, wv/jv, May 27 1714; Bucks CRO D/X 1069/2/139.

28.55-635,db2/jv,Dec 24 1715; R. Sedgwick, House of Commons, ii. 495; Bucks CRO D/X 1069/2/150. I thank Eveline Cruickshanks for noting that John appeared on lists as a possible Jacobite.

29. Sedgwick, House of Commons, ii. 496; L. Namier and J. Brooke, eds., House of Commons, 1754-90 (1964). iii., 580-2; [G.E.C.] The Complete Peerage (1926), v. 295-6; BL Stowe MS 4; BL Egerton MS 2353, Settlement of Lands of Ralph, 2nd Earl Verney, 1767; Lipscomb, History and Antiquities (1831), i. 183-4.

“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”.