The prime requirement of a landed family was a marriage which would ensure a legitimate male heir. The last two male heads of the Warren family of Stockport and Poynton strove to secure these objectives, yet eventually Sir George Warren’s plans were to end in failure: he had no son. In addition to the dynastic problem, the life of the last of the Warrens reminds us of other dimensions to marriage and family obligations: romantic attraction, marital harmony and disharmony, wealth and social status, and the incidence of mortality. All these issues are to be found among the concerns of historians of the eighteenth-century landed family.

I

Sir George Warren was to be the last male representative of a very ancient line, which had held the manors of Stockport and Poynton in Cheshire, and the Lancashire manor of Woodplumpton, for just over 400 years at his birth.¹ The ancient patrimony had been extended by the marriage of his great-grandfather John Warren to Ann Cooper, heiress of the manor of Goosnargh in Lancashire. Even more recently, his grandfather Edward ‘Dinkley’ Warren in 1678 brought the manor of Salesbury and Dinkley and other neighbouring lands in Lancashire into the family, by his marriage with his first wife, the heiress Dorothy Talbot. The family also
owned the Lancashire manors of Over Darwen, Carnforth and Brockholds, together with extensive estates in Lancaster, Overton, Poulton, Heaton, Torrisholme, Quernmore, Warton, Pool, Higham, Chipping, Newsham, Gale, Barnsholme, Clayton-en-le-Dale, Livesey, Ribchester, Dutton and Billington. Mostly within the parishes of Lancaster and Blackburn, these manors and estates lay mainly in the valleys of Lune and Ribble; a number clustered around the borough of Lancaster. By the early eighteenth century, the Cheshire lands included neighbouring estates in Lostock, Offerton, Rainow and Bosden as well as the two manors of Stockport and Poynton.

Edward 'Dinkley' Warren had three sons, John, Edward, and Talbot, by his first wife; nevertheless it was in this next generation that the family problems began. The eldest, John, who succeeded his father in 1717, was a Roman Catholic, and politically active as a member of the Cheshire Jacobite Club centred on Lyme Hall; the Warren lands were, therefore, liable as papists' estates. Furthermore, none of the brothers had married, and so the family's continued existence became uncertain. When, in 1729, John died at the age of fifty, leaving his brothers, now respectively aged forty-nine and forty-three, still bachelors, the line must have appeared in danger of extinction. Not surprisingly, in the following year, 23 January 1730/1, Edward Warren married by special licence from the vicar-general's office. The match was a brilliant one, since his bride was the Lady Elizabeth Cholmondeley, daughter of George, third Earl of Cholmondeley. The first two children, however, were daughters, Harriet and Elizabeth. It was at this juncture, in 1733, that Talbot married his cousin Frances Davenport of Bramhall Hall, only to die without issue in 1734. The following year, George, the only son and heir, was born to Edward and Elizabeth Warren at Millgate Hall, Stockport, on 7 February 1735. Although part of his infancy was spent with his parents and sisters at their London home in Grosvenor Street, his early years, after his father's death, were more probably passed at his Stockport birthplace. The child was still a small boy when, in September 1737, his father died, only a month after drawing up his will. Under its terms, George was left to the care of the five
guardians his father had appointed: the chief were his mother and a neighbour, William Wright, esq., the wealthy and well-connected landowner of Mottram St Andrew and Stockport. In this document there were none of the political and religious perils pervading John Warren’s will of 1720, which had instructed his executors to ‘take all the inside of my pocket books and papers therein and burn the same without inspecting or suffering any other person to inspect the same’. Edward’s marriage to the daughter of the Whig Earl of Cholmondeley, himself connected by marriage to the Walpoles, ensured that the young George was brought up outside Jacobite circles. A danger which might have threatened, when in 1745 the Pretender’s army marched through Stockport, had been removed; the Warren lands were not at risk. Little, however, is clear about George’s upbringing. His guardians certainly intended to raise funds to maintain and educate him ‘suitable to his Birth and Quality’. Nevertheless no records survive of any schooling, of university, or of a grand tour. The relevant registers of the Stockport Grammar School, where he might have attended, have not survived; alternatively he may have been entrusted to a private tutor. Possibly his guardians’ financial problems decided them to sacrifice an expensive education to more material considerations. In 1737 they declared George Warren to be ‘destitute of all sort of proper provision and maintenance’. It seems that his bachelor uncle, John, had died in debt to the tune of £22,000 and upwards, the chief guardians being the principal creditors. In the few years left to him, his father had endeavoured to implement John Warren’s will, with its unusually weighty directive to sell off part of the family’s Lancashire estates, more especially the manor of Carnforth, in order to discharge mortgages on the Cheshire lands. Although Edward had also paid off other debts out of his own purse, his marriage had involved jointures not only to his wife but also to his step-mother, Margaret Spencer, in addition to the expense of partially rebuilding Millgate Hall. Moreover, as tenant for life, he was prevented from renewing on more favourable terms the leases for lives at small reserved rents that comprised a great part of the estate. To illustrate these difficulties, in 1732 Edward Warren had had a golden
opportunity of leasing land and water rights in the Parks, Stockport, to a company of London and local merchants anxious to erect there silk mills requiring the large fixed capital of £12,000. Edward had even become a partner with a fourth share in this enterprise. Then, after requesting more time, he had ignominiously found himself still unable to make any valid and effectual lease. Until they had this in their hands, the company understandably held on to his £3,000 and refused to pay the ground and water rent agreed. This issue was still outstanding when he died, having reduced the burden of debt, it is true, to £12,100, but now George’s sisters each had a portion of £10,000 due under his father’s will, and Lady Warren a jointure of £1,000 per annum. 8

The family had been brought to the brink of disaster, only averted by the adoption of a quite drastic remedy. Lady Warren and Mr Wright, the principal creditors, now lost no time in petitioning the House of Lords to bring in a private bill to invest them with the necessary powers to break the entail. They planned not only to execute the lease of land and premises to the proprietors of the silk mills, but also to sell, for the next term only, the right of presentation to Stockport parish church. The Warrens owned the perpetual advowson, valued at this time at upwards of £1,400. Finally, the guardians sought authority to lease land for building in the manor and town of Stockport ‘at the best rates that can reasonably be got’. The income thus obtained would augment existing rents which for some years past had not exceeded £1,900. These monies were to be devoted towards the annuity and jointures, and, lastly, ‘towards maintaining & educating the said George Warren suitable to his Birth and Quality’. A bill to this effect duly passed both Houses and received the royal assent on 14 June 1739. 9 These measures were apparently successful, for the guardians further extended Millgate Hall and about 1750, when George was fifteen, they rebuilt the family house at Poynton ‘on a grand scale’. Perhaps the proximity of the silk mills to Millgate Hall and the general increase of Stockport’s trade and population, now numbering some 3,000, prompted them. The fact remains that the old hall, dating from 1552, was demolished, and replaced by Poynton Lodge, described
later by Aikin as ‘an elegant piece of architecture of the Ionic order, decorated with beautiful pleasure grounds and a fine piece of water. The park is very extensive and well laid out’, and in fact, Sir George later employed John Metcalf to construct about five miles of road in it. ‘From one part there is a delightful prospect, taking in Stockport and Manchester, and stretching away to the remote parts of Lancashire.’ (Plate I). 10

On coming of age in 1756 George Warren found that the annual income from his estates had risen to £6,500 per annum. His guardians thus appear to have steered him through this critical period of his minority with very considerable prudence and success. Possessed of a new house and a substantial income, he could rank among the country’s major landowners. The financial obligations of the marriage contract remained, nevertheless, a burdensome factor. Just as his own father had had to pay out for his stepmother’s jointure in the 1730s, so George’s estate had to pay his mother £1,000 a year for her jointure for her life; his mother in fact outlived her husband for twenty-five years, to die in 1762. The estate was also encumbered with about £11,000 for the portions of his surviving sister and of his late deceased sister Harriet, who had died unmarried in 1754. Finally, the mortgage of £10,000 to William Wright remained outstanding. 11 Interest on these liabilities at 5% per annum would nevertheless leave young George with some £3,900 to meet his yearly expenses and make some capital payment on the family debts. In fact, his ratio of capital to debt appeared one of modest comfort compared with that of many eighteenth-century landowners. 12

II

George now needed a wife of his own to fulfill his obligation, as head of a landowning family, to provide a male heir. If his marriage settlement could also ease the burden of debt, all well and good, but the arrangements would equally need to accord with George Warren’s status as a leading member of the squirearchy. In December 1755, his appointment as an Ensign in the Third Regiment of Foot Guards marked a
minor entry into national affairs and London society, but in fact young George began to pay his addresses much nearer home to the ward of his neighbour Samuel Egerton of Tatton Park. The young lady of George Warren's choice was none other than Miss Jane Revell (or Revel), sole daughter and heiress of the late Thomas Revell (d. 1752), who had been agent-victualler at Gibraltar and Minorca and member of parliament for Dover. He had accumulated a vast fortune, partly from government contracts. The total extent of this exceedingly eligible young lady's inheritance, consisting partly in government and other securities amounting to £130,000, and partly in landed estates worth nearly £4,000 a year, was variously reported as £200,000 in the Gentleman's Magazine and £300,000 in the Manchester Mercury. Although her precise age at this time cannot be traced, Miss Revell was certainly still a minor. Egerton was also a guardian of Francis Egerton, third Duke of Bridgewater, and a 'treaty of marriage' between him and Jane Revell had in fact been reported in the Manchester Mercury as early as September 1752. Three years later, on the Duke's return from the grand tour, the marriage was definitely announced shortly to take place. Socially this would have been a notable mismatch, despite the wealthy victualler's London house in St James's and Surrey home at Fetcham Manor, and despite the pains taken to furnish his daughter with social accomplishments in French, drawing, and playing the harpsichord. It has been hinted that the young Duke 'showed reluctance to come to grips with the situation'. But, according to a newspaper report, it was Miss Revell herself who was responsible for breaking off the match, prompted by a preference for George Warren. The pair apparently decided to defy Samuel Egerton by taking matters into their own hands. They eloped to Scotland, where the consent of Jane's guardian was unnecessary, and were married in Edinburgh in the early May of 1758. How they succeeded in eluding the vigilance of Jane's guardians and trustees remains something of a mystery. Although Samuel Egerton supervised Jane's maintenance and education, evidence exists to suggest that trusteeship was shared not only with John Egerton, Bishop of Bangor, later Durham, but also by no less a person than George, Earl of Cholmondeley, George War-
ren’s grandfather. Could he have connived secretly at his young grandson’s coup? The truth will probably never be known.

The runaway match certainly seems to have been greeted with popular acclaim. Later in May, Jane was apostrophized as follows in the pages of the *Manchester Mercury*:

Hail! Happy Fair! Whose prudent choice could prove
That Reason’s dictates are obeyed in Love:
Whate’er hard censure on your Sin shall fall,
Nor Weak nor Vain let Malice dare you call,
Who’s shewn the World, true Merit you prefer
To Title’s gaudy Shew, the Noble’s Star.
‘Twas Honour’s Self, and not the Badge, pleased you,
And Virtue only could your Heart subdue.
A mind with every Christian grace imbued
Could find no charms but in the great & good . . .
Learn all, in sum, to be what Warren is,
If you, like him, propose the like success.13

Whatever substance there was in this eulogistic account of Warren’s character, his success was, indeed, prodigious. The proposals for a marriage settlement which, in March 1760, George Perrott, K.C., thought ‘might not be unreasonable’, appear to have been put forward by George Warren himself. The date on which Jane’s trustees eventually recognized the *fait accompli*, as drawn up in a later, more detailed and definitive document, is unknown. According to its terms, the mortgages and annuities on George Warren’s estate, together with his sisters’ portions, were to be discharged out of his wife’s fortune, and the bulk of the remainder was to be at his disposal for the rest of his life. His annual income would now be about £16,000. Meantime, ‘for the immediate, separate use and disposal of Mr. Warren’, a sum of £30,000 was set aside from the marriage settlement to be devoted to ‘buildings, repairs, household furniture, plate, jewels, etc’. Moreover, George Warren’s position as a landowner was now greatly strengthened by the accession of Jane’s estates in Surrey, in St Clements, Kensington and Middlesex, in East Anglia, and in Northumberland by the castle of Widdrington with its messuages, land and collieries and the manor of Newbiggin. The draft proposals, however, had not contained the proviso
now added that if Jane should die before twenty-one without a child born alive, her husband would forfeit interest in this real estate.\textsuperscript{14}

The newly married pair took up residence at Poynton Lodge and for a brief period all seemed to go well. First in importance, the child was born alive on 7 April 1759, a daughter named Elizabeth Harriet, presumably after her two aunts. Meanwhile, George Warren was taking more interest in local activities, serving under his cousin Viscount Malpas as captain in a company of the Cheshire militia. Before the end of 1758, moreover, he had become member of parliament for the major Lancashire borough of Lancaster, on the death of one of its members.\textsuperscript{15} And some time in 1759 he was writing as follows to the Duke of Newcastle:

Mr. Warren, Member for Lancaster, who has always been zealously attached to the King, and has in his own and his wife’s right the heiress of Mr. Revel near £16,000 p.a. is very desirous of having the honour of being a Knight of the Bath.

It is interesting to note that one of his two referees was a ‘Mr. Egerton’. Newcastle accepted the ‘immense estate’ as a valid qualification, but George II did not take so kindly to the application. According to Newcastle’s account to Hardwicke, he ‘flew into a passion, said the other day he was a Lieutenant in the Guards, and then said these words, ‘What do you think I dote? Pray don’t come to me with such proposals as these’. ‘How can I make him any proposition after this?’ lamented Newcastle. ‘What shall I do? Pray send me your thoughts upon it.’ The setback was a temporary one, since five weeks later the old king suddenly died. Warren was sufficiently astute, or well-advised, to attach himself to the Earl of Bute, former tutor and favourite of the heir to the throne, and, coincidentally, tenant of the late Mr Revell’s house in St James’s. In May 1761, on the occasion of the new king’s coronation, George Warren obtained the coveted prize of K.B.\textsuperscript{16} But the year was to end in tragedy. Jane, now Lady Warren but still an unspoilt girl of a ‘most endearing sweetness of temper’, died after a brief married life of three and a half years. She was buried on 26 December within the communion rails of Stockport parish church.\textsuperscript{17}
Sir George did not remain a widower for many years. In February 1764, he took as his second wife Frances, eldest of the ‘endless hoard of beauty daughters’ of Sir Cecil Bisshopp, 7th baronet of Parham, Sussex, and M.P. for Boroughbridge, Yorkshire. The wedding took place in Somerset House chapel and must have been a splendid affair, since for the preceding three years Frances had been maid of honour to the young Queen Charlotte, who gave her the customary wedding present of £1,000. A few weeks later, ‘Sir George and Lady Warren were most graciously received by their Majesties at St. James’s’. If his first wife had brought him a fortune, the second was to bring the possibility of further connections with court circles and with those small groups of influential ministers who wielded political power and patronage. 18

Five years after his second marriage, Sir George Warren decided to commission the rising young painter George Romney, his contemporary, to paint a full-length family group. The result, Romney’s first great public success, was exhibited at the Free Society of Arts in 1769, where it attracted admiring tributes to ‘its truth, nature and tenderness’, and had a great influence in making Romney’s work more widely known (Plate II). Sir George appears as a tall, graceful figure, his elegant hands carefully displayed; his long, strongly-featured if handsome face, with its rather complacent half-smile, is inclined towards his wife. He is sumptuously attired in a dark blue cloak with the star of his Order over a Van Dyck dress of old gold brocaded silk and blue sash. Lady Warren is seated, with one hand in her lap, the other across the shoulder of the young girl who stands at her side; her beautiful features are composed and faintly smiling, and her gaze appears to be following her husband’s pointing finger. Her dress is of light blue, with a gold sash. The young Elizabeth, wearing a cream-coloured satin dress with a blue sash, and bearing a marked resemblance to her father, seems somewhat withdrawn and pensive; with down-bent head she is absorbed in the tethered bull-finch perched on her right hand. The whole composition is dominated by Sir George’s somewhat studied pose, outflung arm and slightly theatrical gesture towards the noble prospect — the ruins of the Colosseum — he is
inviting his wife to admire: it suggests pride of possession, and future expectations. 19

Within the next two years, pride was to receive a severe jolt, when Sir George Warren's childless second marriage appeared to be breaking down irretrievably. In June 1771, following two alleged assaults made by Sir George in the preceding March and May respectively, Lady Warren brought a libel of cruelty consisting of over forty articles against her husband, before the Justice of the Consistory Court of London. Lady Warren's principal charge was that her husband 'took her by the Hands and forced her upon her Knees, and at that Instant some of the Family passing the Door of the Apartment, she screamed out and implored Assistance'. The Manchester press openly sided with Sir George, justly provoked, it claimed, since his wife had been 'guilty of very strange and unbecoming behaviour'. Then, 'by aggravating matters to an amazing Degree', she 'gave this Act of Justice the interpretation of a rude Assault and violent Attack upon her delicate and spotless Person'. If Lady Warren could prove her case, it was her object to obtain not only a separation a mensa et toro, but also separate maintenance. The Judge, Dr John Bettesworth, plainly declared his opinion at the opening hearing: the libel contained 'the most frivolous matter that ever came before a Court of Justice'. He rejected forthwith twenty-eight of the articles of the libel as 'totally irrelevant, frivolous and vexatious'. Nevertheless, the final hearing did not take place until a year later, on 26 June 1772, when it occupied eleven hours, from nine in the morning till eight at night. Counsel for the defence pleaded that, according to the principles of Christianity and to canon and civil law, a separation could only be justified if there were proof that a woman ran an evident risk of her life. Dr Bettesworth accepted this plea and agreed that 'no such Danger was to be dreaded'. Observing that he 'could not consult his particular feelings as a man', but must give sentence according to the laws, he dismissed the citation in favour of Sir George Warren. Notice was given that Lady Warren would appeal to the Court of Arches, where the case was re-opened the following day. Lady Warren's counsel, however, first delayed a hearing and finally announced, on 24 September, that she had
decided to withdraw the appeal. Yielding up to her husband’s bankers the jewels she had taken with her, Lady Warren, prompted doubtless by her want of independent means, wrote repeatedly to Sir George to express her desire for a reconciliation. Within a week she had returned to Poynton Lodge and had given her husband ‘personal assurances of her future Conduct... convinced of her mistake,... [and] satisfied that her Advisers have been her enemies’. ‘Her present situation of mind demands my pity’, thought Sir George, ‘but in exercising that towards her, I must not forget the critical Situation of my own Honor’. In this state of conflict, he decided to withdraw with his daughter for a few days and leave Lady Warren at Poynton, in command of the house and servants, but alone. That same evening, still smarting from ‘the Cruel and Unnatural Treatment’ though now delivered from ‘the combined Rage of malicious Witnesses and the inveterate Evidence of One who of all others should have been the least Officious’, he addressed a letter 600 words in length to Sir Cecil Bishopp, his father-in-law, whom he blamed bitterly for sowing ‘the Seed of Contention between me and your Daughter’. Defending his own past conduct vehemently, Sir George sought in vain the motives for Sir Cecil’s attitude. Could they have included a desire to oblige him to give up authority over his wife, ‘... and make Marriage a Convenience meerly?’ Sir George concluded that ‘from the Part you have acted, it is impossible for me ever to permit Lady Warren to visit you, or any of her Relations, or those who have recorded their Malice and Rancour in so particular and unprovoked a manner against me’. The depth of Sir George’s resentment was further evidenced by his apparent willingness to release the letter unabridged to the Manchester Mercury. The editor, claiming that it had fallen by accident into his hands, presented it to the public ‘out of justice to an Injured Character’. As the year 1772 closed, Sir George and Lady Warren apparently made several efforts to appear together in public, as if to demonstrate their reconciliation to the world at large. By their desire, Mr Whitley’s Company of Comedians presented The West Indian, a comedy, and Midas, a burlesque comic opera, at the theatre in Manchester two days before Christmas.
The reconciliation would appear, however, to have been short-lived. Five years later, on 10 July 1777, one of Miss Mary Heber’s gossiping correspondents regaled her friend as follows with the latest morsel of scandal: ‘It is thought that Sir George and Lady Warren will be parted as she has taken so much to Sir Thos. Clarges — they say not so much out of vice as determin’d to do something to get rid of Sir George’. Thomas Seddon’s *Characteristic Strictures*, published shortly after, described Sir George as having ‘the usurious complexion of the Jew and the dangerous disposition of Sir Benjamin Backbite’. (The School for Scandal, in which Sir Benjamin is a male slanderer, had opened on 8 May 1777). As years passed, they must have appeared an increasingly ill-matched pair. In the October of 1786, Lady Warren was strikingly described by the famous playwright’s wife, the gentle Eliza Sheridan. Formerly a celebrated professional singer, she still sang privately at the great Whig country houses. In a letter headed ‘Crewe’ and addressed to the duchess of Devonshire Eliza recounted a two-day visit to Capesthorne Hall with Sir George and his wife. ‘I wandered about all day alone’, she wrote. ‘It is not often I indulge myself in these solitary rambles . . . but I could not find words to answer all the fine speeches and pressing invitations of Lady Warren. My eyes were so dazzled by the glitter of her diamonds and trinkets, and the sound of her voice almost convinced me I was at a crowded assembly in town. I fled from the idea and from her . . .’ Yet only a few months earlier, the honest Sir Edward Blackett had described Sir George as ‘a strange, shabby fellow’, a painful contrast to the splendid figure portrayed by Romney sixteen years before. The underlying nature of their relationship is reflected in the 1792 codicil, whereby Lady Warren’s less than generous legacy under her husband’s will was further drastically reduced. Sir George Warren’s memorial, erected by his daughter, testified to his ‘tender affections’ as a parent and went on to record his virtues as a gentleman, friend and neighbour. It bore no reference to his conduct as a husband.21

Sir George’s hated father-in-law died in 1778, and with three of his wife’s sisters and their families he appears to have had no contact. But one sister-in-law became in 1782
the second wife of the future first earl of Liverpool. Warren’s correspondence with this relative, who became Secretary of the Board of Trade in 1786, contains numerous requests for patronage for Warren’s associates. At the same time, some genuinely friendly contact seems to have developed between these two families. The last evidence of Sir George’s feelings towards his wife and her family is to be found in his will, dated 1789. By the codicil of 13 July 1792, Sir George singled out for remembrance one branch only of his wife’s family. An annuity of £200 was left to Harry Bishopp of Storrington, Sussex, and Mary his wife, while one fortunate daughter, Frances, received a legacy of £3,000. Seven of her sisters and a brother received only £100 each. It was in the treatment of Lady Warren herself, however, that Sir George’s attitude proved less than generous. The original will of 1789 had bequeathed her the sum of £5,000 with ‘all my linnen of every kind to and for her own sole use and benefit’, an annuity of £500, and a life interest in the house in Albemarle Street, which after her death would revert to Sir George’s daughter. Under the codicil the monetary legacy was reduced to £1,200 and the annuity to £300. It is perhaps understandable that Lady Warren, co-executor with her step-daughter and Sir John Borlase Warren, renounced the probate and execution of both will and codicil. In her difficulties she turned, not for the first time, to her brother-in-law, Lord Liverpool, for counsel and guidance. The latter recommended a legal adviser ‘of great professional learning... & judgement, & of a fine temper, the fittest... to be employed in a delicate transaction of this nature’. Lord Liverpool commended Lady Warren for the ‘temper & prudence’ she showed ‘in every part of this business’ and for ‘the due praise’ she gave her step-daughter and husband, Lord and Lady Bulkeley, for accepting her lawyer’s advice. On 7 October 1801, only five weeks after the death of Sir George, Lord Liverpool was pleased to learn that everything had been settled to her satisfaction. Part of the agreement was that Lady Warren should be allowed to remain for the rest of her life in the beautiful and extensive Kingston House in London, which the Warrens had first rented in 1795. In consequence she besought Lord Liverpool for ‘a great favour, being very
anxious to have so desirable a [royal] gift as the gate into
the park [Hyde Park] continued for her life-time’. This she
‘esteemed as a grant of great indulgence’, and was now
uncertain whether to write to the King or make her request
through the Queen. Knowing that they had ‘more drains
from all quarters than even their munificent minds can
supply’, and reflecting that ‘many of my family owe their all
to the goodness of the King & Queen’, she hesitated to
make a personal approach, probably hoping that Lord
Liverpool would put in a word himself on her behalf. The
sequel is unknown. Altogether Lady Warren felt that if she
could not manage, it would be more her own fault than that
of her income, which she believed, it would seem inaccu-
rately, to be ‘£1,500 a year . . . what was left by the Will’.
‘The lesson of economy I shall with great cheerfulness
undertake to study, and doubt not, that with a little
progress, I may receive more comfort than from uncertain
riches.’ Sincerely resigned to economy Lady Warren might
have been, but these remarks did not apparently fall on deaf
ears: it was reported that ‘the liberality & opulence of her
family enabled her to maintain her usual splendour’. On 12
February 1804, at Brighton, she met a terrible death — so
much less merciful than that of her husband — when, alone
in her bedchamber, her muslin dress caught fire. Lord and
Lady Bulkeley attended her last hours, but Lady Warren
was buried at Fareham, among her own people.23

Alongside the strained relationship with his second wife,
Sir George must have found some comfort in his daughter
who, by all accounts, inherited her mother’s sweetness of
disposition. In 1777, at the age of eighteen, she married
Viscount Bulkeley, prominent in the local government of
north Wales, and well-connected in London and court
circles. Though childless, there is no indication that the
marriage was not a happy one.24

Although in the seventeenth and especially the
eighteenth century the Warren marriages were noted
financial successes, ultimately marriage failed them in its
main aim: the production of an heir. The breakdown of Sir
George’s second marriage, at whatever personal cost to him,
also publicly affronted his status in the community: it is to
the wider aspects of that status that we must now turn.
The expansion of the Warren family's landed estates, effected to a large extent by marriage, raised the family in the hierarchy of wealth that comprised landowning society: from his own and his first wife's estates Sir George's landed income was in excess of £10,000 a year gross, and he later bought additional estates such as the manor of Worth. Though not alone a guarantee of aristocratic promotion, his landed wealth provided the essential prerequisite. Moreover, the extensive estates around Lancaster associated him with its representation for all save four of his thirty-six years as M.P. This long parliamentary career, together with his second marriage, reinforced by that of his daughter, brought him into contact with the London élite. When Sir George Warren, K.B., became one of the premier knights of the land in 1761, at the coronation of George III, his new title signalled the family's increased status. It may have been a study of the heraldic symbols of his knighthood that planted in his mind the idea of obtaining a peerage. Even before the ceremony took place, Sir George was enquiring into the nature of the heraldic supporters he was entitled to assume on becoming a Knight of the Bath. This led to an examination of the armorial bearings due to his noble descent from the earls of Warren and Surrey as well as to the insignia of his new rank. On 9 April 1761, a Mr P. Crespigny reported as follows:

Mr. Drake says that he can't find anywhere the supporters of the Barons of Stockport, but that he finds in an old Book in the time of Hen.8, containing the arms of the nobility, those of Warren, Earl of Surrey, which Arms with the Crest are the same as Sir Geo. Warren bears, and has an undoubted right to, and that the said Earl Warren's supporters are therein depicted as drawn here... It is not thought that these supporters are now born by or belong to any other Family, and therefore it seems advisable for Sir Geo. Warren to set forth in his application to the Earl Marshall, his descent from Earl Warren, and to pray that these same supporters may be confirm'd and granted to him. I have, since I wrote this, been at the Herald's Office, and looked over their Books, and find what is above... Encouraged by these researches, Sir George was enabled to adopt a really superb achievement (Plate III). The shield
bore the Warenne coat of arms, traced back to 1300, displaying a diapered field, checky or and azure, tastefully repeated in the lining of the two supporters' extended wings, wyverns argent armed or (exactly as drawn by Mr Crespigny). The shield was also divided per pale and heavily charged with numerous devices: sinister with the arms of Frances Bisshop, dexter quartered with the arms of Stokeport, Eton, Stafford, Cooper and Talbot, in addition to Sir George's own canton at the chief point, a lion rampant argent on a field gules. Above the knightly helm, the crest took the form of a ducal coronet (not to be confused with the coronet worn by a duke), bearing a plume of five ostrich feathers argent; in the middle of them a griffon's claw or. The whole was encircled by the insignia of the Order of the Bath, the collar of crowns and groups of conjoined rose, thistle and shamrock linked by white knots, the badge bearing the legend *Tria Juncta in Uno*. The motto chosen by Sir George was characteristic of the man: *Tenebo*. He had adapted it from an ancestor's legendary response to Edward I's commissioners when challenged under the Statute of Quo Warranto as to his title to the earldom and lands. He was said to have drawn in open court an ancient, rusty sword and proclaimed, 'Gladio vici, gladio teneo, gladio tenebo'.'27

Hardly had Sir George been knighted than he began to press for a peerage. Indeed, Sir Lewis Namier, distinguished historian of eighteenth-century parliaments, has concluded that a peerage was his 'principal concern', and a determinant of his parliamentary behaviour, albeit in a climate where both the House of Lords and the king were opposed to new creations. At first Sir George pinned his hopes on Bute, but by 1764 he was 'the sure friend' of the aged and ailing Newcastle, who in 1766 held a minor post in the administration. On 2 June 1766, it was Newcastle who placed Sir George's name among 'those proposed to be made peers' and handed this list to the king the following day. A few weeks before, whether by a strange coincidence or by an inspired 'leak', this announcement had appeared in the *Manchester Mercury*: 'We hear that His Majesty was yesterday pleased to create Sir George Warren, K.B., Earl of Surrey.' Although this was never contradicted, the truth
was, in fact, far otherwise. Two days after receiving the list, the king wrote sharply to Rockingham, 'As to Peerages, I though I had yesterday as well as on many former occasions expressed an intention of not at least for the present increasing the Peerage, and remain entirely now of that opinion'. Indeed, apart from three dukedoms created on the earl of Chatham's recommendation, George III remained 'of that opinion' until the pressures of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars caused him to relax his rule. Sir George was not, it seems, aware of this invincible reluctance, though he did become well aware that he lacked friends at court. Some time in 1768, while voting regularly with the administration, he was writing gloomily to Bute, the former favourite, that since the latter's resignation he 'had no friend from whom to solicit the peerage'. Then, perhaps hopeful that Bute might not have lost all back-door influence with the king, he helpfully enquired 'whether Bute would wish him to bring anyone into parliament at the next election'.

Although these measures stubbornly refused to bear fruit, Sir George was not one to yield without a further struggle: he merely adopted different tactics. If the earldom could not be won by his deserts, it should be proved his by right. In the eighteenth century, few aristocrats were left who could claim a peerage by descent from the Middle Ages; the first essential step would be to prove the aspirant's pedigree.28 In 1769 the death of the rector of Stockport gave Sir George the opportunity he was looking for. He filled the vacancy by appointing a clergyman of decidedly antiquarian tastes and abilities, the Rev. John Watson, M.A., F.S.A., with the express purpose of enquiring 'whether there was any foundation for the tradition that [the Warren] family had a right to the peerage'. The wealthy living of St Mary's was, of course, to provide the means, the leisure, and the reward.

Watson proceeded to don the velvet cap he always wore at work in his study, and settled down to the prolonged researches which were to occupy him for the next thirteen years. Writer of good songs and collector of humorous stories, Watson was also a most painstaking, persevering and industrious antiquarian. Simultaneously engaged in completing his other great task, the History of Halifax,
published in 1775, the amount of time he could devote to his duties as pastor and magistrate must have been limited.

After seven years of toil, Watson felt in a position to issue a preliminary argument, dedicating to Sir George 'this account of a once noble and very distinguished family, from which it appears you are the next lawful male descendant'. He went on to affirm that 'the stain of bastardy, which several records in the Herald's Office... have fixed on the chief ancestor of your family, is effectually removed; and this, I apprehend, has hitherto been looked on as the great bar to your claim'. How far his 'observations' answered Sir George's purpose of proving his right to a peerage Watson could not say. He had, he felt, put them in 'the strongest and fairest light' he could; 'they are now before the public, and must stand or fall by their decision'. Six copies only were issued and circulated for corrections and additions by antiquarian literati.

Three years later, the indefatigable Watson brought out a second edition of twelve to fifteen copies with the same object. Abundant comments poured in from the most distinguished antiquarians, including the President and the Director of the Society of Antiquaries. On 30 May 1780, Watson took one copy in person to the Heralds' Office in order to consult Mr John Charles Brooke, Somerset Herald, his collaborator throughout. The remarks and additions thus received were faithfully incorporated and the whole rewritten. This third and final edition bears on its title page the date 1782. Nevertheless, the curious fact that in some copies most of the numerous plates bear the date '20 August 1785' would suggest that few if any perfect copies were distributed before that year. According to Nichols, Sir George Warren bore the entire cost of the great work he had commissioned, 250 copies of which were produced by the famous printer William Eyres of Warrington. The two sumptuous volumes bound in brown, gold-tooled leather, were produced regardless of expense. Superbly printed on excellent paper, the work is embellished with every conceivable ornament: armorial devices, decorated initials and vignettes. It is profusely illustrated with copper engravings by Basire, the well known engraver of Golden Square, London. These included a folding print taken by Sir
George's direction from R. E. Pine's painting of 1770 in his possession, illustrating alike the spirited stance of the ancestor from whom he had derived his motto and, by implication, his own right to the earldom. The *Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey* was Eyre's undoubted masterpiece, acclaimed as one of the most accurate specimens of typography ever produced, 'a monument that does him greater honour than one of marble or bronze'.

The carefully worded dedication to Sir George states that:

> from these Earls it is clearly proved that you are well descended. Your right to a peerage is now laid open, and appears to be so justly founded that you need not despair of success in a country where claims less clear than yours have been admitted.

This claim to success in Watson's main object is certainly less than bold; in fact, it is a strangely muted and tentative assertion. Watson seems to have rested his case on two main arguments. The first sought to remove the illegitimacy of the link between the ancient earls and the Poynton branch of the Warrens by establishing the latter's ancestor Sir Edward to be not a natural son of the last earl, but a legitimate son of a John Warren, son of another John Warren, descended in a direct line from Reginald, a second son of William the second earl. Second, Watson concluded that, his legitimacy established, the head of the Poynton Warrens was justly entitled to the rank and privileges of the earldom on the basis of entail to heirs male.

Unfortunately, the two John Warrens in Sir George's supposed line of descent could not be supported by any evidence as to their existence or that of their wives. Watson did not succeed in uncovering any vital piece of evidence to confirm a shaky pedigree copied indeed from Flower and Glover, but attributable to an inferior hand. Moreover, he had not disposed satisfactorily of a passage in the last earl's will (which he said was 'unfortunately lost'), leaving £20 to an Edward de Warren, listed among his numerous illegitimate children. 'He leaves the matter in very great doubt', commented a learned writer in 1805. If an 1819 verdict, 'elaborate but conjectural', seems unkind, it is but just. Even had Watson been able to prove the first part of his
case, his second position was completely untenable. If, as he stated, Watson had founded his patron’s claim on ‘the strict rules of the feudal system’, he must have recognized that the earldom had once passed to the issue of a female heiress, Isabel, daughter of the third earl. Again, after the death of the last earl his widow retained the title; on her death the earl’s sister, the countess of Arundel passed the title ‘earl of Surrey’ to her son. The substitution of reversion to a junior branch in the male line was therefore completely unacceptable.

No literary criticism appears to have been passed on Watson’s work on its final appearance. The apparently disconcerting absence of reaction may be partially explained by the fact that it was never regularly published, and did not attract the notice of any of the ordinary reviews. Not until some years after the death of Sir George Warren did distinguished genealogists begin publicly to express their views. In addition to those already quoted, Dr Ormerod in his History of Cheshire had to admit that, without identification of the two Johns, ‘the whole [hypothesis] falls to the ground’. Finally, in 1828, Dr Joseph Hunter gave the best and most reliable account, which established that the Poynton Warrens were indeed an illegitimate branch of the ancient house.  

Although King George III possessed a copy of the Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey in his library, there is no evidence that his views on a peerage for Sir George were affected in the slightest degree. Nor is there any evidence that a committee of the House of Lords ever sat to investigate the claim. Although the private distribution of the volumes discouraged public comment, the total absence of response in Sir George’s lifetime comes as a disconcerting anticlimax that, to some extent, remains inexplicable. The particular point in time at which Sir George began to ‘despair of success’ cannot be precisely identified. The Rev. John Watson did not live to see the Memoirs’ final circulation; he died in 1783. Writing Sir George’s obituary many years later, Mr Richard Gough of Enfield, Director of the Society of Antiquaries and one of the commentators on the earlier drafts of the Memoirs, suggested that, on the author’s death, the work ‘was laid aside’. He also attributed the
abandonment of the great objective to the growing ill-health of the patron. Although Sir George was to live for almost another twenty years, it is perhaps not without significance that only two years after Watson’s death Sir George was noticed in the House of Commons as ‘a strange, shabby fellow’.

Sir George’s deep and lasting disappointment was reflected in the complete reversal of his political sympathies. A persevering supporter of Lord North’s administration, he was still on 12 February 1779 classed as ‘a friend’ by Robinson, the Treasury Secretary and one of the king’s most trusted advisers. But in a ‘State of Representation’ Robinson drew up in August 1782, a probable date of the Memoirs’ production, he wrote this highly significant phrase about Viscount Bulkeley: ‘He goes with his father-in-law Sir George Warren, and was by him carried against the old Administration on his disappointment...’. Robinson did not date the change precisely, but the division lists show that Sir George began to vote with the Opposition as early as 3 March 1779. Sir Lewis Namier believed that disappointment over the peerage ‘probably played a part in the change’, but did not altogether support Robinson’s categorical statement, feeling it uncertain which of the two ‘carried’ the other into opposition. They certainly voted together in opposition for a few years, Bulkeley having obtained a seat for his father-in-law at Beaumaris. But they were of widely contrasting temperament. Before long, Bulkeley, rewarded with a peerage, was a staunch supporter of the Younger Pitt, and later, sympathy with the royal malady kept him at the King’s side. Sir George, on the contrary, again representing Lancaster, continued doggedly in opposition, opposing Pitt’s Regency Bill, despite his daughter being ‘much affected by his conduct’: a measure, perhaps, of the depth of his disappointment.

IV

Sir George Warren, after some years of failing health, died suddenly at the spa town of Tunbridge Wells on 31 August 1801. His body was brought home to lie in state in Poynton
Sir George Warren

chapel, which he had rebuilt and rededicated in 1789, not as of old to St Mary, but to St George. If ostentatious and conspicuous consumption marked the social status of landed society in life, so it did in death. ‘His remains were interred in the family vault’ at Stockport parish church, on 19 September, ‘with great funeral pomp’. It was a procession upwards of a mile long that set out from Poynton. At its head, following the town beadle and constables of Stockport, rode 140 tenants on horseback, two and two. Mutes on horseback and horsemen in mourning cloaks escortcd the arms of Lady Warren and her predecessor. Then followed the great banner of the Order of the Bath, Sir George Warren’s arms and the state ‘Lid’ of feathers with pendants. These insignia were borne before the hearse, drawn by six horses, each decorated with plumes, velvets, escutcheons, pendants, stars and crests. There were no more than three family mourners in the first coach: Lord Bulkeley, the chief, and Sir George’s distant cousins, Sir John Fleming Leycester of Tabley House and his brother, together with the Rev. Charles Prescot, rector of Stockport. Three of Sir George’s stewards occupied the second coach, and the upper family servants a third. The ten pall-bearers in their own coaches were all neighbouring landowners. The procession closed with a train of twenty-five carriages containing clergymen and gentlemen friends.

At Rowcroft Smithy the procession was met by the Grenadier Company of the Stockport Loyal Volunteers, who formed on each side and marched in step with the carriages through Stockport. As it came down Hillgate, past the now spreading houses of the industrial town, the street was lined by three battalion companies of the Volunteers; beyond them stretched ‘an immense concourse of spectators’. At the gates of the then decaying and ruinous church overlooking the market-place and Millgate Hall, the music changed to the dead march in Saul, while the procession proceeded to the porch over black cloth which had been laid on the ground. ‘The interior of the church was also draped with black, the cloth, according to directions left by Sir George himself, being afterwards divided amongst the aged poor of the town.’ According to the taste of the period, it was considered that, ‘except those of the royal family,
As long ago as 1720, John Warren of Poynton had named the Borlase Warren family at Stapleford, Nottinghamshire, as seventeenth and last in the line of succession to his estates. Prompted by Watson’s Memoirs, which repeated this quite fallacious connection, Sir George Warren revived the supposed relationship in his will of 1789. If his daughter predeceased him, Sir George intended Sir John Borlase Warren to have his entire inheritance. In fact, Sir George died first, and his ‘dutiful only daughter’ inherited ‘every part’ of his estates with the exception of named bequests. One of these, however, was to Sir John Borlase Warren, who was given all the papers relating to the Memoirs, and an estate in Wales the former property of Lady Bulkeley’s father-in-law which had been mortgaged to Sir George. There would never again be a Warren at Poynton because Sir John’s only surviving son had been killed in the war a few months before Sir George died. The best his daughter and son-in-law could do was to assume the name of Warren before Bulkeley. Lord and Lady Warren Bulkeley’s marriage had, however, been childless for over twenty years, so there was no male child who could take the Warren name. Instead, after her husband’s death in 1822, Lady Warren Bulkeley, ‘slightly influenced’ by the supposed kinship, devised all except her Lancashire estates to her friend Frances Maria, daughter of Sir John Borlase Warren, and wife of the fourth Lord Vernon. She also sought to perpetuate her father’s name, if only for a time, by directing that Frances Maria should assume the name and arms of Warren only. The fifth Lord Vernon likewise observed this condition, but it did not apply to his heirs. The Lancashire estates Lady Warren Bulkeley bequeathed to the son of Sir Peter Fleming Leycester, the nearest blood relation, but again with the proviso that on coming of age he should take the name of Warren.

It was Sir George’s daughter who dedicated a splendid monument to his memory on the north chancel wall of Stockport parish church (Plate IV). A marble relief on slate, it is a remarkable piece of work by the young London
Plate IV: Monument to Sir George Warren, Stockport parish church (Photograph by the late Mr G. Warren).
sculptor Richard Westmacott. The inscription contains a reference to his first wife, but none to his second. The florid eulogy, already quoted, that follows may be no more than typical of the period. But perhaps Lady Warren Bulkeley’s firm statement that her father was 'lineally descended from the noble and ancient Race of the Earls of Warren and Surrey' gives pause for more thoughtful reflection. Then there is the record of 'her sincere love and regard for the best and tenderest of parents', and the mute eloquence both of the mourning female figure, said to be her own likeness, and of the very theme she chose that the monument should portray. These last suggest that it was his only child who understood Sir George Warren best. For the tablet bears no proud achievement of arms. Trailing down from the urn over which Lady Warren Bulkeley leans is the collar and badge of the Order of the Bath, while half-draped around the plinth is the mantle with its star. Still more significantly, lying in disarray on the left are plumes at the base of which is a broken stump of carving, resembling — from ground level — a sword hilt, but from above a griffon’s claw. Here lies the once proud crest of the earls of Warren and Surrey, so long and ardently desired, now finally fallen from his grasp.33

NOTES


5 Cheshire R.O., DVE 86, Vernon Collection, Letter Box 12, M. Warren to Edward Warren, 4 Mar. 1736; St Mary’s Church Stock-
Sir George H'arren


*Manchester Mercury*, 2, 9 July 1771; 13 Oct. 1772; Lambeth Palace Library, Arches Acts, A 35, no. 19, ff. 222, 223, 226, 228; no. 20, f. 231; no. 21, f. 244; Cheshire R.O., DVE 2401, Bundle 48, settlement 3 Feb. 1764; cf. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 333; *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1801), LXXI, Part II, p. 861, incorrectly stating that a legal separation had been granted, on grounds of ‘incompatibility of temper and personal habits mutually repulsive’, but that later ‘they came together again… until death produced the final separation’.


35 Monument to Sir George Warren, Stockport parish church.
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