

The barony of Malpas in the twelfth century

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The barony of Malpas described in Domesday Book covered a large swathe of southern Cheshire and even after its later division into two halves (or moieties), each was sufficient to sustain a significant baronial family. It included a compact group of settlements extending northwards from Malpas to Tiverton and Tilstone Fearnall, westwards to Farndon on the Welsh border and eastwards to Cholmondeley and Spurstow, as well as encompassing isolated places in the rest of the county, including Christleton, Guilden Sutton and Cranage. Little is known but much has been speculated about the barony in the period between its original formation and its history in the thirteenth century. This period – roughly equivalent to the twelfth century – is the time at which the estate was split into two nominal moieties and during which the shape of many later estates began to be formed among the barons' descendants.

Understanding the descent of the barony is important for at least four reasons. First, the landowning families of Cheshire are little known compared to those of the rest of the country, partly because its special status under an autonomous earl meant that the county was mentioned relatively infrequently in records such as the pipe rolls and cartae baronum. Almost seven per cent of the known population of England lived in Cheshire at the time of Domesday Book,¹ but only 2.5 per cent of individuals identified from a survey of twelfth-century English documents have any connection with the county.² Even allowing for the wide uncertainties and omissions that these figures represent, they point

¹ H.C. Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 336.

² K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday descendants: A prosopography of persons occurring in English documents 1066-1166* (Woodbridge, 2002).

to the need for greater understanding of Cheshire's twelfth-century population.

Second, Malpas appears to have descended differently from other baronies in the county. Of the seven original Cheshire baronies, specific names and familial descents, firmly datable to the twelfth century, are known for six,³ with Malpas the only exception. Five of the other six include firm dates in the 1130s or earlier and the sixth includes at least one undated original charter that clearly belongs to the same period. They are known with some certainty to have passed continually from father to son or son-in-law, as are many English baronies of the period. In fact, apart from the odd example that reverted to the crown after the death of a baron, or those that were forfeited and re-granted to others, it has been assumed that just about every English barony of the period can be described in this way, almost to the point where such descent is part of the definition of feudal baronies.⁴ The Malpas barony has none of these proofs and the assumption that it descended in the same manner as the others is not based on the discernible facts. The evidence suggests a quite different, uncertain and untidy form of descent.

A third reason for the importance of the barony is its border with Wales (through Cuddington, Shocklach, Crewe and Farndon), which gave it a significance in border disputes that had national consequences when Ranulf II Earl of Chester (see Table 1 opposite) pursued his own aims through Welsh alliances in opposition to King Stephen.

The fourth reason why Malpas is interesting is that practically every family with origins in Cheshire has claimed descent from its early barons, including a number of titled houses, and many of these ancient claims rest on flimsy and contradictory evidence. The putative early barons appear in various guises in a large number of modern family trees published on the internet, purporting to provide an astonishing number of uncorroborated facts and dates. The details of the barons' families have even been used as crucial evidence in legal disputes. Thus John Luscombe

³ G. Ormerod, *The history of the county palatine and city of Chester* (revised edition, edited by Thomas Helsby, 3 vols, London, 1882), 2, p. 150.

⁴ I.J. Sanders, *English baronies: A study of their origin and descent* (Oxford, 1960).

secured a massive inheritance in 1822, relying partly on the validity of stories about the family relationships of the twelfth-century barons of Malpas.⁵

Table 1. Earls of Chester from Hugh Lupus to Ranulf Blundeville.⁶

Earl	Commonly used surname	Dates of tenure as earl	Date of birth	Relationship to predecessor
Hugh I	Lupus	c.1070-1101	unknown	-
Richard	-	1101-1120	c.1090	son
Ranulf I	Le Meschin	1120-1129	unknown	cousin
Ranulf II	Gernon	1129-1153	unknown	son
Hugh II	Kevelioke	1153-1181	1147	son
Ranulf III	Blundeville	1181-1232	1170	son

George Ormerod's great history of Cheshire laid out a plausible scheme for the descent and division of the barony, but much of his evidence was fragile, and on more detailed examination, the story he told cannot be true. This article examines the surviving genuine evidence, which varies greatly in detail and quality, in an attempt to reconstruct as much as possible of the twelfth-century history of the barony of Malpas.

Robert fitzHugh

Robert fitzHugh was baron of Malpas at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086. He held at least 43 townships in Cheshire and North Wales from Hugh I Earl of Chester,⁷ and these define the barony's boundaries. Fifteen of the earl's townships in other counties were held by men called Robert in 1086 and some of these references probably relate to Robert

⁵ *The English reports*, 106 (1932), pp. 1289-95.

⁶ *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (61 vols, Oxford, 2004).

⁷ A. Williams and G.H. Martin, eds, *Domesday Book: A complete translation* (London, 2003), pp. 721-23.

fitzHugh. For example, Buscot in Berkshire and Kegworth in Leicestershire both came to be associated with Malpas families.⁸

Very little else is known about fitzHugh. Many early historians suggested that he was the son of Hugh I Earl of Chester, but there is no evidence for this. 'Robert de Malpas' was one of those who helped the earl of Chester in attacking the Welsh⁹ and Robert fitzHugh was named as a witness to the foundation charter of Chester Abbey in 1093, which also listed his donations of property to the abbey. Although the surviving copies of this document are later forgeries, they record genuine grants and there is no reason to doubt that fitzHugh presented these lands to the church.¹⁰ Without giving details, Sir Peter Leycester claimed in the seventeenth century that fitzHugh was known as a witness to a number of ancient charters, but none appears to have survived.¹¹ There is no record of Robert fitzHugh's death.

No early records exist (either originals or later copies) purporting to name any offspring of Robert fitzHugh, legitimate or otherwise. However, Ormerod's account, considered definitive by most later sources, began by stating that 'It is agreed by all parties that Robert fitzHugh died without male issue, and by the best authorities that he had two daughters', namely Letitia and Mabella, citing 'MSS. Samson Erdeswick in Coll. Arm'. According to Ormerod, these women married into the Patric and Belward families, later owners of the two moieties of Malpas. Neither of the statements made by Ormerod was accurate, his scheme contradicts earlier evidence and the reference he gave was wrong.

Not everybody agreed that fitzHugh had no sons. Samuel Lee had doubted whether this could be true because he had found evidence for 'one Ralph, baron of Malpas'. Lee believed Ralph

⁸ I.H. Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue of Derbyshire charters* (London, 1906), pp. 67-68; W. Page and P.H. Ditchfield, eds, *The Victoria history of the county of Berkshire* (4 vols, London, 1906-27), 4, p. 512.

⁹ M. Chibnall, ed., *The ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis* (6 vols, Oxford, 1968-80), 2, p. 260; 4, pp. xxxiv-xxxviii.

¹⁰ J. Tait, ed., *The chartulary or register of the abbey of St Werburgh, Chester*, Chetham society, 79 (1920), 82 (1923), 79, p. xliii.

¹¹ P. Leycester, *Historical antiquities* (2 vols, London, 1673), 2, p. 160.

could have been a son or grandson of fitzHugh.¹² He was wrong; Ralph was the son of Einion ap David, whose descent is recorded elsewhere.¹³ Ormerod knew this, which may explain why he ignored Lee's observation. Ormerod's mistake was suggesting that the best authorities thought fitzHugh had two daughters. Sampson Erdeswick, whom Ormerod quoted as his source, believed unambiguously that fitzHugh had a single daughter,¹⁴ while most early writers believed that he had no children at all. William King wrote that Robert fitzHugh 'as it seemed, died without issue',¹⁵ explicitly following William Camden.¹⁶ Sir Peter Leycester's exhaustive study of Cheshire documents led him to the view that fitzHugh's line died out and was replaced in the barony by a 'distinct Stock and Linage'.¹⁷

Robert fitzHugh's putative daughter: Letitia de Malpas

Of the two putative baronial daughters mentioned by Ormerod, Letitia de Malpas is the only one who certainly existed, but the evidence for a relationship with Robert fitzHugh is extremely weak. Her name occurs in two charters, the earliest of which supposedly dates from the 1120s and confirms a former grant, in which Letitia de Malpas had given a house in the city to Chester Abbey. In the second charter, purporting to come from 1151 or 1152, Ranulf II Earl of Chester confirmed the same gift and also Letitia's grants to the abbey of Littleton and Bache. Both charters are, in a strict sense, forgeries, but there is no reason to doubt the validity of the grants they record, and the second was probably written before 1160.¹⁸ The omission of Letitia's gifts of Littleton and Bache from the first charter is suspicious, but would be explained if these grants were made after the document was drawn

¹² S. Lee, 'Chronicon Cestrense', p. 51, found in D. King, *A description historical and geographical of the countie palatine of Chester* (London, 1656).

¹³ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, f. 239v.

¹⁴ S. Erdeswick, *A survey of Staffordshire* (London, 1717), pp. 114, 246.

¹⁵ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 1, p. 150.

¹⁶ W. Camden, *Britain* (London, 1637), p. 612.

¹⁷ Leycester, *Historical antiquities*, 2, p. 161.

¹⁸ G. Barraclough, ed., *The charters of the Anglo-Norman earls of Chester, c.1071-1237*, Record society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 126 (1988), p. 10.

up. This would also explain the fact that the second version includes the name of an extra witness. If this interpretation is correct, the date of Letitia's later gifts must have been in the period roughly between 1130 and 1150. One of the witnesses was Robert Grefesac, who was active between about 1129 and about 1144.¹⁹

The suggestion that Letitia was Robert fitzHugh's daughter seems to be based on nothing more than the fact that she was called 'de Malpas' and came from a sufficiently important family to own lands independently of her husband. If she was active as a married woman in the 1130s, she could easily have been born well before 1100, and possibly belonged to the right generation to be fitzHugh's daughter. These grounds are hardly conclusive, however, especially since neither Bache nor Littleton is actually named in Domesday Book, and Bache certainly cannot be counted as part of fitzHugh's barony. Littleton became part of Christleton parish and may have been included in fitzHugh's original manor of Christleton. Moreover, in the abbey's foundation charter of 1093, substantial lands that were supposed to belong to Robert fitzHugh were actually in the hands of other people. Robert de Tremons owned the entire vill of Tilston Fearnall, while Billeheld the wife of Baldric was in possession of Peckforton.²⁰ The only other Cheshire barony that appears from the charter to have seen its ownership redistributed in this way was that of Robert of Rhuddlan, who was already dead. The most obvious explanation is that the foundation charter actually brings together grants that had been made over a period of years.²¹ Robert fitzHugh's own gifts could genuinely have been made in 1093, and if he died shortly afterwards without heirs, Billeheld and Tremons could have been among those who benefited.

This interpretation is consistent with Welsh documents that predate most of the known pedigrees of Malpas barons, which state that Gruffydd ab Owain was 'Lord of Maelor and Malpas'.²² Although impossible to date accurately, Gruffydd must have held Malpas around the turn of the twelfth century (his first cousin

¹⁹ Barraclough, *Charters*, pp. 27, 50, 67, 70, 72, 79, 83; J. Hunter, ed., *Magnum rotulum scaccarii 31 Henry 1* (London, 1833).

²⁰ Barraclough, *Charters*, pp. 5-6.

²¹ Tait, *The chartulary or register*, 79, p. 20.

²² National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS. 139, f. 191v.

lived from the 1050s to the 1130s). The phrase 'lord of Malpas' presumably means that he held the vill and castle of Malpas rather than necessarily the whole barony. Other sources suggest that the family was given Malpas as compensation for the loss of confiscated Welsh territory.²³ Perhaps Gruffydd acquired Malpas as one of the Welshmen on whom Henry I lavished gifts in 1102 as bribes for support against the earl of Shrewsbury.²⁴ Richard Earl of Chester was a child in the king's household at the time, so Henry would certainly have been in a position to distribute his baronial lands in this way.

Thus, it is far from certain that Letitia de Malpas was a direct heir of Robert fitzHugh. Indeed, she certainly did not inherit his manors of Peckforton or Tilston Fearnall. However she acquired Bache, she cannot have inherited the entire manor because the mill there had already been given to the abbey by Earl Richard.²⁵

Furthermore, early writers knew of no evidence for a connection between fitzHugh and Letitia. William Camden, who used a vast catalogue of manuscripts (some no longer in existence) in the sixteenth century, thought that fitzHugh died childless. The link seems to have first been made by Sampson Erdeswick (who died in 1603), who described 'Letitia...Daughter and Heir of Robertus Filius Hugonis'.²⁶ In the mid seventeenth century, Randle Holmes guessed that Letitia was probably related to the barons of Malpas, without committing himself to a specific relationship,²⁷ although he later noted Erdewsick's suggestion²⁸ and assumed it to be true.²⁹ By the later seventeenth century, the genealogical records of some of Cheshire's great families purported to show their descents from Robert fitzHugh, through Letitia.³⁰

²³ Gonville & Caius College Cambridge, MS. 533/297, f. 136r.

²⁴ B. Thorpe, ed., *Florentii wigorniensis monachi chronicon ex chronicis* (2 vols, London, 1848-49), 2, p. 50.

²⁵ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 8.

²⁶ Erdeswick, *Survey of Staffordshire*, p. 114.

²⁷ British Library, Harleian MS. 2146, f. 138r.

²⁸ British Library, Harleian MS. 1988, ff. 183r., 185v.

²⁹ British Library, Harleian MS. 2119, f. 59r.

³⁰ *Collins's peerage of England* (9 vols, London, 1812), 4, p. 17.

Nothing else is known about Letitia de Malpas, except that in both of the charters that name her, her actions were witnessed and allowed by her husband Richard and ‘fratre suo’ Richard Maillard. That could mean ‘her brother’ or ‘his brother’ (that is, her husband’s brother), and historians have differed in their view of which is more likely,³¹ but it seems rather more likely that Maillard was Letitia’s brother than her brother-in-law; this is partly because it is not obvious that her brother-in-law’s permission would have been needed for the grants if her husband had given his and partly because it would be unusual for her husband to have a brother with the same name as himself. If Maillard had been Letitia’s brother, and if they really were children of Robert fitzHugh, Maillard would surely have been heir to the barony. In fact, he appears to have had no claim on it, presumably because neither he nor Letitia was in fact fitzHugh’s offspring. There are various other early references to people called Maillard in the earl of Chester’s lands in the East Midlands.³² Establishing the identity of Letitia de Malpas’s husband would be a major step forward in clarifying the early descents of the barony, but nothing is known except that his name was Richard. Ormerod supposed him to have been Richard Patric, ancestor of the Patrics who later owned half of the barony of Malpas. There is no evidence to support this claim, which directly contradicts earlier records stating that his name was Richard Belward (which also have no obvious support). There are no relevant early references to anyone called Richard Patric and the sixteenth-century herald’s visitations proposed quite different details of how the Patrics came to obtain an interest in Malpas.

Moreover, Ormerod’s views were not shared by his contemporaries. Hugh Cholmondeley, a member of the ancient Malpas family, was specifically thanked in Ormerod’s preface for supplying ‘numerous original evidences relating to the Barony of Malpas’.³³ Yet Cholmondeley wrote that ‘I cannot satisfy myself

³¹ W. Farrer, *Honors and knights’ fees* (3 vols, London, 1923-25), 2, p. 45; Keats-Rohan, *Domesday descendents*, 2, p. 1018.

³² Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue*, pp. 67-68, 70; J. Nichols, *The history and antiquities of the county of Leicester* (4 vols, London, 1795-1815), 1, part 3, p. 849; Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office, 26D53/76.

³³ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 1, p. xliii.

that the Patricks ever had any Thing to do with the Barony of Malpas till the Marriage of William Patriche with Beatrice eldest Daughter of David the Bastard', which happened over a century after Letitia de Malpas had been active.³⁴ Cholmondeley was wrong – the Patrics certainly owned half the barony long before this marriage – but his words prove that Ormerod was not relying on some crucial documentation that he failed to cite.

All that can be said with confidence about Letitia de Malpas is that she took her name from the town in Cheshire that was the centre of the barony and that she owned lands in the area, some of which almost certainly were not part of the barony. By about 1100, someone else – Gruffydd ab Owain – held Malpas itself, while others had owned other parts of the barony since before that date. In the 1130s, Letitia's husband was called Richard and her brother's name of Maillard suggests an association with an East Midlands family. While Letitia de Malpas could have been Robert fitzHugh's daughter, she could equally well have been his widow or widowed daughter-in-law, who had remarried. If fitzHugh had died childless, she could have been the (remarried) widow of someone else who had been granted lands of the barony, or possibly even a member of Gruffydd ab Owain's family.

Robert fitzHugh's putative daughter: Mabella de Malpas

Ormerod's explanation for the division of Malpas was that Robert fitzHugh had a second daughter, Mabella, and he cited as his source Sampson Erdewsick's manuscripts in the College of Arms.³⁵ The only manuscript Ormerod could have intended to cite as being by Erdeswick and housed in the College of Arms was the text of some charters copied out by Erdeswick³⁶ which Ormerod named as one of his sources.³⁷ However, the manuscript contains no information that could possibly assist in understanding Robert fitzHugh or his descendents. Among Erdeswick's other manuscripts is one that mentions 'Mabella primogenita & Altera Hered Robti filz Hugonis Baronis de Malo pass',³⁸ and it is

³⁴ British Library, Additional MS. 9414, no. 55.

³⁵ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 592.

³⁶ College of Arms, Vincent MS. 120.

³⁷ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 1, p. xl.

³⁸ British Library, Harleian MS. 338, f. 6r.

presumably from this that Ormerod obtained his information (although it is not included among his list of sources). However, Erdeswick clearly made a rare error, which his published work amended by stating explicitly that Letitia was fitzHugh's 'only Daughter'³⁹ and that fitzHugh left 'but one daughter'.⁴⁰

Erdeswick apparently misunderstood a deed, which he copied into the same manuscript and which mentions 'Roberto filio Williemo et Mabilae sponsae suae'.⁴¹ This William was supposedly the man called William Belward, who was baron of one of the Malpas moieties.⁴² Taken out of context, the words 'Williemo et Mabilae sponsae suae' could be interpreted as meaning that William had a wife called Mabel. But Mabel was the wife of Robert, not of his father William (that is, it is best read as 'Robert fitzWilliam and Mabel his wife').⁴³ In any case, for Ormerod's scheme to have been true, Mabella would have been Robert's grandmother, not his mother.

No other writer before the time of Ormerod had ever mentioned Mabella, either as a daughter of Robert fitzHugh or in any other connection with Malpas, and there are no occurrences in charters or any other documents (originals or copies) that could possibly refer to her. Thus, there is no reliable evidence of any kind for the existence of Mabella. Ormerod's quoted source is irrelevant and the only possible source he could have meant was a mistake by Sampson Erdeswick, which Erdeswick himself corrected. There can be no doubt whatsoever that Ormerod's genealogy of the twelfth-century descents of Malpas was badly flawed. Indeed, the evidence demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that Mabella de Malpas never existed.

The division of the barony

Although Ormerod's account of Malpas cannot be correct, he may well have been right to assume that marriages to female heirs formed the most likely explanation for how the two halves of the barony ended up in the hands of apparently unrelated families.

³⁹ Erdeswick, *A survey of Staffordshire*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁴¹ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 783.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2, p. 598.

⁴³ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, f. 81r.

One of these families was that of William Patric and the other that of a man whom history has remembered as William Belward. As this second family had no fixed surname, it is simplest to refer to its members as the Belwards.

The Patrics

The Patric family undoubtedly acquired half of the barony of Malpas before 1200. Early references to the Patrics include William and Robert,⁴⁴ but the name Richard Patric, used by Ormerod, does not appear in any early documents and no previous historians had mentioned him. The earliest evidence of the Patrics actually owning part of the barony of Malpas comes from a deed reproduced in John Nichols's *History of Leicestershire*.⁴⁵ In this, Robert Patric, lord of Kegworth in Leicestershire, mentioned that he held one half of 'Maupas'. The deed is undated, but Nichols placed it after his observations about the family in the reign of Henry II and before 1216. This would date it to around the turn of the thirteenth century, consistent with Robert Patric's appearance as a witness to Cheshire deeds in about 1200⁴⁶ and 1210.⁴⁷ The document has been lost, although Nichols must have seen the original because he copied the seal from it.

One explanation for the Patrics' acquisition of an interest in Malpas, preserved in the 1613 visitation of Cheshire, is that Robert Patric married a daughter of a twelfth-century baron of Malpas.⁴⁸ This version cannot be wholly accurate, partly because it records that his heirs were a son and then grandson both called Robert Patric, when original evidences show that his heir (a boy in about 1215 and an adult in about 1230) was a son called William.⁴⁹ A different, perhaps older, version of the story, preserved in the

⁴⁴ J.H. Round, ed., *Calendar of documents preserved in France illustrative of the history of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1899), pp. 434, 463; Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 162.

⁴⁵ Nichols, *History and antiquities*, 1, part 3, p. 849.

⁴⁶ W. Beamont, ed., *Arley charters: A calendar of ancient family charters preserved at Arley Hall* (London, 1866), p. 40.

⁴⁷ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 357.

⁴⁸ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, f. 239v.

⁴⁹ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 357; Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH C/250.

1580 visitation, is that the marriage took place a generation or two earlier and that it was a man called William Patric who married into the Malpas inheritance.⁵⁰ This version, also reported by Nichols, has the benefit of being consistent with contemporary evidence. William Patric appears together with a son William Patric junior in a deed that dates from the 1170s.⁵¹ ‘William Patrich’ died in the 1180s,⁵² and his son William then held half the barony.⁵³ The second William must have died by 1199, when his widow Emma was involved in suing Robert Patric, perhaps her son or stepson.⁵⁴

The further descent of the Patrics’ half of the barony of Malpas is known in full and the details were given accurately by Ormerod. It eventually passed to Isabella Patric and she was known as baroness of Malpas in 1281, having also inherited a further quarter of the barony from her mother (who was a Belward).⁵⁵ Assuming that the Patric interest in Malpas derived from a marriage between the early William Patric and a Malpas heiress, there remains a question about his wife’s identity. The 1580 and 1613 visitations of Cheshire agree that a member of the Patric family married Beatrix, the daughter of Ralph ab Einion, who was for some reason styled baron of Malpas.⁵⁶ Nichols clearly had access to different evidence about the marriage, since his version contains discrepancies from the other records. For example, he said that when the Patrics acquired their moiety of Malpas, the other share was held by Gilbert the Clerk, whereas the visitation records say it was held by David the Clerk⁵⁷ (which cannot be true because David belonged to a later generation). Nichols certainly had the original deed from about 1200 and it seems probable that he was working from some unknown piece of supporting evidence.

⁵⁰ British Library, Harleian MS. 2119, f. 48v.

⁵¹ G. Barraclough, ed., *Facsimilies of early Cheshire charters*, Record society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 107 (1957), p. 6.

⁵² R.C. Christie, ed., *Annales Cestriensis*, Record society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 14 (1887), p. 32.

⁵³ Gonville & Caius College Cambridge, MS. 696/282, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Farrer, *Honors and knights’ fees*, 2, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁵ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 598.

⁵⁶ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, f. 239v.; Harleian MS. 2119, f. 48v.

⁵⁷ Nichols, *History and antiquities*, 1, part 3, p. 849.

The Belwards

The members of the family that held the other half of the barony of Malpas are generally known as the Belwards. The earliest evidence for this name comes from the late sixteenth century, when William Camden reported seeing an 'ancient' roll belonging to the Brereton family, which referred to 'William Bellward lord of the moietie of Malpasse'.⁵⁸ This roll is important, because it predated any of the other pedigrees relating to Malpas; it has subsequently been lost, but small sections of it were copied by John Booth in the seventeenth century, showing it to have been in medieval French, consistent with Camden's claim that it was genuinely old when he saw it. A few tantalising details were copied from the roll in 1578⁵⁹ and these agree with what Camden wrote, and also call William Belward the 'stipes' of the family, Latin for the trunk from which the rest of the family tree branches out.

William Belward is known from a handful of original evidences and early copies, although none of these uses the name Belward (with the exception of someone called Beluard appearing in Domesday Book as a tenant in Gloucestershire, the name is remarkably absent from early documents). In manuscripts dating from around Camden's time, he was often called 'Baron of Malpas' and the 'pater originalis', or founding father, of an important family.⁶⁰

In the later nineteenth century, an unlikely claim was made that the name Belward was a corruption of Belvoir, and that William Belward was a Norman baron from Lincolnshire.⁶¹ In fact, the descent of the Belvoirs is known and has nothing to do with William Belward.⁶²

⁵⁸ W. Camden, *Remaines of a greater worke, concerning Britaine* (London, 1605), p. 123.

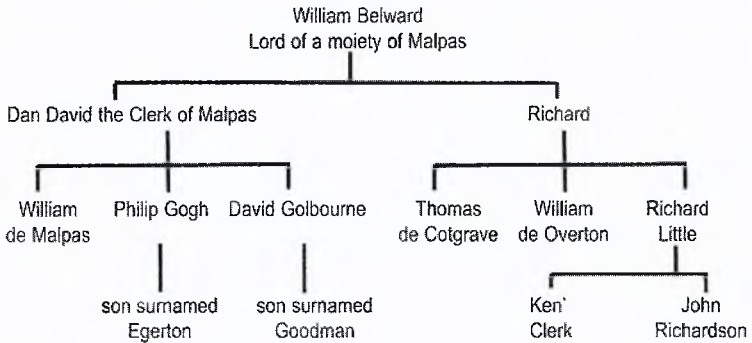
⁵⁹ British Library, Harleian MS. 2188, f. 29v.

⁶⁰ British Library, Additional MS. 39,925, f. 159v.

⁶¹ *The Norman people and their existing descendants in the British dominions and the USA* (London, 1874), p. 197.

⁶² W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (6 vols, London, 1846), 3, p. 228; K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, 'Belvoir: the heirs of Robert and Berengat de Tosny', *Prosopon newsletter*, 9 (1998), pp. 1-4; J.A. Green, 'The descent of Belvoir', *Prosopon newsletter*, 10 (1999), pp. 1-4.

Figure 1. William Belward's family as recorded on a roll considered 'ancient' in the late sixteenth century.



Camden recorded that Belward had two sons named David de Malpas and Richard. The elder was called 'Dan' David, an honorific title meaning 'Master' or 'Sir'. The use of this word offers a clue to the date of the roll; the *Oxford English dictionary* has no record of the title from before 1300 and relatively few after 1400. Camden said that David was surnamed Clerk, but there is no contemporary evidence that he ever served as the earl's clerk. However, the name is useful because it distinguishes David from his grandson David 'the Bastard' of Malpas. As well as his sons Richard and David, William Belward is generally supposed to have had a son called Robert, ancestor of the Cholmondeley family.⁶³

William Belward's grandsons were recorded on Camden's ancient roll as William de Malpas, Philip Gogh, David Golbourne, Thomas de Cotgrave, William de Overton and Richard Little. The next generation included the surnames Kenclerk, Richardson, Egerton and Goodman. Many of these people are known from original medieval Cheshire records and there is no reason to doubt that they really were closely related to one another.

George Ormerod's proposed scheme to explain how Belward came to hold half of Malpas suggested that his father married one of Robert fitzHugh's putative daughters (Mabella), and Erdeswick had given a similar scheme, although he believed that, as fitzHugh's only daughter, it must have been Letitia de Malpas who was William Belward's mother. The 1613 visitation of

⁶³ College of Arms, Vincent MS. 120, p. 289.

Cheshire, however, recorded that William Belward gained his rights in Malpas when he married Beatrix, the daughter of Einion ap David, who had himself been baron of Malpas.⁶⁴ But the 1580 visitation, while agreeing that her name was Beatrix, reported that William Belward's wife was a daughter of Hugh II Earl of Chester.⁶⁵ This version suggests that Einion ap David's granddaughter married William Belward's son. The hazy details of these stories are contradicted by the assertion included in many pedigrees that William Belward's wife was called Tanglust (sometimes spelled Tanghurst or Tanglusk),⁶⁶ although these agree that she was Hugh II Earl of Chester's daughter. The variant spellings are copying errors for Tanglwst, a corruption of the Welsh name Tangwystl.⁶⁷ At the time the visitation pedigrees were being drawn up, there were clearly doubts about the details. A contemporary manuscript contradicted the story of Tanglwst because 'W[illia]m le Belward married Beatrix da & heire to Enion ap d[avi]d baron of Malpas...and not this Tanghurst wch I never hard of befor'.⁶⁸

Indeed, the evidence for Tanglwst is very questionable. She cannot have been mentioned in Sir William Brereton's ancient roll of evidence or she would have been included in the 1578 pedigree drawn from it, and it is extremely suspicious that these ancient papers did not mention the supposed fact that Belward married a woman as illustrious as the earl of Chester's daughter. We know Tanglwst was also omitted from the records at the College of Arms because, sometime around 1600, Brereton had her name inserted, on the basis of evidence about an ancient court case involving one Thomas Whitgreve.⁶⁹

No early pedigrees or records provide any evidence about Tanglwst, but there is some reason to suppose that her story was based on a misinterpretation of genuinely ancient documents. In about 1200, Pope Innocent III mistakenly believed that the Welsh

⁶⁴ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, ff. 125r., 216v.

⁶⁵ British Library, Harleian MS. 2119, f. 48v.

⁶⁶ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 593.

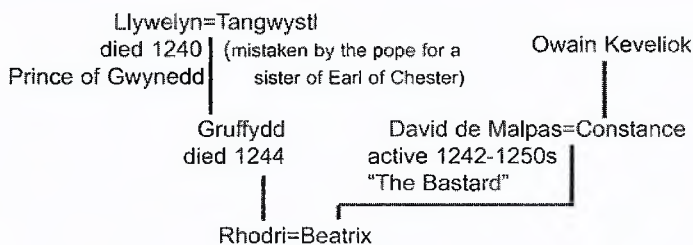
⁶⁷ S. Baring-Gould, *Lives of the British saints* (8 vols, Felinfach, 2000), 4, p. 208; The National Archives, C1/540/70.

⁶⁸ British Library, Harleian MS. 2011, f. 29r.

⁶⁹ British Library, Harleian MS. 2039, f. 151r.

prince Llywelyn had previously been married to a sister of Ranulf II Earl of Chester.⁷⁰ The only woman he could have meant – the mother of Llywelyn’s children, sometimes called his wife – was called Tangwystl.⁷¹ The coincidence of an unusual name with the suggestion that she was a sister of Earl Ranulf strongly point to this being the woman whom Whitgreve believed had married his ancestor. In fact, she was not the earl’s sister⁷² and her association with the Belwards was probably caused by confusion about a later marriage; the genuine Tangwystl’s grandson really did marry one of Belward’s descendents and heirs in the barony.

Figure 2. Relationships showing how David ‘the Bastard’ of Malpas was genuinely related to the Welsh prince Owain Kevelioek and to Tangwystl, who was mistaken for a sister of Ranulf II Earl of Chester. These links may explain how his grandfather, David ‘the Clerk’ of Malpas, came to be associated by historians with Tangwystl and with Hugh II Earl of Chester, who is also remembered by the surname Kevelioek.



Thus, the story about Tanglwst appears to have been based on a series of later misunderstandings and in view of the fact that no early documents even allude to her, it is safest to assume that she was not the mother of Belward’s children.

Dating William Belward and his sons and grandsons

Dating the Belwards has proved difficult and the apparently contradictory evidence led the Cheshire historian John Brownbill to argue that the men identified as William Belward’s grandsons

⁷⁰ *Patrologia cursus completus* (221 vols, Paris, 1844-64), 215, column 335.

⁷¹ J.E. Lloyd, *A history of Wales* (New York, 2004), p. 222.

⁷² R. Vaughan, *British antiquities revived* (London, 1662).

must actually have belonged to a much later generation.⁷³ Specifically, he said that two or more generations must separate Belward's son Richard from his putative sons. In fact, Brownbill had been misled by the incorrect assumption that he could date Belward as the grandson of Robert fitzHugh. He knew that William Belward's supposed grandsons lived in the second half of the thirteenth century. For example, Richard Little is known from deeds of about 1250⁷⁴ and 1288⁷⁵ and his widow occurred in 1304.⁷⁶ Little's brother Thomas de Cotgrave is known from 1259⁷⁷ and the 1260s,⁷⁸ and his son was an adult by 1288.⁷⁹ Brownbill rightly observed that these dates were not consistent with the idea that William Belward was the grandson of Robert fitzHugh, or with the assertion in the 1580 visitation of Cheshire that Belward was active in about 1140.⁸⁰ He assumed that more generations separated Belward from Little, Cotgrave and the others. However, although the details of Belward's own dates have been repeated in many published accounts,⁸¹ nobody ever offered any evidence to support them or any reference to old or original documents, and they do not stand up to scrutiny. It is Belward himself whose dates have been wrongly recorded and this is clear from dating his sons Richard and David.

Richard fitzWilliam

Three definitive references survive (as originals and copies) to Richard son of William Belward acting as a principal party in legal deeds; in these, he is always known as 'Richard son of William,' rendered here as Richard fitzWilliam. In the first,⁸² Richard fitzWilliam gave lands in Overton to one of his sons. As well as his three nephews, there were eight other witnesses, including Ithell ap

⁷³ *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, 4 (1902), pp. 39-40.

⁷⁴ C.G.O. Bridgeman, *A genealogical account of the family of Aldersey of Aldersey and Spurstow* (London, 1899), p. 377.

⁷⁵ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH C/846.

⁷⁶ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 643.

⁷⁷ The National Archives, CHES29/1.

⁷⁸ British Library, Harleian MS. 2022, f. 34r.

⁷⁹ The National Archives, CHES29/2.

⁸⁰ British Library, Harleian MS. 2119, f. 48v.

⁸¹ Such as *Collins's peerage*, 3, p. 170.

⁸² British Library, Harleian MS. 2119, f. 50v.

Tudor, Richard the Clerk, Richard fitzRobert and Kenright fitzAlexander, who are otherwise known from deeds dated between 1200 and 1220.⁸³ A second deed records that Richard fitzWilliam received lands in Hampton in exchange for property in Duckington.⁸⁴ This was witnessed by two of the same men as the first deed, as well as Orme fitzWilliam, who also witnessed a deed in 1230,⁸⁵ and David fitzWyon, who is known from the 1240s⁸⁶ and lived into the 1280s.⁸⁷ In a third deed, Richard granted property in Hampton to his daughter Morville on her marriage to William Tailard,⁸⁸ who is also known from 1244.⁸⁹

There are a number of other apparent occurrences of Richard fitzWilliam's name, starting in 1206. In one, he appears in a deed from April of that year relating to unspecified lands in Cheshire.⁹⁰ Another says that Philip de Orreby was justiciar of Chester and that William Vernon was sheriff of Lancaster;⁹¹ their tenures only overlapped for a short time in about 1206.⁹² This deed also names four of the same witnesses as the Overton and Hampton deeds in which Richard fitzWilliam was a principal party. This further strengthens the case that these documents were written around the time of Orreby's justiciarship, one of the few certainties by which Cheshire documents of the period can be accurately dated. Richard fitzWilliam also witnessed two deeds dated about 1220 and 1240,⁹³ and an undated one in the cartulary of Whalley Abbey.⁹⁴ It refers to William the chaplain of Stoke, who

⁸³ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH D/1, D/32-37, A/2, D/31, D/35-37.

⁸⁴ British Library, Additional Charter 21, 176.

⁸⁵ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH C/250.

⁸⁶ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH A/2, D/2.

⁸⁷ R. Stewart-Brown, *Calendar of county court, city court and eyre rolls of Chester, c.1259-97*, Chetham society, 84 (1925), p. 118.

⁸⁸ Chester and Cheshire Archives, CR63/2/27, f. 103b.

⁸⁹ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH C/405.

⁹⁰ *Rotuli chartarum in turri Londinensi asservati, volume 1, part 1* (London, 1837), p. 165.

⁹¹ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DLT/B1, f. 146.

⁹² Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 295; 31st report of the deputy keeper of public records (London, 1870), p. 300.

⁹³ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH A/2, D/31.

⁹⁴ W.A. Hulton, *Theoucher book or cartulary of Whalley Abbey*, Chetham society, 10 (1847), 11 (1847), 16 (1848), 20 (1849), 10, p. 27.

was active in about 1215,⁹⁵ and William Maillard, who was associated with the Patric family of Malpas at about the same time.⁹⁶

Two documents witnessed by Richard fitzWilliam have been tentatively dated to around 1180,⁹⁷ but this cannot be correct, because they also refer to at least three of the witnesses associated with the deeds from the 1220s. Indeed, Geoffrey Barraclough admitted that these documents were 'not easily' dated and in part founded his assessment on the belief that he already knew when Richard fitzWilliam was active, assuming he was the great-grandson of the man who had held the barony in 1086.⁹⁸ The evidence demonstrates fairly conclusively that Richard fitzWilliam, son of William Belward, was active in the period from about 1206 to the 1220s and perhaps a little later. Thus, he belonged to exactly the right generation to be the father of Richard Little, Thomas de Cotgrave and the others traditionally said to have been his children.

David the Clerk

Richard's elder brother, David the Clerk de Malpas, received a grant of lands apparently in about 1194,⁹⁹ and possibly another a few years earlier.¹⁰⁰ If David was a teenager at the time (Hugh II and Ranulf III Earls of Chester took possession of their lands at 16 and 17 respectively), it would suggest that he was born in the early to mid 1170s; he certainly cannot have been born any later. Thus, he cannot have been a grandson of Hugh II Earl of Chester, who was less than 30 at the time, having been born in 1147.¹⁰¹

David de Malpas witnessed a number of Ranulf II Earl of Chester's charters between 1205 and 1217.¹⁰² In 1216, the estates of the Sandford family of Shropshire were temporarily forfeited

⁹⁵ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 360.

⁹⁶ Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue*, p. 70; Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office, 26D53/76.

⁹⁷ Chester and Cheshire Archives, DCH C/11, C12.

⁹⁸ Barraclough, *Facsimilies*, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 264.

¹⁰⁰ British Library, Harleian MS. 2153, f. 258v.

¹⁰¹ Christie, *Annales Cestriensis*, p. 21.

¹⁰² Barraclough, *Charters*, pp. 232, 256, 282, 283, 284.

following the rebellion against King John and were given to David de Malpas.¹⁰³ One charter suggests that David's son William was already old enough to be witnessing deeds by about 1210, but it is a forgery.¹⁰⁴ This William later gave lands in Christleton to his daughter Margery when she married William de Bermingham. By the early part of the fourteenth century, this estate had passed to her great-grandson.¹⁰⁵ This dates Margery de Malpas's adulthood to the mid thirteenth century, consistent with the fact that her father died in 1242,¹⁰⁶ and further strengthening the case that her grandfather, David de Malpas, was active in the earlier years of the century.

Some early writers claimed that 'David, Baron of Malpas' was justiciar of Chester in the thirty-fourth year of the reign of Henry II (1187 or 1188),¹⁰⁷ but this might easily be a mistake for Henry III (1249 or 1250). The reference was in any case cast into doubt by Sir Peter Leycester, whose lists of Cheshire officers were taken from original sources. He did not mention David as justiciar, but showed instead that David de Malpas was sheriff of Chester in the thirty-sixth year of Henry III's reign, which fell between 1251 and 1252.¹⁰⁸ Randle Holmes had similar evidence¹⁰⁹ and original tax records mention David de Malpas in Cheshire in the same year.¹¹⁰ These references have sometimes been assumed to relate to David the Clerk,¹¹¹ but he was certainly dead by then, and they must refer to his grandson David 'the Bastard' of Malpas, who claimed his family's half of the barony in 1242.¹¹²

¹⁰³ *Rotuli titterarum clausarum in turri Londinensi asservati* (2 vols, London, 1833-44), 1, p. 252.

¹⁰⁴ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁵ The National Archives, CHES29/44.

¹⁰⁶ R. Stewart-Brown, ed., *Cheshire in the pipe rolls 1158-1301*, Record society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 92 (1938), p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ *The history of Cheshire* (2 vols, Chester, 1778), 1, p. 419.

¹⁰⁸ Leycester, *Historical antiquities*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ British Library, Harleian MS. 2153, f. 143r.

¹¹⁰ H. Hall, *The red book of the exchequer* (2 vols, London, 1896), 1, p. 184.

¹¹¹ H. Sanders, *The history and antiquities of Shenstone in the county of Stafford* (London, 1794), p. 119; F. Nichols, *The British compendium: or rudiments of honour* (8th edn, 2 parts in 1 vol., London, 1738), part 1, p. 229; *Collins's peerage*, 3, p. 229.

¹¹² Stewart-Brown, *Cheshire in the pipe rolls*, p. 70.

Since he disappears from the records after 1217, it is possible that David the Clerk of Malpas was one of the hundred knights who went on crusade with Ranulf III Earl of Chester in 1218.¹¹³ He must have been born in the early to mid 1170s and was active from about 1190 until 1217. His younger brother Richard fitzWilliam survived longer and was certainly still alive until about 1230. So, although Brownbill was right that Ormerod's dating of William Belward is inconsistent with what is known of his grandchildren, the discrepancy is better explained by attributing a later date to Belward than by following Ormerod's unsupported assertion that he was a grandson of Robert fitzHugh. In fact, the most likely date for William Belward's birth must be during the early 1150s or perhaps the 1140s. His mother cannot realistically have been fitzHugh's daughter and he must have acquired his interest in the barony of Malpas in some other manner.

Another version of events

A story about the division of Malpas which gained currency in the seventeenth century was that the Patrics had been in possession of the whole barony and that Robert Patric surrendered the estate into the hands of the earl of Chester (Ranulf III Earl of Chester), who then returned half to Patric and granted the other half to David the Clerk of Malpas.¹¹⁴ Both Ormerod and Thomas Helsby, who edited, revised and expanded Ormerod's work, thought that the story was 'suspicious' and wondered 'if it ever took place'.¹¹⁵

The origin of this story is an entry on the roll of medieval Cheshire deeds known as the Cheshire Domesday (nothing to do with Domesday Book). Although the roll was lost in the seventeenth century, partial copies survive.¹¹⁶ It actually recorded something much simpler than the traditional story suggests. The justiciar of Chester recognised a deal in which David de Malpas was granted by Robert Patric an estate including half of the church

¹¹³ R. Eales, 'Ranulf (III) sixth earl of Chester', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*.

¹¹⁴ British Library, Harleian MS. 2079, f. 2v.

¹¹⁵ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 302.

¹¹⁶ Chester and Cheshire Archives, CR63/2/30, pp. 91, 106; G. Ormerod, *Miscellanea palatina* (3 parts in 1 vol., Chester, 1851), part 2, p. 12; British Library, Harleian MS. 2079, f. 5v.

of Malpas, half the mill at Overton and the 'Passage' of Malpas, half of the townships of Horton, Agden and Malpas, and all the lands of Stockton and those of someone called Ednowen of Handley or Hampton. While that is a considerable block of lands, it does not amount to half the barony. In fact, the text does not mention the word 'barony' at all (it refers instead to the fee of Shocklach), and it does not invoke the earl's name. Moreover, the transaction cannot explain how David de Malpas's family came to be in possession of various other baronial lands, including Christleton, Egerton and Duckington. The transfer must have occurred between 1206, when Philip de Orreby became justiciar,¹¹⁷ and about 1215, when Robert Patric was dead.¹¹⁸ While this conveyance makes for interesting speculation, it clearly has nothing to do with the original division of the barony into two moieties. Camden's insistence that his ancient roll showed that William Belward was already lord of one moiety of the barony serves in any case to prove that the division occurred before the time of his son, David the Clerk of Malpas.

Ralph ab Einion

The most enigmatic character in the early history of the barony of Malpas is Ralph ab Einion. From the eighteenth century, he was described as 'a person of great note and large possessions in Wales and Cheshire' and said to have married the earl of Chester's daughter.¹¹⁹ In pedigrees of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries he (or his father, Einion ap David) is said to have been baron of Malpas and to have been disinherited by Henry II.¹²⁰ Ormerod doubted the story, but his reasons were inconclusive, and Helsby was less dismissive, suggesting that Ralph may have acquired a temporary interest in the barony, perhaps as a trustee on behalf of one of the freeholders.¹²¹ The traditions surrounding Ralph ab Einion provide the only credible explanation for how the barony came to be divided between the Belwards and the Patrics. According to the heralds' visitations, Ralph's heirs were two

¹¹⁷ Barraclough, *Charters*, pp. 343, 433.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

¹¹⁹ Nichols, *British compendium*, part 1, p. 229; *Collins's peerage*, 3, p. 170.

¹²⁰ British Library, Harleian MS. 2011, f. 29r.

¹²¹ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 593.

daughters who married William Patric and David the Clerk of Malpas (William Belward's son).¹²² This version of events cannot be completely accurate because David the Clerk's father was already lord of a moiety of Malpas, so the family's interest cannot have been acquired through David's marriage. But this apparent disparity is explained elsewhere by suggesting that it was William Belward himself who married Ralph ab Einion's daughter.¹²³ The details are lost, but it is clear that ancient traditions explained how both the Belwards and the Patrics could have acquired an interest in half of the barony of Malpas by marrying daughters of Ralph ab Einion.

There is no specific evidence for how Einion and Ralph might have acquired the barony in the first place and there is no suggestion that the barony itself was ever held by Einion's father. However, early Welsh pedigrees do state that his great-grandfather, Gruffydd ab Owain, was 'Lord of Maelor and Malpas'.¹²⁴ It seems that after fitzHugh's line had died out, the barony reverted to the earls of Chester. Gruffydd ab Owain obtained the manor of Malpas itself, and his descendent Ralph then acquired the title of baron after marrying a daughter of Ranulf II Earl of Chester. This is consistent with the assertion in one sixteenth-century manuscript that while Einion held Malpas, it was Ralph who first 'called himself Baron of Malpas'.¹²⁵ Gruffydd ab Owain was a first cousin of the Prince of Gwynedd called Griffith ap Cynan,¹²⁶ who was born in 1054.¹²⁷ This allows a very rough estimate for the birth of Ralph ab Einion's daughters to 1150, a credible date for the mother of David the Clerk of Malpas and his brother (who were born between 1170 and 1190). If this is indeed how Ralph came to hold the barony, it would be consistent with similar re-grants recorded for other English baronies,¹²⁸ but would be the only occasion on which such an event had been known to occur in

¹²² British Library, Harleian MS. 2119, f. 48v.

¹²³ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, ff. 81r., 125r., 216v., 239v.

¹²⁴ National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS. 139, f. 191v.

¹²⁵ Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, MS. 533/297, f. 136r.

¹²⁶ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, f. 125r.

¹²⁷ H. Pryce, 'Gruffydd ap Cynan', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*.

¹²⁸ G. White, *Restoration and reform* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 100-12; Sanders, *English baronies*, passim.

Cheshire. The fact that Ralph may have acquired his Cheshire lands through marriage into the earl's family underlines the importance of ties between Ranulf II Earl of Chester and his Welsh neighbours; King Stephen could not rely on Ranulf to hold the frontier during the civil war because Ranulf was allying with the Welsh to pursue his own ends.¹²⁹

For someone of such importance, with such sizeable estates and such noble connections, Ralph ab Einion left remarkably little trace in the historical record. Considering that he was supposedly a baron in Cheshire, it is surprising that he is not mentioned in any of the charters of the earls of Chester¹³⁰ or indeed in any of the records of Chester Abbey, which include references to many medieval patrons.¹³¹ It is almost as though he never existed, but several fragments of evidence suggest both that Ralph ab Einion was a real person and that he held an interest in Malpas.

First, a Welsh manuscript from the mid sixteenth century (earlier than the visitations) includes a pedigree that details Ralph's ancestry.¹³² Another piece of evidence comes from Randle Holmes's book about Anglesey.¹³³ In the original version of Ralph's family tree, Einion ap David was said to have had a daughter Beaunion, his heir; she married William Belward, who became 'in her right Baron of Malpas'. But at some later stage, Holmes altered the pedigree in a different coloured ink. Ralph ab Einion is interpolated as an extra generation, with his wife 'Beatrix sister to Hugh Keveliok Earl of Chester'. Beaunion (now said to be Ralph's daughter) is given an unnamed sister who married one of the Patrics. The Belwards' estate is now called 'halph Malpas'. The changes to this pedigree suggest that Holmes had access to two separate traditions about the family of Einion ap David. Ralph ab Einion is included in one but not the other, as is the woman who married one of the Patrics. For two traditions to have grown

¹²⁹ G. White, 'Ranulf (II) fourth earl of Chester', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*; D. Crouch, 'The March and the Welsh kings' in E. King, ed., *The anarchy of King Stephen's reign* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 256-83.

¹³⁰ Barraclough, *Charters*.

¹³¹ Tait, *The chartulary or register*.

¹³² National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS. 139, f. 191v.

¹³³ British Library, Harleian MS. 1974, f. 32.

up and persisted independently, it seems probable that there was some underlying factual basis in the story, which was garbled in slightly different ways as the story was passed down in different branches of the family.

Further evidence about Ralph ab Einion was given by Henry Sanders from a manuscript of 'a curious antiquary'. It recorded that Earl Hugh Kevelioke's daughter 'married Radaulf baron de Malopassu'.¹³⁴ The unusual, outdated spellings suggest that Sanders cannot have relied on the known manuscript sources, which use more normal versions 'Ralph' or 'Rafe' and 'Malpas'. A further unique reference in a sixteenth-century manuscript records that, although Ralph's wife was generally thought to be the earl of Chester's daughter, others thought she was a 'daughter to the Lord Mortymer of Wigmore'.¹³⁵ The author obviously had access to some material that has subsequently been lost. The last hint about Ralph ab Einion comes from Samuel Lee, who wrote in the mid seventeenth century, 'I find one Ralph, Baron of Malpas...This Baron was possesst of Cristleton, Ordrick, Crin, Fulwich, and Boughton'.¹³⁶ Fulwich is an old name for Wychough and Ordrick was Abbots Cotton in Christleton; Crin was a mistake for Criu, an old spelling of Crewe in the parish of Farndon. The list of places is identical with that from which Robert fitzHugh made grants to Chester Abbey.¹³⁷ Lee assumed that Ralph may have been a descendent of Robert fitzHugh and did not appear to know that his father's name was Einion, so he cannot have been working from any of the known surviving sources; further, by specifying a list of places that Ralph owned, Lee proved that this information did not come from other known sources, which record nothing at all about the specific lands that Ralph held.

The accounts recorded in visitations and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pedigrees state that Ralph ab Einion (or his father) was disinherited of the barony during the reign of Henry II.¹³⁸ If this were true, it is not immediately obvious that his

¹³⁴ Sanders, *History and antiquities of Shenstone*, p. 119.

¹³⁵ Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, MS. 533/297, f. 136r.

¹³⁶ Lee, 'Chronicon Cestrense', p. 51, in King, *A description historical and geographical*.

¹³⁷ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 5.

¹³⁸ British Library, Harleian MS. 2142, f. 22r.

sons-in-law would have been entitled to any interest in the barony. But the uncertainty of the twelfth century created many competing claims for the ownership of land, in which families held property, lost it and recovered it. The idea that Ralph was disinherited is consistent with other evidence. Hugh II Earl of Chester joined the great rebellion against Henry II in 1173 and was imprisoned for four years.¹³⁹ After the defeat of the rebellion, Henry presumably deprived some of Hugh's under-tenants of their property, especially those who were related to him, as Ralph is supposed to have been. At this time, the king removed the custodians of all the castles in the country (presumably including Malpas) as a way of breaking the entrenched power of the barons.¹⁴⁰ Nor is it obvious that Ralph would have been immediately reinstated when Hugh II Earl of Chester was restored to his property in May 1177.¹⁴¹ Within weeks, Hugh was invading the Welsh lordship of Bromfield¹⁴² (the area around modern-day Wrexham). Bromfield and Holt bordered part of Cheshire that formed a key part of the barony of Malpas and according to the visitations, they were the ancestral lands of Ralph ab Einion's family.¹⁴³ Anxious to show his renewed loyalty to Henry II and clearly worried about the Welsh in Bromfield, Hugh II Earl of Chester may well not have felt able to restore his brother-in-law to his lands in Malpas.

Whatever the detail, this escapade seems to have brought about the end of the continuing uneasiness between Cheshire and Bromfield; the ownership of Bromfield was never disputed again.¹⁴⁴ Significantly, the earliest datable reference to either the Belwards or the Patrics owning parts of Malpas comes from just a few years later,¹⁴⁵ suggesting that Ralph ab Einion's sons-in-law,

¹³⁹ T.K. Keefe, 'Hugh, fifth earl of Chester', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*.

¹⁴⁰ W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (New Haven, 2000), p. 141.

¹⁴¹ W. Stubbs, ed., *The chronicle of the reigns of Henry II and Richard I commonly known under the name of Benedict of Peterborough* (2 vols, London, 1867), 1, p. 161.

¹⁴² Christie, *Annales Cestriensis*, p. 27.

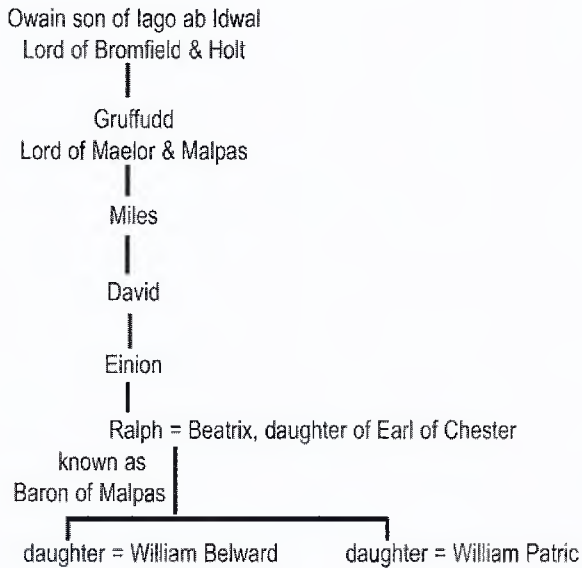
¹⁴³ British Library, Harleian MS. 1535, f. 125r.

¹⁴⁴ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, p. 565.

¹⁴⁵ British Library, Harleian MS. 2153, f. 258v.

William Belward and William Patric, may have been granted their wives' shares of the barony at about this time.

Figure 3. Relationships of Ralph ab Einion given in sixteenth-century pedigrees



Gilbert the Clerk

Several accounts of Malpas claim that Gilbert the Clerk at one time held a moiety of the barony. Nichols dated Gilbert to the time of Henry II,¹⁴⁶ while Helsby specified 'in the reign of King John or early in that of Henry III'.¹⁴⁷

The original source for the claim that Gilbert held a moiety of Malpas was an entry on the roll known as Cheshire Domesday but it does not actually say that he held any part of the barony. The only property explicitly said to have belonged to Gilbert was one half of the church of Malpas.¹⁴⁸ Since the rectory of Malpas was divided between two priests, it is possible that Gilbert was nothing more than rector of one half. He no doubt belonged to an

¹⁴⁶ Nichols, *History and antiquities*, 1, part 3, p. 849.

¹⁴⁷ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 593.

¹⁴⁸ Harleian MS. 2079, ff. 5v., 22v.

important family (Helsby suggests he may have been a Patric or a Belward) and may indeed have owned lands in the barony, but there does not appear to be any surviving evidence to support the assertion that he controlled all or half of the barony. The entry in Cheshire Domesday that referred to Gilbert the Clerk explicitly dates from the time when Philip de Orreby was justiciar of Chester (1206 to 1229); it does not say that Gilbert held any interest in Malpas at that time, but that half the rectory had been his in the past, presumably fairly recently. His name also appears as a witness to a charter dated to the time of King Stephen or Henry II (any time between 1135 and 1189) and on others from about 1190¹⁴⁹ and 1200.¹⁵⁰ Gilbert was presumably the Gilbert of Malpas whose son Henry was mentioned in charters from around the turn of the thirteenth century.¹⁵¹

John Booth, who had access to the same ancient roll seen by William Camden, claimed in the sixteenth century that Gilbert the Clerk was the father of William Belward.¹⁵² If this information came from the old roll, it would have to be considered as reliable, but since the roll called Belward ‘stipes’ – the stem of the family – it seems unlikely that it named his father. In the 1630s, John Legh also claimed that ‘Gilbert ye Clearke’ was Belward’s father,¹⁵³ but there is no evidence that he had access to any independent evidence and he was presumably copying Booth.

Robert fitzNigel and Agnes of Malpas

The place of Robert fitzNigel in the history of Malpas has been overlooked, but his interactions may throw light on the relationships of other important players. He was a tenant-in-chief of the crown who died in 1186, holding lands under the earls of Chester both in Leicestershire and in Cheshire; the latter were eventually granted to David the Clerk de Malpas.¹⁵⁴ He held lands in Rowton (in Christleton) within the barony of Malpas and

¹⁴⁹ Beamont, *Calendar of ancient family charters*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue*, p. 70.

¹⁵¹ Barraclough, *Facsimilies*, p. 10; Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue*, p. 70.

¹⁵² Cheshire and Chester Archives, CR63/2/30, pp. 22-23, 155ff.

¹⁵³ British Library, Additional MS. 29,778, f. 15v.

¹⁵⁴ Barraclough, *Charters*, pp. 264-65.

granted them to a man called Robert fitzWilliam;¹⁵⁵ this William is generally supposed to be the man known to posterity as William Belward, so that Robert was a brother of David the Clerk and Richard fitzWilliam.¹⁵⁶ FitzNigel's lands in Leicestershire included Kegworth and some of them later fell into the hands of the Patric family.¹⁵⁷ In other words, after his death, at least some parts of fitzNigel's estate were divided between the Belward family and the Patric family, exactly as the barony of Malpas was.

One of the most tantalising documents in understanding the early history of Malpas is a deed by which a woman called Agnes de Malpas gave lands in Kegworth to Calke Abbey in Derbyshire. The deed described her as a daughter of a man called Richard fitzNigel. Her husband was Nigel de Puis and she had adult sons called Robert, Richard and William.¹⁵⁸ Difficult to date precisely, the document appears to come from some time during the reigns of King Stephen or Henry II (between the 1130s and the 1180s). The fact that Agnes de Malpas's father was called Richard makes it tempting to suggest that she may have been a daughter of Letitia de Malpas and her husband Richard,¹⁵⁹ but there is no other hint to support such a claim. What may be more important is that her husband was named Nigel and it seems probable that Agnes's eldest son, Robert, was the man later known as Robert fitzNigel. Since his mother was called 'de Malpas' and certainly owned lands in Kegworth, this relationship would explain how fitzNigel came to be in possession of lands in both places.

The known beneficiaries of fitzNigel's lands in Cheshire were David the Clerk and his apparent brother Robert fitzWilliam. One possible reason could be that they were fitzNigel's nephews. William Belward may have been the same man as Agnes de Malpas's son William and thus Robert fitzNigel's brother. Robert fitzNigel apparently had no direct descendents,¹⁶⁰ so it is perfectly possible that his brother's sons were his heirs. Some seventeenth-century material records that Belward's family came into

¹⁵⁵ British Library, Harleian MS. 338, f. 29v.

¹⁵⁶ Ormerod, *History of the county palatine*, 2, p. 783.

¹⁵⁷ Nichols, *History and antiquities*, 1, part 3, p. 849.

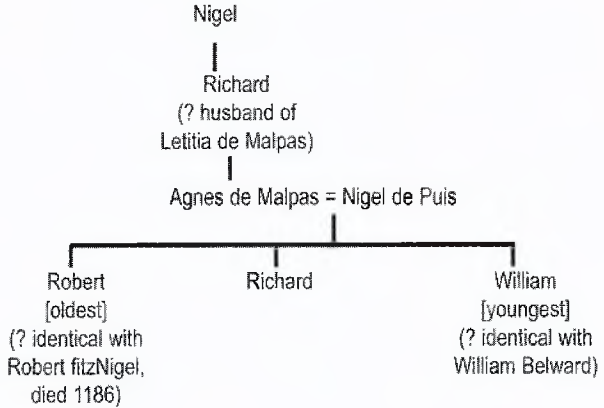
¹⁵⁸ Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁵⁹ S. Statham, *The descent of the family of Statham* (London, 1925), p. 15.

¹⁶⁰ Barraclough, *Charters*, p. 265.

possession of some of their Malpas lands in 1187 or 1188,¹⁶¹ immediately after fitzNigel's death.

Figure 4. Relationships of Agnes de Malpas, whose sons Robert and William may have been Robert fitzNigel and William Belward, both of whom had lands in the barony of Malpas.



Conclusion

It is a great deal easier to describe what did not happen to the barony of Malpas in the twelfth century than to say what did happen. Robert fitzHugh certainly did not have the daughter called Mabella identified by George Ormerod and Ormerod's explanation for the division of Malpas cannot be true. Nor is there any support for the tradition that the Patrics held the whole barony in the mid thirteenth century and forfeited it to the earl for it to be divided between the Patric and Belward dynasties.

After the death of Robert fitzHugh, the fate of his barony is unknown. While Letitia de Malpas may have been his daughter, there is no strong evidence, and in any case she had a brother, Richard Maillard, a surname associated with the earl of Chester's lands in the East Midlands. The fact that other people owned whole vills within the barony before 1100 and that Gruffydd ab Owain held the manor of Malpas itself tends to favour the view that fitzHugh's family had died out. Agnes de Malpas may have

¹⁶¹ British Library, Harleian MS. 2153, f. 258d.

been Letitia's daughter. Whether or not she was related to Letitia, her eldest son Robert is a strong candidate for Robert fitzNigel, who died in the 1180s, leaving no direct heirs. His Cheshire lands were taken by David the Clerk, whose father William Belward may well have been fitzNigel's youngest brother.

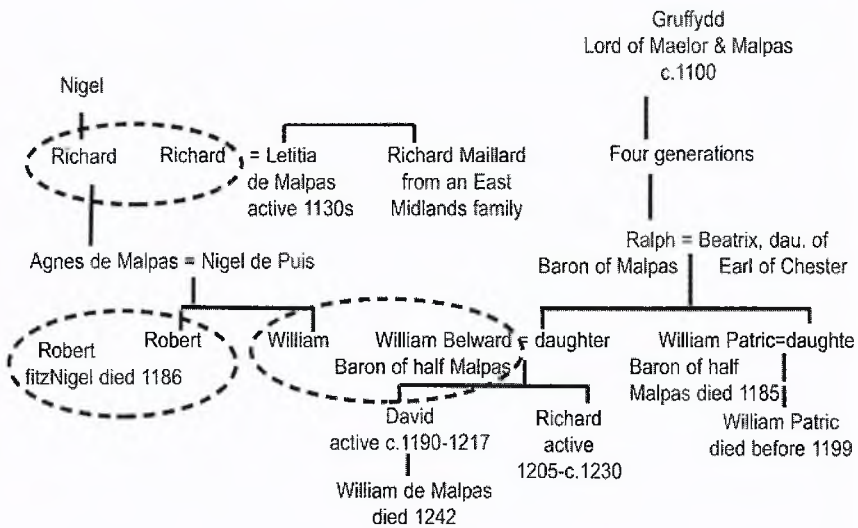
By the last quarter of the twelfth century, two sections of the barony of Malpas were apparently distinctly delineated and ownership was shared between William Belward and William Patric. While a credible explanation exists that Belward may have obtained parts of his moiety by descent, there is no parallel suggestion for Patric. However, there is a plausible tradition that Patric and Belward came into possession of their shares of the barony by marrying the daughters of Ralph ab Einion. Ralph's family had held Malpas itself for several generations and he was perhaps granted the dormant barony when he married the sister of Ranulf III Earl of Chester. Ralph ab Einion was apparently dispossessed of the barony by Henry II, almost certainly after the great rebellion of the 1170s. It was revived in two moieties for his sons-in-law, Belward and Patric, whose families are first recorded holding baronial lands soon afterwards.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, the two halves of the barony descended normally and the descents were skilfully recorded by Ormerod, subject to a few amendments of dates using information that was not available to him.

Although there are early evidences to support the assumption that Cheshire's six other feudal baronies passed by simple inheritance, as is assumed for most English feudal baronies, Malpas must have been different. Its division into two moieties, which certainly occurred before 1200, was unusual. Even more atypical was that major blocks of lands were distinguished as separate entities, including a group of villis owned by Ralph ab Einion, mirroring the block from which Robert fitzHugh had originally endowed Chester Abbey. But Ralph's ancestry is known and he was not related to Robert fitzHugh. Even though the Patrics unquestionably owned half the barony, they reflected the complex pattern of ownership with different nomenclature, using the name fee of Shocklach for their property (although it included lands in Malpas itself). These features are quite different both from the other baronies in Cheshire and from English feudal baronies

more widely.¹⁶² It would appear to be a mistake to assume that such estates always passed through the normal procedures and to presume, as Ormerod did, that unknown sections can be filled in using simple family trees based on sketchy knowledge. Confiscation and patronage, a common feature in the history of twelfth-century baronies, seem to have come into play in Cheshire, as they did elsewhere in the country.

Figure 5. Relationships among the various families known to have had interests in the barony of Malpas in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Each of the dashed ovals encompasses two people of the same name who appear to be identical.



¹⁶² Sanders, *English baronies*, passim.