Descendants of the
Illegitimate Sons and Daughters of
the Kings of Britain

By Walter Lee Sheppard, Jr., F.A.S.G., F.G.S.P., C.G.*

BACKGROUND

The proliferation of precolonial hereditary societies over the past 75 years can probably be traced at least partially to the somewhat condescending treatment many American businessmen and their wives have received from their European counterparts, and the similar treatment experienced by wealthy and well connected Americans on extended visits to the United Kingdom and the Continent, especially during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The European of noble birth or other person secure in his knowledge of generations of "blue blood" tended to patronize persons of unknown parentage who had attained prominence by work rather than inheritance. The wealthy American returning from a grand tour, smarting from this patronization, often sought the services of a genealogist to prove that his or her ancestry was just as illustrious as that of the noble acquaintance. To assure that the word got back to the proper parties, societies such as Americans of Royal Descent, Descendants of Kings, of Charlemagne, etc., were founded. The membership in these societies was frequently little interested in historical matters; their primary concern was in the display of gentle lineage.

The genealogists who served these persons were often working in an unfamiliar field, and frequently made untenable assumptions, such as identifying a colonist in Virginia with a near contemporary of the same name in England. Such identifications were often based solely on the coincidence of names, confirming evidence being neither sought nor found. Given a choice of several persons with the same name, the so-called genealogist often selected one from the gentry, ignoring lesser persons, as well as chronology, geography, or circumstances. Further analysis of overseas records and literature often reveals that the alleged colonist married, raised a family, and died in England.

In some cases genealogists specializing in this kind of work, in order to save themselves trouble and extensive research, would simply invent a connection to an existing armigerous family, thereby tying the immigrant—often of most humble station—to a glamorous and utterly unconvincing noble pedigree. See Note 1 for some examples of this practice.

* 923 Old Manoa Road, Havertown, Pennsylvania 19083. Mr. Sheppard was one of the founders of the society and is currently its President.
The early records of almost all of these precolonial hereditary societies contain many such spurious lineages. Most of them are, unfortunately, still believed and perpetuated by repeated use in the admission of new members in right of the previously accepted lineage. The fact that fraudulent lineages have been exposed in scholarly journals and books does not seem to matter; such facts are still too often ignored. See Note 2 for some examples.

FOUNDING THE SOCIETY

Such attitudes and practices are abhorrent to many of us who consider genealogy an honorable profession, and who seek to elevate it to equality with its sister sciences of history and biography. After many discussions of the problem, four serious genealogists in 1950 at Richmond, Virginia, decided to form a precolonial hereditary society, membership in which would be limited to those persons who could prove in a fully documented and properly researched manner, acceptable to the best genealogical scholars, an uninterrupted line of descent from a group of ancestors which would be large enough to provide a base for the Society, but yet a group of ancestors essentially unimportant and without inherited social distinction. We settled on bastards of British royal personages (kings, queens or their princely offspring, and specifically excepting from eligibility those royal bastards subsequently legitimated by Act of Parliament, as, for instance, the four Beaufort children of John of Gaunt) as best fulfilling this requirement. Thus was born the Descendants of the Illegitimate Sons and Daughters of the Kings and Queens of Britain (The Royal Bastards, for short).

Mimeographed fliers were sent by the four founders to some 40 outstanding genealogists. Within four months the society became a reality, with ten charter members in the United States and Great Britain. The distinguished medievalist, George Andrews Moriarty, became first President; Dr. Arthur Adams of Trinity College was Herald (and genealogist, examining and approving lineage papers), and the writer was Secretary. Within a few more weeks a short and simple constitution was adopted by postal ballot. It stated that what a man makes of himself is far more important than who his ancestors were.

CURRENT STATUS

As a result of interest from outside the profession, within a few years we evolved from a small society composed primarily of genealogists into a serious hereditary society. Occasional social gatherings are held in lieu of regular meetings. Elections and other business are conducted by mail. Because operating expenses are minimal, there are no annual dues. A moderate initiation fee pays for minor administrative costs (e.g., postage) and a handsome four-color membership certificate with the society coat of arms (described below). All members subscribe on a lifetime nontransferable basis to the society’s Lineage Book, containing lineages of all members. Unlike other hereditary societies, we do not
accept and publish supplemental lineages. In one case, however, when we discovered information invalidating a member’s lineage, we published the invalidation and an approved replacement lineage. At this writing we have a total membership of 103, of whom somewhat more than 80 are living, scattered from Australia to England.


RECOGNITION BADGE

A recognition badge, suggested by the late Lundie Weathers Barlow and designed by the late Dr. Harold Bowditch, was adopted by the Society in 1960. It may be described, heraldically, as follows: On a field sable, a gutée d’or, charged with a baton sinister gules. The badge was originally planned to be a lozenge bearing the above devices, but—because of unavailability of the proper diamond-shaped blanks—the Society settled on circular badges with small ceramic inserts on which the above device was painted and then fired. The gutée is a droplet, usually of blood or gold. Thus we interpret the device as: a black background representing mystery, or acts performed in the dark or secretly. The gold gutée indicetes royal blood, and is surmounted by a baton sinister to indicate bastardy. The color of the baton is red, the color of the Royal Arms of Great Britain.

COAT OF ARMS

The Constitution of “the Royal Bastards,” Article III, states: The Arms of the Society shall be: on a shield gules a lion passant or, a canton or charged with two pairs of unicorns’ horns in saltire, sinister over dexter, couped vert, over all a baton sinister sable, inside a bordure wavy vert. Crest: on a knight’s helmet reversed antlered proper a ducal coronet or, surmounted by a cuckoo rampant proper. Motto: Honi soit qui mal y pense.

The unicorn, a fabulous beast, is considered a “royal animal,” and two are used as supporters of the Royal Arms of Scotland. Since the union of the two kingdoms, the Royal Arms of Great Britain have included one unicorn and one lion. According to mythology, a unicorn may only be captured by a virgin.
The prime ingredient in the ancient formulae for love philters, and later for aphrodisiacs, was ground up unicorn’s horn.

The basic shield bears the lion of England (originally called a leopard) in the style of its earliest appearance, a single beast, a gold animal charged upon a red shield, for English royalty. The canton is an addition, sometimes, but not often, used to identify an illegitimate connection of the bearer, most often simply used for difference. This one has a suggestive charge: a double cross (the two pairs of unicorns’ horns in saltire). The meaning of the double cross must be immediately apparent to most Americans. This one is composed of materials used for making love philters, and the left over the right is suggestive of illegitimacy. The internal top corners of the crosses just touch, forming a diamond, the design (called a lozenge) upon which a maiden displays her arms. (A knight uses the shield.) The baton sinister, charged over all, is the symbol most frequently used in England to denote bastardy, but in Scotland the wavy border is more common. We have both in this coat.

The crest includes a reversed knight’s helmet, the reversal again denoting bastardy. A knight’s helmet would indicate the probable quality of one partner, and the ducal coronet the other. “Putting the horns” on the knight’s helmet (perhaps the husband of the lady) is perhaps more suggestive to the American mind, but quite intelligible to the heralds of all nations. Any bird lover knows that one attribute of the cuckoo is to lay its eggs in another bird’s nest. The royal unicorns used as supporters have, of course, sacrificed their horns to the alchemist for his love philters. The motto has been appropriated from the Most Noble Order of the Garter as entirely suitable to our worthy purposes.

The illustration of the coat of arms was drawn by America’s great herald, the late Dr. Harold Bowditch. He was not a member of the Society, but was in favor of it. He was very pleased with the heraldry of our coat armour and donated his time and effort to make our four-color membership certificate.

**MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS**

We frequently receive inquiries as to membership requirements. The inquirer is invariably advised that there is no difficulty in applying. We can always find a proposer and a seconder. But we are extremely particular about the research behind the lineage submitted. The descent must be proven to the absolute satisfaction of our genealogist (Herald) before we can accept an applicant into membership.

Of the applications claiming descent through an immigrant ancestor not previously used, less than one quarter are found qualified. Of the rejected lineages, many were previously approved by one or more of the best known precolonial hereditary societies (such as those mentioned in an earlier paragraph).

The Society requires that all applicants offer a complete and satisfac-
torily documented lineage covering every generation from the Royal Bastard to the applicant. The fact that a member has earlier offered a lineage, duly approved by the Herald, containing many of the same generations, does not relieve the applicant of the requirement to document these same generations. The applicant may order facsimiles of approved lineages and may repeat the same evidential citations. It should be noted that the summary appearing in the Society's Lineage Book is not an acceptable reference; it probably omits the majority of the citations and some of the dates. Also not acceptable are pedigree compilations (such as those of Dr. Weis), which may, however, provide useful source references.

ESTABLISHED LINEAGES

Lineages have been and continue to be approved passing through the following American colonists:

Joseph Bowles, Winter Harbor, Maine, by 1640
George Elkington, Burlington, N.J., 1677
Edward Carleton, Rowley, Mass., 1639, and his wife Ellen (Newton)
Christopher Wetherill, Burlington, N.J., 1683
Obadias Bruen, Marshfield, Mass., by 1640
Mary (Launce), wife of the Rev. John Sherman, Watertown, Mass., by 1645
Thomas Lewis, Saco, Maine, by 1631
Jeremy Clarke, Rhode Island, by 1637
Frances (Deighton), by husband Richard Williams, Taunton, Mass., by 1640
Gov. Thomas Dudley, Boston, Mass., 1630
The Rev. Peter Bulkeley, Cambridge, Mass., 1637
Dr. Richard Palgrave, Charlestown, Mass., 1630
Thomas Warren, Surrey County, Virginia, by 1650
Olive (Ingoldsby), wife of the Rev. Thomas James, Charlestown, Mass., 1632
Samuel Appleton, Ipswich, Mass., 1634
Capt. Charles Barham, Surrey County, Virginia, by 1654
John Drake, Windsor, Conn., by 1646
Gov. Roger Ludlow, Boston, Mass., 1630
James Veitch, Calvert County, Maryland, by 1658
Thomas Witter, New York City, by 1746
Col. George Reade, Virginia, by 1637
Elder William Wentworth, Exeter, N.H., by 1639
Capt. Thomas Bradbury, Ipswich, Mass., 1636
Alice (Freeman), wife of John Thompson, New London, Conn., by 1660
William Clopton, New Kent County Virginia, by 1680
Sarah (Ludlow), wife of Col. John Carter, Lancaster County, Virginia, by 1660
William Strother IV of Richmond County, Virginia, by 1700
Nathaniel Littleton, Northampton County, Virginia, by 1650
Olive (Welby), wife of Henry Farwell, Chelmsford, Mass., by 1640
Elizabeth (Alsop), wife of Richard Baldwin, Milford, Conn., by 1680
Richard More, child passenger on the Mayflower, Plymouth, Mass., 1620
Mary (Gye), wife of the Rev. John Maverick, Boston, Mass., by 1635

Of the above, the ancestry of Capt. Thomas Bradbury, presently accepted, is under some dispute and errors may be found in it. The ancestry of Alice (Freeman) Thompson, previously under question because of a number of generations of very close chronology, seems to hold up under examination.
UNACCEPTABLE LINEAGES

Five additional colonists whose ancestries were earlier accepted are no longer approved. The evidence for the claimed paternity of John Prescott, Lancaster, Mass., by 1645, is unsatisfactory. The earlier portion of the Washbourne pedigree of John Washbourne, Duxbury, Mass., by 1631, is faulty. Several false generations have been uncovered for Mabel (Harlackenden) Haynes, wife of Gov. John Haynes, Boston, Mass., 1635. The earlier portion of the pedigree of Frances (Wyatt) Allyn, wife of Matthew Allyn, Windsor, Conn., by 1671, from Richard, King of the Romans, has been shown to be erroneous. However, an alternative and acceptable line to Henry I, has been uncovered. The identification of Dorothea Gotherson as the wife of John Davis of Long Island and New Jersey has every appearance of forgery and is certainly totally false. The Prescott and Washbourne lines may subsequently be proven, though probably not with the same generations. Very little hope can be held for the Harlackenden line.

At least an equal number of additional immigrant ancestors have appeared in lineages submitted and rejected as inadequately proven or false. As these words are being written, a flier has come to the author’s desk, announcing the publication of volume 2 of Pedigrees of Some of the Emperor Charlemagne’s Descendants. The list of pedigrees identified in the index includes a number that pass through three immigrants whose documentation is totally inadequate to this Society: Mary (alleged Wentworth), wife of Elder William Brewster of the Mayflower; Governor Ogle of Delaware; and the Buchanan ancestry of President James Buchanan. The first two may well be true, but there is certainly no adequate evidence available to support them. The latter is based on nothing but hearsay and contains many generations devoid of dates. At least one hereditary society accepts the descendants of Peter Wright of Oyster Bay, Long Island, on a similar unproven though possible pedigree, also unacceptable to the Society.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

Until recently little effort was made to bring into one reference work a list of the illegitimate offspring of English royalty. The new edition of the Complete Peerage (in vol. 6, app. F, p. 706) discusses the bastards of Charles II. Those of James II appear in vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 914, and of Henry I in vol. 11, app. D, p. 105. Individual articles have appeared in various magazines from time to time, identifying one or more bastards of specific monarchs. In a series of articles in the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, this writer summarized the material then available, with sources cited, from William I through the reign of Queen Anne. The Scottish monarchs are included in this series from Malcolm II to the merging with the English throne. Sir Archibald H. Dunbar’s Scottish Kings, 1005-1625 (Edinburgh, 1899) has quite useful data on the Scottish royal bastards, as does the first volume of Sir Balfour Paul’s Scots Peerage. The only reasonably useful work contain-
ing data on English monarchs is that of Sir Francis Sandford’s *Genealogical History of the Kings of England* (1677), generally available in major libraries. This work is interesting, though incomplete and out of date. No efforts of which the writer is aware have been made to bring into one reference work the bastards of Anglo-Saxon Kings, or of the Welsh rulers, though of course many of these are known.\(^4\)

**SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT ROYAL BASTARDS**

Among the more illustrious royal bastards are: Robert of Caen, or “The Consul,” Earl of Gloucester, eldest illegitimate son of Henry I, in his day one of the most important and powerful men in England, mainstay of the forces of the Empress Maud, his legitimate half-sister, in her war with King Stephen.\(^5\) James, Duke of Berwick, illegitimate son of James II, was the leader of his father’s (French) armies in the long endeavor to restore James II to the throne of England. He was known in his day as a military genius.\(^6\)

Of those royal bastards, descent from whom has been used for members in the Society, the most frequently claimed are: Robert of Caen, Earl of Gloucester, son of Henry I;\(^5\) William Longespee, Earl of Salisbury, son of Henry II;\(^7\) Joan, Princess of Wales, daughter of King John and wife of Llewellyn ap Jarwerth;\(^8\) and Richard de Chilham or de Douvres, son of King John.\(^9\) The most remote ancestor claimed is Gytha, illegitimate daughter of Harold II Godwinson,\(^10\) last Anglo-Saxon King of England. The most recent is Charles, Duke of Richmond, son of Charles II.\(^11\)

**RESEARCH**

With improved scholarship, discovery of previously misplaced or unavailable source material, and better abstracting and indexing of records in major repositories, a thin but steady stream of well researched papers is appearing, identifying the parents of American immigrants, and in some cases tracing their lineages with satisfactory documentation into the past. As examples, in the early 1940s the ancestry of Edward Carlton of Rowley, Mass., was finally established, correcting an old and accepted, but entirely fallacious, pedigree.\(^12\) In the 1950s a royal ancestry was identified for Joseph Bowles of Maine.\(^13\) In the 1960s Alice Bayton, wife of Christopher Batt,\(^14\) and Mary Gye, wife of the Rev. John Maverick,\(^15\) both immigrants to Boston, were shown to have noble lineage.

The methods of determining the parentage of an immigrant and the type and methods of research necessary to establish his or her ancestry have been discussed elsewhere.\(^16\) This work requires great patience, exhaustive and often expensive research, combined with a thorough grounding in this highly specialized subject. The casualness with which it has been approached in the past by many genealogists who should know better has never ceased to baffle the serious student of precolonial
genealogy. It is certainly not an impossibility to prove the home place and parentage of an immigrant; in the case of Quaker families this can often be done. But success crowns no more than about 10% of cases. Of this 10%, less than 10% can be traced back to a connection with a noble or royal line, legitimate or otherwise.

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS

There appears to be a common, though incorrect, belief that the prefix “fitz” often signifies illegitimacy. An example might be the mention in Scott’s Lady of the Lake, where James fitzJames is certainly not a bastard. This merely means “James son of James.” The “fitz” is a corruption of the French fils used by the Normans to compose a patronymic. It is often thought that when used with Roy (or Regis) it means of royal bastard, as for example William fitzRoy for William son of the King. But this also is debatable; the old records show many references to the legitimate children of a king so identified. William son of King Henry could appear in these records either as William fitzRoy or William fitzHenry, often interchangeably. And William may be the Crown Prince, or eldest son. In later years, after the general adoption of surnames, royal bastards might well elect to take such a name as fitz Roy as a surname, and in fact many have; but in the early middle ages, a patronymic was just that, and not usually transmitted to the son as a surname.

The term “bar sinister,” despite its frequent use in fiction, is without heraldic meaning. A bar in heraldry is a horizontal stripe across the shield. Because “sinister” is the designation of the corner of the shield from which or in which a charge is placed, obviously there can be no such thing. The correct usage is either (1) “bend sinister” (a diagonal stripe drawn from the “sinister” corner top to “dexter” side at bottom), or (2) “baton sinister” (a short stripe, not touching either bottom or top, but on a diagonal in the same position as the “bend sinister”). Either of these two is correctly used as a charge over the shield of the father to show illegitimacy when the shield is born by the son, though often the son may obtain an entirely new and different coat, or may (by permission) use his father’s arms without any difference at all.

It is also often, though falsely, thought that bastards could not inherit their father’s property. But the records are replete with cases of those who have. In the Meinhill (Meinil) family a bastard inherited his father’s wealth and received a title. In the early middle ages such bastardy was a limitation only if the bastard was not strong enough to prevent it. William the Conqueror was a bastard, yet succeeded in retaining his father’s duchy against other legitimate claimants and went on to conquer England. Robert of Caen might well have become King of England. His name was advanced in council by several of the magnates after the death of his father Henry I; but Robert had promised to support his sister and this he did. A bastard was often educated with
his legitimate brothers. Henry II brought up his bastards William Longespee and Geoffrey2 with his legitimate children, and they were apparently acceptable to Henry’s Queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Though the bastards took precedence behind their legitimate younger brothers, there were some able men who succeeded to thrones over the legitimate heirs. Henry of Trastamara19 of the Kingdom of Castile, and Tancred of Sicily,20 in the fourteenth and twelfth centuries, respectively, are two examples. As late as the sixteenth century, Henry VIII managed to get Parliament to name his bastard son Henry, Duke of Richmond, as heir to the English throne. Henry might actually have inherited it had he lived (he died aged seventeen) and had his younger brother, the legitimate son Edward died.

In the seventeenth century the popular James, Duke of Monmouth,21 illegitimate son of Charles II, might well have taken the throne from his unpopular uncle James II had he been a better general or less lazy. Today’s historical novelist errs when he or she makes bastardy a serious impediment to advancement. There are, however, important distinctions between bastards: those whose mothers were of noble or acceptably gentle birth (whose bastards were usually recognized and admitted into the family), and those resulting from casual contact with servants, serfs, ladies of easy virtue, or prostitutes (which bastards were usually ignored or acknowledged only when legitimate issue failed). The writer distinguishes between prostitutes and ladies of easy virtue. In the first case the issue probably would never be acknowledged; in the second the hindrance is only doubt as to actual paternity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The late Archibald Bennett in his book Finding Your Forefathers in America (1957), pp. 120-4, uncritically preserved the pedigree given in Americana (Jan. 1939, pp. 326-348), which derived Alexander Fleming of Virginia from the Fleming Earls of Wigton, on nothing more substantial than similarity of names. Though barely possible, such an ancestry for the Virginia Flemings is extremely doubtful.

Tyler’s Magazine many years ago published an article on the Fauntleroy family of Virginia, deriving them from a romantic liaison between King Jean “the Good” of France (1350-1364) and his mistress, a Mortimer, during his imprisonment in London 1356-1364. (See Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., 10:821.) That he had a mistress, and perhaps more than one, is well known, but no bastards are recorded. Though it is possible that Col. John Moore Fauntleroy (d. 1663 Va.) was son of one John Fauntleroy of Crandall (d. 1644), proof is lacking and the ancestry of the alleged father has never been satisfactorily researched.

One of the more ridiculous claims was immortalized by George C. Ridgway in his Ridgeway Family in England and America (1926), in which the pedigree of a poor tailor (the Quaker Richard Ridgway who came with wife Elizabeth Chamberlain to Burlington, N.J., on the Jacob and Mary of London in Sept. 1679) is neatly fitted into the peerage. According to that work, he was a son of a Robert, and grandson of Robert Ridgway, 2nd Earl of Londonderry. Apart from the incongruity of assigning to one of the wealthiest peers of the day a poor tradesman as a grandson, if there had been any merit in the claim, Richard Ridgway’s eldest son would have inherited the title and emoluments, for the male descendants of the 2nd Earl failed and the title passed to their cousins. This imaginative and fraudulent pedigree dates from the late nineteenth century, and has been shown to be false by a number of genealogists over the past century. Yet it is still being accepted and used for membership in hereditary societies.

Another imaginative line is the ancestry assigned to the Mayflower pilgrim William Mullins. In Americana, issue of 25 Jan. 1925 (under “vanNostrand and Allied Families,” pp. 541-2), the
author states that he is a male line descendant of the gentle family of Molyneux. Though lacking any evidence to support it, this preposterous pedigree is still being accepted for membership in hereditary societies.

2. Thomas Tracy, ship carpenter at Salem, Mass., 1637, was for many years credited with a false descent from the noble Tracy family in Gloucestershire. Donald L. Jacobus exposed this error in his Waterman Family (1939), 1:69-4. In spite of this, a royal ancestry has been claimed and is accepted by hereditary precolonial societies. An article by John G. Hunt in The American Genealogist 41:250-1 should have put most of these claims to rest. We understand that the Ridgway claim (cited in note 1) is still being accepted. In the Pomeroy Family (1922), Charles A. Hoppin stated as a fact, but without any citations, a purely conjectural ancestry for the colonist Eltweed Pomeroy. Within the last decade this identification has been proven wrong and the true identity published.


10. DNB, 24:418; Smith, Saxon England (1953), cited in note 4 above.


12. NEHGR, 93:3-46; 94:3-18.


17. Some readers may not be aware that the points of the shield are named for the points of the body of the man who is carrying it. Therefore the upper left corner of the shield as the viewer faces it in a picture is the dexter or right corner, while the sinister corner is the upper right corner.

18. CP, 8:632-4.


20. Ibid., 25:34.