British Journal for Military History

Volume 8, Issue 3, November 2022

Ties of Service and Military Identity in Sixteenth Century England: The Example of the Blount Family

Elizabeth Norton

ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 28 November 2022

Citation: Elizabeth Norton, 'Ties of Service and Military Identity in Sixteenth Century England: The Example of the Blount Family', *British Journal for Military History*, 8.3 (2022), pp. 38-56.

www.bjmh.org.uk

The BJMH is produced with the support of Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Ties of Service and Military Identity in Sixteenth Century England: The Example of the Blount Family

ELIZABETH NORTON*
Independent Scholar, UK
Email: mail@elizabethnorton.co.uk

ABSTRACT
The sixteenth century is usually considered to be a time of considerable change in the military in England. Through a case study of the Blount family, this article considers the ways in which the landed gentry of the sixteenth century defined themselves through military service, as well as looking at the ways in which they were mustered, with both the retinue system and the militia providing troops for the major conflicts in which the Blounts were involved. It will be demonstrated that personal ties of loyalty remained important to military service in the late sixteenth century.

Introduction

When Rowland Lacon decided to honour his deceased uncle, Sir George Blount (d.1581), he ordered that a great alabaster tomb be erected in the church at Kinlet in Shropshire. Lacon depicted his uncle wearing armour, in spite of George's limited military experience. Fifty years before, George had erected a tomb for his own parents in the same church, depicting Sir John Blount (d.1531) dressed for battle. Further back still, George's great-grandfather, Sir Humphrey Blount (d.1477), was shown as a knight in his tomb effigy, while the family's fourteenth century ancestor, Edmund Cornwall, still stares down from stained glass in Kinlet Church depicting him in full armour.

The military identity of Sir George Blount and other members of his family remained central to their self-image, in spite of the fact that the sixteenth century is, with good reason, characterised as a period of change in relation to the military in England, with

*Dr Elizabeth Norton is an historian, specialising in the sixteenth century and has published widely on the period. Her PhD thesis studied the Blount family in the long sixteenth century.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v8i3.1643

the use of the militia usually characterised as superseding the retinue system by the end of the century.[1] Neither were innovations, with retinue service commonly owed to lords through land occupation or indenture in the medieval period, while the county militia, which encompassed all able-bodied men aged between sixteen and sixty, had its roots in the Statute of Winchester of 1285, which required troops to be raised for domestic purposes.[2] Unsurprisingly, a considerable amount of historical research has been carried out into musters in the sixteenth century. John Jeremy Goring, for example, identified a shift from a feudal to a 'quasi-feudal' system, by which the leaders of society were summoned to provide retinues of their tenants and servants to serve in an army.[3] The crucial difference here is that such troops were summoned by the king rather than by the nobility, and that the troops raised were usually not bound to give their lord military service. Goring's work has been hugely influential, with Steven Gunn recently suggesting that the subsequent shift from quasi-feudal to a national basis of raising troops led to retinues being superseded in the 1540s by county forces raised by commissioners.[4]

This accords with the prevailing historiography, with the militia viewed as a national system of recruitment that filled the gap left by the retinue system by Charles Cruickshank in a still influential study of the Elizabethan army dating from 1946.[5] More recent historians agree, with nuance added in recent years, with it acknowledged that retinues remained to some extent and that there could be overlaps with the militia.[6] This is unsurprising, since the ways in which troops were mustered for the militia in the period were, in any event, complex, with general musters – which were intended for domestic conflict – distinct from musters for specific levies which, in the period, could necessitate serving outside England. Lindsay Boynton, for example, noted the

[1]Steven Gunn, *The English People at War in the Age of Henry VIII,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.2.

[2]William Huse Dunham, 'Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers 1461-1483', *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences,* 39 (1955), p. 9; Steven Gunn, David Grummitt and Hans Cools (eds.), *War, State, and Society in England and the Netherlands 1477-1559,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 6, p. 21; Penry Williams, *Tudor Regime,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 2; Mark Charles Fissel, *English Warfare, 1511-1642,* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 8. Two Acts of Parliament from 1558 further updated the militia's role, although it was very much based on earlier legislation.

[3]John Jeremy Goring, 'The Military Obligations of the English People 1511-1558', (Queen Mary's, University of London, PhD thesis, 1955), p. 17.

[4]Gunn, *The English People at War,* p. 14.

[5]Charles Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 7.

[6]Lindsay Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia 1558-1638,* (London: Routledge, 1967), p. 11; Goring, *Military Obligations,* p. 7.

continuing responsibility of an Elizabethan militia captain towards his men, with local connections and personal ties of considerable importance in the relationship.[7] That there is overlap between the two systems can also be seen in the fact that, while the decision to raise the militia would be taken by the central government, the administration of the musters and the appointment of the captains themselves was usually highly localised, something that was codified in the legislation, which envisaged local dignitaries, including the gentry, mayors and other civic officers playing a substantial role.[8] Indeed, this was a feature of the Statute of Winchester of 1285, which required local constables, under the oversight of the sheriffs and local bailiffs to survey the arms held by the counties, with this local focus repeated in the Marian legislation.[9] In spite of the deliberate focus on the localities in the statutory authority for the militia, the localised nature of the militia organisation has traditionally been viewed as a weakness and a cause of conflict between the shires and the central government.[10] However, the de-centralised nature of the militia's administration has more recently been characterised as a point in its favour, allowing for interaction between the localities and the centre in mustering troops, with the Elizabethan military's achievements at times impressive.[11]

This article will use the Blount family as a case study to evaluate their role in the military in the period. This gentry family, who were particularly large, had divided into several branches by the end of the fifteenth century, with seats focussed on the West Midlands in Shropshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Oxfordshire. Given their size and a reasonable amount of surviving source material, the family make a good subject for a case study, with this article looking at the extent of their military involvement, as well as the importance of the social relationships engendered and negotiated through this. This article will consider whether the Blounts' own military activities can be seen as undergoing significant change in the period. It will be illustrated here that the military remained of particular importance to the Blounts' lives and identities, with personal ties of loyalty, rather than the requirements of the militia

[7]Boynton, *Elizabethan Militia,* p. 104.

[8]Neil Younger, *War and Politics in the Elizabethan Countie,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 3.

[9]*Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First,* ninth edition, William Stubbs, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), pp. 463-469

[10]Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army;* A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Norfolk, 1558-1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); John McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The 1590s Crisis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[11]Younger, *War and Politics,* p.8; Paul E.J. Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars: War, Government and Society in Tudor England, 1544-1604,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), p. 253.

statutes or direct royal command, still arguably the most important driving force in their service both in the late medieval period and throughout the sixteenth century. While the conclusions drawn will be necessarily specific to this one family, it is hoped that this article will add to the growing body of scholarship recognising both change and continuity in the way in which troops were mustered and the military culture of the gentry of the period.

Retaining in the Medieval Period

Blounts frequently served in warfare throughout the later medieval period, usually in noblemen's retinues.[12] Humphrey Blount of Kinlet (1422-1477) has been placed in the retinue of John Sutton, Lord Dudley, who had held his wardship, and he probably served with Dudley on the Lancastrian side at the Battle of St Albans on 22 May 1455 and, possibly, at Blore Heath on 23 September 1459.[13] By the middle of October 1459, however, Humphrey had joined his kinsman, Walter Blount (the future first Lord Mountjoy) in support of the Duke of York at the abortive battle of Ludford Bridge.[14] Humphrey then returned his allegiance to the Lancastrian king, Henry VI, but was an early supporter of the Yorkist Edward IV, fighting for him at Towton on 29 March 1461, alongside Walter Blount.[15] Humphrey also fought at Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471,

[12]'An account of the military service performed by Staffordshire tenants in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', ed. George Wrottesley, *Collections for a History of Staffordshire,* 8 (1887), p. 112; George Wrottesley (ed.), 'Military service performed by Staffordshire tenants during the reign of Richard II, from the original rolls in the Public Record Office', ed. George Wrottesley, *Collections for a History of Staffordshire,* XIV (1893), p. 230. The most prominent Blount from this period was undoubtedly Sir Walter Blount of Sodington (d.1403), who served in the retinue of the Black Prince and then John of Gaunt, before serving as Henry IV's standard bearer. Walter Blount is a prominent character in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1,* with Shakespeare, writing in the late sixteenth century, emphasising Blount's service as that owed directly to the king, rather than his retinue service due to Henry as the heir of Blount's previous patron, John of Gaunt (see Vimala C. Pasupathi, 'Coats And conduct: the materials of military obligation in Shakespeare's Henry IV and Henry V' in *Modern Philology, 109* (2012), pp. 326-351).

[13]*Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, vol 17: Henry VI 1437-1445,* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1937), p. 283.

[14]Ian Rowney, 'The Staffordshire Political Community' (Keele University, PhD thesis, 1981), p.88; *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, Vol 6: Henry VI 1452-61,* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1910), p. 532, p. 539.

[15]*Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, vol 19: Henry VI 1452-1461,* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939), p. 289; *Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, vol 20: Edward IV and Henry VI 1461-1471,* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), p. 9.

where he was knighted by Edward IV. His home of Kinlet in Shropshire was within the sphere of influence of the earldom of March, which was held by Edward IV, with the neighbouring manors of Earnwood and Highley actually held by the Yorkist king from before his accession, who also leased land to Humphrey. As such, Humphrey's ties both of local loyalty and kinship were to the Yorkist side and it is therefore remarkable that he was ever a member of a Lancastrian retinue. Pertinently, on his tomb Humphrey was portrayed wearing a Yorkist sun and rose collar as a tangible demonstration of his loyalties: his career demonstrates that local concerns and loyalties could potentially override loyalty to a lord's retinue. This can also be seen in the career of his cousin, James Blount, who entered into an indenture with Lord Hastings on 12 December 1474, promising to be retained for the duration of his life. This included military service, since he vowed to be 'at all times be ready to go and ride with the said lord whensoever he shall thereto be required with the land with all such men as he may make at the cost and charge of the said lord'. However, as with Humphrey, family and personal ties could impact on retaining. In his indenture, James promised Hastings that he would 'be his true and faithful servant and to do him true service during his life, and his part take against all earthly creatures, his ligeance to the Lord Mountjoy, his nephew, when he cometh of full age, except'.[16] His loyalty to the head of his family was still paramount.

While Humphrey Blount's military service made up a comparatively small proportion of his adult life, it was central to his self-image: he owed his knighthood to his service in battle, he was depicted on his tomb in Kinlet Church in armour, while his most significant personal bequests in his will of 1477 were his two best swords.[17] In this, he was far from unusual, with a high proportion of surviving late medieval tomb effigies depicting men in armour. Indeed, Humphrey's neighbour, Sir Richard Croft, whose daughter married Humphrey's heir in the 1470s, was similarly depicted in the chapel at Croft Castle in Hereford. He, too, was primarily a holder of local office, including serving as Edward IV's general receiver for the earldom of March in Hereford and Shropshire and as treasurer of Richard III and Henry VII's households.[18] His time in the field was limited, although the early sixteenth century Hall's Chronicle claimed he was responsible for the capture of the Lancastrian Prince of Wales on the field at Tewkesbury.[19] He also served, along with his son-in-law, Sir Thomas Blount, in the Battle of Stoke in 1487, with Croft created a knight banneret on the field and Thomas Blount knighted. For Sir Humphrey Blount and Sir Richard Croft, their military service,

[16]Dunham, 'Lord Hastings', pp. 126-127.
[17]Bodleian Library MS Blakeway 22, f. 25.
[18]H. Southern and N.H. Nicolas, 'Biographical Memoirs of Sir James Croft, Privy Counsellor and Comptroller of the Household of Queen Elizabeth', *The Retrospective Review*, second series, 1 (1827), p. 472.
[19]Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle,* (London: J. Johnson *et al*, 1809), p. 301.

although only of very limited duration, was highly important to the ways in which they viewed themselves, as well as an important route to local and national office.

That service in a late medieval retinue was not always primarily military in character can be seen with Sir Hugh Peshall, father of Katherine Blount (Sir Thomas Blount of Kinlet's daughter-in-law), and his brother-in-law, Sir Humphrey Stanley. Hugh entered into an indenture with Lord Hastings on 28 April 1479, promising to be retained for life, as well as to do service 'at all times when he shall be required with as many persons defensibly arrayed as he can or may make or assemble, at the cost and expense of the foresaid lord'.[20] The retainer system in which these men were involved can be viewed in terms of a patron-client relationship, rather than one strictly connected with the need to raise and maintain troops. This can be seen from the fact that when a retainer relationship ended, such as with the execution of Lord Hastings in 1483, the retainers often sought other patrons. Hugh Peshall and Humphrey Stanley moved first to serve the Duke of Buckingham following their lord's execution in 1483.[21] Hugh's father, Humphrey Peshall, was already in Buckingham's service, being the Duke's 'trusty servant' who rode to York to meet secretly with the future Richard III following Edward IV's death, and assured him of his support.[22] Hugh Peshall and Humphrey Stanley later joined the retinue of their kinsman, Lord Stanley. Clearly, it was desirable to be in a nobleman's retinue in the period and such relationships can also be characterised as those of patrons and clients, with service required both in peace and war. The relationship was, however, mostly characterised and conceived of in military terms.

Although the Tudor monarchs viewed retaining unfavourably at times, it is acknowledged by historians that retainership continued – to some extent – into the late Elizabethan period, albeit that retinues declined in importance as a means by which troops were raised.[23] The Blounts support this, with clear evidence that they continued to be retained during the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII. Humphrey Blount of Sodington, for example, served the third Duke of Buckingham. There were many facets to his role in Buckingham's service, including display and to provide military service if required.[24] A similar retainer relationship can be observed between

[20]Dunham, 'Lord Hastings', p. 131.
[21]C.L. Kingsford, *The Stonor Letters and Papers,* vol 2, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1919), p. 161.
[22]John Stow, *Annals or General Chronicle of England* (London, 1615), p. 460.
[23] J. P. Cooper, 'Retainers in Tudor England', in J.P. Cooper (ed.), *Land, Men, and Beliefs: Studies in Early-Modern History,* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), pp. 78-96; Gunn, *The English People at War,* p. 56.
[24]'Extracts from the Household Book of Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham', *Archaeologia,* 25 (1834), p. 319, p. 322, p. 339.

Robert Blount of Eckington (the fifth son of Sir Thomas Blount of Kinlet), who entered the service of the fourth of Earl of Shrewsbury before 1536.[25] He later transferred his loyalties to the fifth and sixth earls respectively.[26] While primarily an administrative official, he was also called upon to provide military service, for example serving in the earl's army in Scotland in 1548.[27] In this, the role appears similar to the late medieval retainers of Lord Hastings, for example, with retainers serving both in peace and war.[28]

Blount Family Retinues

Blounts and their wider kin also maintained their own retinues. In 1477, Hugh Peshall (father of Katherine Blount) was brought before the Justices of the Peace at Ludlow, charged with giving liveries to fourteen lower status men of two Shropshire parishes in an attempt to retain them on 10 August 1476.[29] Due to a statute of 1390 which limited retaining to noblemen such retaining was illegal, but very common. Both Hugh and his brother-in-law, Sir Humphrey Stanley, brought retinues to Bosworth Field in August 1485 when they were sent by Lord Stanley to shore up the vanguard of Henry Tudor's army.[30] Hugh certainly retained men in peacetime. In 1466, for example, the Countess of Shrewsbury accused him of 'collecting together a great body of malefactors and disturbers of the peace, and breaking into her closes and houses at Whitchurch and Blakemere, and so threatening her servants and tenants that for fear of their lives they were unable to attend to their business or perform their duties to her'.[31] In 1477, Hugh led seventy-two others in an attack on the house of Sir William Young, in which Young's servants were severely beaten. Later that same year both Hugh and his father, Humphrey Peshall, were accused in Star Chamber of leading

[25]Ibid., p. 459.

[26]*Historical Manuscripts Commission: Report on the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Bath Preserved at Longleat: vol 4: Seymour Papers 1532-1686,* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1968), pp. 69-70.

[27]*Calendar of State Papers, Scotland,* vol 1, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh: HM General Register House, 1898), p. 318.

[28]The National Archives (hereinafter TNA) C 1/1307/23; *Historical Manuscripts Commission: The Manuscripts of the Duke of Rutland, K.G., Preserved at Belvoir Castle,* vol 1, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1888), p. 108; 'A Calendar of the Shrewsbury Papers in the Lambeth Palace Library', ed. E.G.W. Bill, *Derbyshire Archaeological Society Record Series,* 1 (1966), MS.705, f. 91v.

[29]Dunham, 'Lord Hastings', p. 146.

[30]'Ballad of Bosworth Field' in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, Ballads and Romances,* vol III, ed. J.W. Hales and F.J. Furnivall, (London: N. Trubner & Co, 1868).

[31]George Wrottesley, ed., 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls, 34 Henry VI to 14 Edw IV, inclusive', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire,* New Series, 4 (1901), p. 138.

twenty men to attack one Richard Berell at Gnossall in Staffordshire.[32] Hugh evidently did keep a group of men ready to serve him in peace and war, with these groups looking little different from the sixteenth-century evidence of retaining by the family.

Both Sir Thomas Blount of Kinlet and his eldest son, John Blount, who married Hugh Peshall's daughter, served as captains in the retinue of the Earl of Shrewsbury in France in 1513 and were each in charge of 98 men.[33] Of his 98 men, Thomas had personally supplied twelve who were part of his personal retinue and whom he mustered in response to letters sent by the king.[34] There is clear evidence that Sir Thomas Blount employed retainers both in times of peace and war. In 1522, a military survey was conducted in order to make assessments for the forced loans to finance war in France. Survivals are patchy, although those for part of Worcestershire, where Thomas was a very minor landowner, do exist.[35] In these, 87 retainers were listed, with 77 of those retained by the Marquess of Dorset and two archers and three billmen retained by Sir Thomas Blount.[36] Based only on a tiny sample of Thomas Blount's lands in 1522, it is clear that he had the ability to raise a military force through the retainer system. There was nothing unusual in this. In a letter to Thomas Cromwell dating to the late 1520s, Thomas Blount's son, Sir John Blount of Kinlet, makes it clear that Sir William Compton, the recently deceased patron of his estranged younger brother, Edward, had maintained a local retinue.[37] According to John, Compton had imprisoned thirty of his servants, while, when he attempted to secure their release, he found that, 'I can have no favour be reyson of my brether and other that were master Comptons servants also here'[38]. Both men's 'servants' look very like retinues as would be understood in a medieval sense of the word, with the men ready to serve their lords in war.

There are many other examples in the Blount family. In 1543 Thomas Blount of Sodington was accused in Star Chamber of arraying twelve men 'lyk men of warr' during a dispute over common land in the manor of Sillingford, with his opponent, Thomas Meysey, arriving with nine or ten men of his own.[39] In a separate matter, Sir

[32]Beverley Murphy, 'The Life and Political Significance of Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, 1525-1536' (University of Wales, Bangor, PhD thesis, 1997), p. 30.
[33]TNA SP1/231, f. 215.
[34]TNA SP1/2, f. 127; TNA SP1/229, f. 53.
[35]Michael Faraday (ed.), 'Worcestershire Taxes in the 1520s: The Military Survey and Forced Loans of 1522-3 and the Lay Subsidy of 1524-7', ed. Michael Faraday, *Worcestershire Historical Society,* New Series, 19 (2003).
[36]Ibid., f. 32, f. 53.
[37]TNA SP1/68, f. 116.
[38]Ibid.
[39]TNA STAC2/20/370; TNA STAC2/24/101; TNA STAC10/4/32.

George Blount also expressed himself in military terms, complaining that Thomas Meysey's men had entered the Forest of Wyre, of which he was steward, and 'hunted within the said forest in warlike manner', acting, after killing a deer, 'as yf they had trewlie gotten and won a greate victorie and upper hande' shooting their arrows in the air in a celebration, something that was 'visible to the greate terror and fere of all the country'.[40] George's uncle, Walter, described a similar event in 1557 when he claimed that, as keeper of Bewdley Park, he had been assaulted by Sir Robert Acton and twenty of his men 'beinge arraigned in manner of warre'.[41] While violence in Star Chamber proceedings must be treated with caution since allegations of violence were a requirement to list a matter in the court, the idea that members of the gentry could muster forces of local men was clearly considered probable. It is difficult to see any distinction between these peacetime servants and the retainers that the men could muster for war.

Court records also provide information on the way that men were enlisted to accompany Sir George Blount of Kinlet on Henry VIII's Boulogne campaign in 1545 and the Duke of Somerset's war in Scotland in 1547. In one Star Chamber case, it was recalled that Thomas Southall, one of George's tenants at Kinlet, had served under him in both these campaigns 'and none of all the lordship went at that tyme but onlie he'.[42] During Kett's Rebellion in 1549, Southall and his brother instead hired a mercenary 'of their owne cost and charge to go with the said Sir George to Norwich', with this recalled as being at their 'proper costs and charge'. The Southall brothers' recruitment of a mercenary to serve with George during Kett's Rebellion in their stead demonstrates just how real the obligations of retainership had remained. It is clear that, in relation to the Blounts at least, some level of retaining continued until well into the sixteenth century.

The Growth of the Militia

The militia had always been a means by which kings could raise troops, with writs surviving from the late thirteenth century for Staffordshire and Shropshire, for example.[43] Sir John Blount of Sodington was appointed commissioner of array in Worcestershire by the king in September 1403, for example, to muster men to fight in Wales.[44] As leaders of the local community, members of the Blount family were frequently employed to raise militia troops in the Tudor period too. In 1539, Walter

[40]TNA STAC5/B5/3.
[41]TNA STAC4/4/54.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Wrottesley, 'An account of the military service performed by Staffordshire tenants in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', p. 10, p. 11.
[44]J.T. Driver, 'Worcestershire Knights of the Shire', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 3rd series vol 4 (1974), p. 29.

Blount of Uttoxeter, was one of the commissioners appointed to muster 'all and singular men at arms and armed men capable for arms, as well archers as other men, horse and foot, above the age of sixteen years, resident in the several places within the County of Stafford'.[45] Walter Blount of Astley was similarly appointed for Halfshire Hundred in Worcestershire and his Blount of Sodington cousins for Doddingtree Hundred, with both men resident in the hundreds in which they were appointed.[46]

The 1542 muster returns for Grendon Warren, Marston and Grendon Bishop in Herefordshire show a community headed by the elderly Sir John Blount of Grendon.[47] He was found to possess horse and harness for two men, while his parish included eleven men suitable to serve as billmen and four as archers.[48] In total, the parish possessed three additional pairs of harnesses, one breastplate, one set of archer's equipment and a bow, four sallet helmets, four bills, three pairs of splints and one horse – far from sufficient to furnish the men that the parish could raise. Musters for other Shropshire hundreds also show a similar reliance on archers and billmen, with inadequate equipment in many cases.[49] The position had improved in Shropshire by 1580, although the weaponry recorded were still inadequate. For Stottesdon Hundred, for example, in 1580, there were only 55 pikes, 33 bills, 32 bows and 2 guns, in spite of the fact that there were 250 men able to fight.[50] While this inadequacy of weaponry, which was nationwide and first noted by the government in 1522, has been suggested as encouraging the monarch to enforce the statutory provisions more rigorously, there is little evidence of this from the examples above.[51] Instead, where there is significant evidence of weaponry is in the hands of the local gentry. Legal cases concerning the Blounts from the 1540s onwards make it clear that both they and their gentry neighbours possessed significant armaments, with which they equipped their

[45]'The Muster Roll of Staffordshire of AD 1539 (Offlow Hundred), ed. W. Boyd, *Collections for a History of Staffordshire,* New Series, 4 (1901), p. 215.
[46]TNA SP1/146, f. 1.
[47]Wrottesley, 'Military service performed by Staffordshire tenants during the reign of Richard II', p. 243.
[48]*The Herefordshire Musters of 1539 and 1542,* ed. Michael Faraday (Independently Published, 2012), pp. 164-165.
[49]'Muster Rolls of the Hundreds of Bradford, Munslow, &c., AD 1532-1540', ed. C.H. Drinkwater, *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society,* 3rd series, 8 (1908), pp. 245-286.
[50]'A Particular Certificate for the Countie of Salop, 1580' in W. Phillips (ed.), 'Papers relating to the trained soldiers of Shropshire in the reign of Queen Elizabeth', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society,* 2nd Series, 2 (1890), pp. 215-294.
[51]Goring, 'Military Obligations', p. 22.

servants.[52] Given their importance in the militia musters, it seems highly likely that the Blounts, and other, similar gentry families, would be called upon to also provide armaments, This has been identified by Lois Schwoerer in her work on early modern gun culture in England, noting significant overlap in gun ownership for military and civilian purposes, with the local gentry commonly the means through which lower status individuals became familiar with firearms.[53] Such private armouries, as identified in legal cases relating the Blount family, would have been essential to the militia, demonstrating that the compliance of the local gentry in the raising and equipping of the militia was essential.[54]

The importance of the local gentry can also be seen in the evidence of militia musters. On 27 June 1563, faced with conflict with France, Elizabeth I sent a letter to the Justices of the Peace in Shropshire (who included Sir George Blount of Kinlet), requiring them to carry out a muster to raise 500 soldiers.[55] The Justices were required to choose only 'the most ableste men for servyce', as well as ensuring 'that sume of the best yn degree, yn that shyre, being no barons, and yet mete to take charge of men, may be ordered to be the capteynes and conductors of the same'. George, along with four other men, levied 122 troops in four of the hundreds, with 39 of these coming from Stottesdon Hundred, where Kinlet is situated. As well as supplying men, the commissioners were also required to arm them at the county's expense, with 30 shillings to be raised for each man from the towns of the shire.[56] Although the monarch ordered the raising of the militia, the administration took place at a local level, with the county gentry particularly involved. In 1596, for example, the Justices for Staffordshire, of whom Sir Christopher Blount of Kidderminster was one, were ordered to muster men at Lichfield on 5 April 1596.[57] Indeed, it was usual for militia captains to be tasked with raising men from the areas in which they held their lands.[58] Christopher Blount, for example, was sent to raise troops in Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire for an expedition to Cadiz in March 1596, with it intended that he would lead the men recruited in these

[52]TNA STAC3/3/37; TNA STAC2/20/370; TNA STAC2/27/68; TNA STAC5/B5/3; TNA STAC2/17/220; TNA STAC4/4/54; TNA STAC4/5/47.
[53]Lois G. Schwoerer, *Gun Culture in Early Modern England,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 3, p. 76, p. 80.
[54]Younger, *War and Politics,* p. 138.
[55]Phillips, 'Trained soldiers of Shropshire', p. 230.
[56]'A Particular Certificate for the County of Salop, 1580' in Phillips, 'Trained soldiers of Shropshire'.
[57]'The Staffordshire Quarter Session Rolls Vol III 1594-1597', ed. S.A.H. Burne, *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (1933), p. 156.
[58]Goring, 'Military Obligations', p. 59.

counties in which he and his family held lands.[59] It is clear that local patronage networks were taken into account, even when the instructions were addressed to the militia.

The Blount family's association with the more prominent Dudley family also illuminates the nuanced way in which troops were raised in the late sixteenth century. The families were very distantly related, with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, who shared a great-great-grandmother with Thomas Blount of Kidderminster referring to him in correspondence as 'Cousin Blount', while Sir George Blount of Kinlet served as an executor to Leicester's mother's will.[60] Blounts served the Dudleys as senior household servants, including Thomas Blount of Kidderminster, who acted as the Comptroller of the Household of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland.[61] He later became the Earl of Leicester's principal administrative officer, who was trusted enough to be appointed to investigate the suspicious death of his patron's wife in 1560.[62] While the majority of this patronage was centred on everyday affairs, there was a strong military element to the service which very closely resembles the retinue service of earlier Blounts. This can be seen in the late sixteenth-century conflict in the Netherlands which, although Elizabeth I offered little direct support, saw the involvement of a number of Protestant English noblemen.[63] While religion was likely

[59]*Acts of the Privy Council of England, vol 25, 1595-1596,* ed. John Roche Dasent, (London, 1901) [hereafter *APC* 25], p. 323.

[60]TNA PROB 11/37/342.

[61]Gilbert Blount of Kidderminster and Humphrey Blount received Leicester's livery in 1567-8, with Humphrey also attending the earl's funeral in 1588. John Blount of Warwick (a Kidderminster Blount) served Leicester by August 1585. Sir George Blount of Kinlet was probably a member of Leicester's household in 1558-9 when he was twice entrusted by Dudley to make payments on his behalf. His nephew, George Blount of Bewdley, appears in Leicester's accounts for 1558-9, probably as a minor household official. (*Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, 1558-1561, 1584-1586,* ed. Simon Adams, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 50, p. 53, p. 77, pp. 82-83, p. 105, p. 299, pp. 419-420, p. 426, p. 427, p. 454). Sir George Blount of Kinlet was known to be close to the Earl of Warwick (TNA SP15/20); *Acts of the Privy Council of England, vol 4, 1552-1554,* ed. John Roche Dasent, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1892), p. 324, p. 342.

[62]Simon Adams, *Leicester and the Court,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 157; *Court Rolls of Romsley 1279-1643,* ed. M. Tompkins (Worcester: Worcestershire Historical Society, 2017), p.677; Adams, *Household Accounts*, 464; George Adlard, *Amye Robsart and the Earl of Leycester,* (Teddington: Wildhern Press, 2007), p. 32.

[63]David Trim, 'Fighting 'Jacob's Wars' The Employment of English and Welsh Mercenaries in the European Wars of Religion: France and the Netherlands, 1562-1610', (King's College London, PhD thesis, 2002), pp. 28-29.

one of the motivating factors in Leicester's involvement in the Netherlands, he did not specifically seek out troops desirous to serve for religious reasons, instead using the retinue system to raise the bulk of his troops. As he wrote himself to the Queen's councillor, Sir Francis Walsingham,

> uppon hir first order geven, both from hir self and also confirmed further by your letters by hir majesties commandment, I dyspached, between Thursday night and yesternight iiij a clocke, above 200 lettres to my servaunts, and sondry my frends, to prepare themselves, according to the order I had my self, with all the spede they could possible, to serve hir majestie, under me, in the Low Countreys.[64]

He had a substantial body of men to call upon, with the leases of Leicester's tenants on his Denbighshire estates, for example, requiring them to serve with him 'in tyme of warre'.[65] He also equipped his soldiers, writing to Walsingham in late September 1586 that he had purchased armour and steel saddles 'as many as must cost me a good pece of money'.[66] The personal nature of the service is clear from a subsequent letter, when Leicester considered that

> I hope, sir, I may have that I made you acquainted with v or vi c [500 or 600] of my owne tenauntes, whom I wyll make as good reconing of as of 1000 of any that as yet gonn over, and no way to increase hir majesties chardges'.[67]

The Earl of Leicester was a staunch Protestant and a number of his Puritan friends regarded the expedition as 'a crusade for the Gospel'.[68] However, there is no indication that Leicester's retinue had any choice about where they served, since the earl had a diverse range of contacts. Indeed, Sir Edward Blount of Kidderminster, who sailed with him in late 1585 was openly Catholic.[69] Leicester was not able to raise all his men through the retinue system, asking in December 1585 for 600 or 700 men from the militia England 'to fill up our bands', although a sizeable proportion of his men were drawn from his relatives and tenants.[70]

---

[64]*Correspondence of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leycester, During his Government of the Low Countries, in the Years 1585 and 1586,* ed. John Bruce, (London: Camden Society, 1844), p. 5.
[65]*Transactions of the Denbighshire History Society,* 24 (1975), p. 206.
[66]Ibid., p. 6.
[67]Bruce, *Correspondence of Robert Dudley,* pp. 10-11.
[68]Adams, *Leicester and the Court,* p. 176.
[69]R.C. Strong and J.A. Van Dorsten, *Leicester's Triumph,* (Leiden: Sir Thomas Browne Institute, 1962), p. 110.
[70]Bruce, *Correspondence of Robert Dudley,* p. 27.

The service of Sir Christopher Blount of Kidderminster, who arrived in the Netherlands with Leicester and served on more than one Dutch campaign, can be viewed through the prism of his social ties with his patron. Christopher distinguished himself in the Netherlands, leading his own horse-band by 1587, for example, and saving the life of Sir Francis Vere at the Battle of Zutphen in September 1586.[71] He was notably brave, as his desire in the summer of 1588 to be 'placed very near the enemy' attests, while he also led the doomed defence of Rheinberg with his friend, Captain Shirley.[72] However, in spite of these personal successes, he remained firmly within Leicester's patronage networks even after his patron returned to England. In June 1588, for example, he wrote to Leicester's brother, Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, requesting funds to pay his troops – suggesting again the retinue nature of at least part of the army.[73] As late as July 1588 he was describing himself as 'captain of the Earl of Leicester's company', in spite of the fact that his troops by that stage were mostly Dutch.[74] Only a few months before, Christopher and Captain Anthony Shirley, had petitioned Leicester's lieutenant in the Netherlands for an English company which had previously been offered to the Dutch by its Captain.[75] Leicester continued to rely on Christopher's reports from the Netherlands, with the Earl relaying 'the advice of Mr Digges and Mr Christopher Blunt' to Lord Burghley regarding the Netherlands on 18 October 1587.[76]

Leicester himself considered that he still had a responsibility towards Christopher. From England on 12 June 1588, he wrote to the new English commander, Lord Willoughby to 'thank you for the favour you doe continually show to my friends there and specially to my servant Capt. Blount', indicating the degree of favour in which Christopher was held and that he was considered one of Leicester's 'friends' (i.e. clients).[77] Leicester acknowledged that the loyalty these men owed him as patron was superior to that which they owed to Willoughby as their military commander, with the Earl including in his letter the assurance that

> I doe protest and assure your lordship that longer than they shall behave themselves to you in all commandments and duty as they would toward my self

[71]TNA SP84/31, f.189; Cyril Falls, *Mountjoy: Elizabethan General,* (London: Odhams Press, 1955), p. 28.
[72]*Manuscripts of the Earl of Ancaster*, p. 136.
[73]Ibid., p. 154.
[74]Ibid., p. 121.
[75]*Calendar of State Papers, Foreign: Elizabeth, vol 22, July-December 1588,* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), p. 22, p. 30.
[76]Ibid., p. 247.
[77]TNA SP84/24, f. 108.

> if I move them: I will neither speake to your lordship for them nor think well of any them then.[78]

That same month Christopher referred to himself in a letter to Leicester as 'a man that was known to be yours', something which had caused him political difficulties in the Netherlands.[79] Christopher was anxious to retain his patron's favour, arguing that everything that he had done contrary to Willoughby's instructions were 'in performing but my duty to you: when you bethink yourself of a more convenient means to conserve your honour amongst these people, then that which your honour gave me in my instructions at my going away'. His loyalty to Leicester was his primary one, causing him to disobey the orders of the queen's commander in the Netherlands if they proved contradictory.

There were considerable tensions when Willoughby first arrived in the Netherlands and attempted to assert his control over Leicester's men, due to the existing patronage networks. In September 1588, shortly after the Earl's death, Christopher wrote to Willoughby to apologise for 'my untowardly corse taken with you at my first entry into thes partes', which he assured him was down only to a direction from 'him whom I felt myself most affected unto [i.e., Leicester]'.[80] It was only with Leicester's death that he felt able to commit himself to Willoughby. This was almost certainly caused by the loss of Leicester's patronage and Christopher's need to establish a new patronage network to support his position in the Netherlands. As late as December 1588, there was still a dispute over who was liable to pay Christopher's company.[81] By March 1589 his horse-band had been discharged.[82] He returned to England and evidently hoped to return to the Netherlands that summer but, by July his service abroad was expressly ruled out, with Lord Burghley writing in his rough notes that 'Sir Christopher Blount is not to go'.[83] His lack of ability to find a place in the army in the Netherlands after 1588 may be linked to the death of the Earl of Leicester. Leicester's followers would naturally transfer their loyalties to his stepson, the Earl of Essex, who was effectively his political heir, although in Christopher's case this continuing patronage was by no means guaranteed due to his scandalous union with Leicester's widow, a marriage which his new stepson, Essex, considered to be an 'unhappy choyse' and 'ill match'.[84]

---

[78]Ibid.
[79]BL Cotton Galba D/III, f. 199.
[80]*Manuscripts of the Earl of Ancaster,* p. 226.
[81]Ibid., p. 233.
[82]TNA SP84/31, f. 121.
[83]TNA SP84/33, f. 159.
[84]BL Lansdowne MS 62, f. 78.

In spite of this, Christopher Blount was able to rapidly transfer his service to his new stepson, with the importance of the military service he owed to Essex evident in his service in Ireland, which was to become the major conflict of Elizabeth's reign. By January 1599 it had been decided that the Earl of Essex (who had volunteered to do so) would serve in Ireland, with it widely recognised that he would recruit his officers through his patronage networks, with these men drawn from his 'followers' or 'creatures' as some contemporaries put it. Given the scale of the Earl of Tyrone's rebellion in Ireland, which had, as its central aim, the restoration of Catholicism, the English requirements for new recruits were massive, with 1300 footmen sent over in early 1590, for example and the queen expending £29,700 a year towards her army there by February 1591.[85] As a result, recruitment for the Irish wars used a range of systems including the militia, retinues and conscription, with Essex's troops – below the ranks of officers – largely raised through the militia system, as previous armies for Ireland in the 1590s had also been recruited.[86] Given the sheer demand for troops, this is unsurprising. Essex required 17,000 men at an estimated cost of more than £277,782 a year, with only the militia in any way capable of supplying such a huge number of men.[87] While Essex's troops were primarily raised from the county militias, there was some conflict as to whom, exactly, they were serving, with the queen paying them, but Essex commanding them.[88] This uncertainty was probably largely due to the fact that, while the militia supplied the troops, the commanders were largely drawn from Essex's retinue, as the case of Sir Christopher Blount shows, while he was also criticised for making 59 knights in Ireland by August 1599, something that was probably a way in which he was able to further bind his troops to him.[89]

[85]Dudley Edwards, *Church and State in Tudor Ireland,* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1935), pp. 282-283; Cyril Falls, *Elizabeth's Irish Wars,* (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 1985, p. 16; John McGurk, 'The Recruitment and Transportation of Elizabethan Troops and their Service in Ireland, 1594-1603', (University of Liverpool, PhD thesis, 1982), p. 5; McGurk, *Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland,* p. 21; Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's Rebellion,* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), p. 215; Rory Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 146; *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts, Preserved in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth 1589-1600,* vol 3*,* eds. J.S.Brewer and William Bullen (eds.), (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1869)*,* p. 71, p. 107.

[86]Fissel, *English Warfare,* p. 89; McGurk, *Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland,* p. 30.

[87]*Carew Manuscripts,* 292; McGurk, *Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland,* p. 262.

[88]*Letters by John Chamberlain,* ed. Williams, XX.

[89]Ibid., XXIV.

Christopher Blount, on hearing of Essex's appointment, wrote to him to offer the use of 'my sword (which is ever at your command)'.[90] As the inheritor of Leicester's patronage networks, it is unsurprising that Essex also inherited Christopher's loyalty, particularly with the additional family tie of Christopher's marriage to his mother. Christopher frequently served with Essex, for example commanding a regiment of 1000 men as colonel during his stepson's expedition to Cadiz in 1596.[91] It was also Essex who arranged his appointment in March 1599 as a marshal of the queen's army in Ireland although, at the same time, Elizabeth refused the Earl's request to make Christopher a member of the Council of Ireland, with it clear that Christopher – whom the queen disliked – was present in Ireland only at Essex's behest. Christopher Blount was, in any event, injured during the first months of the campaign and spent much of his time recuperating in Dublin.[92]

Unsurprisingly, given the dominance of the conflict in Ireland in the 1590s, other members of the Blount family were also involved in the army there. In August 1598 the Catholic Richard Blount of Mapledurham in Oxfordshire was reported to the Privy Council for refusing to supply funds for horses to be sent to Ireland.[93] This could be due more to a disinclination to make a financial contribution in this way, but religious objections are worth exploring. Certainly, the religion of Christopher Blount's brother, Sir Edward Blount of Kidderminster, proved a major problem when he sailed for Ireland with his cousin, Lord Mountjoy, when he was appointed as Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1599.[94] Robert Cecil evidently objected to the appointment, since Mountjoy wrote in February 1600 to assure him that Edward came only to oversee his 'domestical affairs', something which suggests that he was considered not to be appropriate to join the army there, while he also attempted to defend his character, while confessing that he was 'I think, somewhat affected to the other religion'.[95] In

[90]Ibid., XXIV; *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, vol 14: Addenda,* ed. E. Salisbury (London, 1923), p. 84.
[91]*APC* 25, pp. 351-352; *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, vol 6, 1596,* ed. R.A. Roberts, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1895), p. 361; *CSP, Domestic: Elizabeth, 1595-1597*, p. 104.
[92]*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1599-1600,* ed. Ernest George Atkinson, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1899) [hereafter *CSP, Ireland, 1599-1600],* p. 68, p. 140.
[93]*Acts of the Privy Council of England, vol 29, 1598-1599,* ed. John Roche Dasent, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1905), p. 29.
[94]*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1600,* ed. Ernest George Atkinson, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1903) [hereafter *CSP, Ireland, 1600]*, p. 91; Falls, *Mountjoy*, p. 236; F.M. Jones, *Mountjoy 1563-1606: The Last Elizabethan Deputy,* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1988), p. 87.
[95]*CSP, Ireland,1599-1600*, p. 128.

April, Mountjoy wrote again to Cecil, defending his cousin as 'a true, honest man, a good fellow [i.e. good man] papist, and as I think as much or more my friend than he is to any'.[96] In the face of government pressure, Mountjoy returned Edward to England later that month.[97] This hostility towards English Catholics going to Ireland can be understood within the context of the Irish rebels' links to Spain, while military identities within Ireland were themselves complex.[98] There clearly was concern in the English government about sending Catholics to Ireland, while Catholics themselves may also not have wished to support this war. However, the fact that Lord Mountjoy was prepared to take Sir Edward Blount and so vocally vouch for him makes it clear that the loyalty that existed between a patron and client or, to use terminology more usually applied to the medieval period, the retainer and the retained, could override religious loyalties.

Conclusion

War was central to the lives of the late medieval and early modern gentry: both as part of their self-image and in the reality of the regular demands for troops. Even in the face of Elizabeth I's perennial reluctance to go to war, the military pervaded society at all levels, regardless of the relative rarity in which gentry, like the Blounts, actually served. There were many reasons why a man might go to war – not least because his patron decreed that he should. The medieval indenture system, as used by Lord Hastings in relation to Hugh Peshall, made it clear that the retainer was expected to follow their lord when required. Similarly, when the Earl of Leicester sent out his letters to his 200 'servants' and 'friends' to ask them to ready themselves to serve with him in 1585, he did not ask for their consent to the motives behind his action. He expected them to obey his summons as, indeed, it appears that they did.

As members of the country gentry, the Blounts were both patrons and clients in the Tudor period, and retainers and the retained in the medieval period. There was a strong resemblance between these roles. While the sixteenth century saw considerable change in the way that such relationships functioned – with the monarch, in particular, able to establish direct links to the country gentry in some cases - the requirements for retinue service remained in place. The majority of the service offered by a retainer in the medieval period and the sixteenth century was in relation to everyday life, but the military element remained a key one in the relationship between the patron and client, as can be seen in relation to the Blounts. Even with the increasing

[96] *CSP, Ireland 1600*, p. 91.
[97] Ibid,, p. 105.
[98] Ruth A. Canning, "Trust, desert, power and skill to serve': the Old English and military identities in late Elizabethan Ireland' in Matthew Woodcock and Cian O'Mahony, eds., *Early Modern Military Identities, 1560-1639,* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019), pp. 138-157.

use of the militia in the sixteenth century, such ties of patronage or retinue remained important, with militia captains frequently drawing their troops from within their spheres of interest and, ultimately, serving a lord to whom they had a patronage relationship. At the same time, the Blounts show that patronage could be a stronger motivation for going to war than religion, as the involvement of family members in the conflicts in the Netherlands and Ireland attest. While the Blounts were just one family, a detailed analysis of their military service in the late sixteenth century can help add to historians' understanding of the often complex motivations that a man might have for going to war in the period. While statute and a desire to serve an increasingly centralised state might play a part, there were often stronger ties – of family, location or religion – that could override or inform their service, just as their ancestors had done in the centuries that preceded them.