

SIR WILLIAM RUFFUS OF WALSALL AND HIS FAMILY

by Dorothea Rowse¹

ABSTRACT

This article is based on a long-term study of families and individuals using the surname Ruffus or Rous, who lived in England during the 12th to 14th centuries. The study has identified a number of discrete regional and county groupings, of which the family living in the west Midlands was one of the most energetic. Their marriages and careers brought them into contact with similar families and these linkages demonstrate some of the early stages in the formation of the gentry during the 13th century. This article highlights the careers and family connexions of this Ruffus family group.

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One of the most colourful of the Ruffus families in 12th and 13th century England was that of the family of Sir Herbert Ruffus. He acquired land in Staffordshire and Warwickshire but it is clear that the family probably lived much of the year away from these two manors since their social circle appears to have been based in north Nottinghamshire - at Grove, East Retford, Rampton and Eaton in Nottinghamshire, with contacts across the county border to Reepham and Lea. His grandson Sir William Ruffus lived through the turbulent first half of the 13th century and played an active part in the politics of England and the counties in which he lived. However, his career and reputation have slipped into obscurity, a fate which has befallen a number of men of that period. In this article I provide details of his ancestry, his career, his family and connexions.²

SIR WILLIAM'S ANCESTORS

Sir William was the grandson of Herbert Ruffus, one of Henry II's personal servants during the 1150s³. Herbert was possibly a member of one of the families called Ruffus, who had settled in Lincolnshire as servants of the Bishop of Lincoln by Domesday. By the middle of the 12th century they were occupying positions in the Lincolnshire church as well as holding modest acreages of land and the occasional knight's fee. In 1159 the King rewarded Herbert's service with the grant of the manor of Walsall⁴. He also acquired a half knight's fee, associated with land at Caldecote in north Warwickshire, held of the Bishop of Coventry (Hall, 1896, p.263). Archaeological evidence suggests that Herbert did little to develop the property at Walsall since substantial dwellings on the manor date from his grandson's time or later. Herbert left the King's service in about 1166 and possibly organised his

¹ Dorothea Rowse is a retired academic librarian living in Melbourne, Australia who is researching the Ruffus and Rous families of 12th and 13th century England.
Email address: derowse1@bigpond.com

² Published accounts of this family include VCH Warwickshire, Vol.4, p.40; VCH Staffordshire, Vol.17, pp.169-170; Willmore (1887, pp.50-67). The last named is particularly inaccurate.

³ Herbert was described as *meus serveus* by the King and should probably be seen as a personal servant or valet rather than a chamberlain.

⁴ Pipe Roll 55, *Carta Antiquae Rolls* 1-10, p.105.

replacement - in that year Richard Ruffus, who may have been a kinsman, joined the King's service as a very junior chamberlain⁵.

Sir Herbert had at least two, possibly three, sons to continue the family line, and they used the name Ruffus fairly consistently. He obtained a position for his younger son Richard as a chamberlain with the Duke of Saxony and it seems probable that he would have found a position for his eldest son at court. There was a man named William Ruffus who worked as chamberlain for the Queen and the young King between 1167 and 1172 and later had a military role during the young King's rebellion. He was not the William Ruffus who became a judge and Sheriff of Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, and he may have been Herbert's eldest son.

SIR WILLIAM'S FATHER

There is no document that provides the name of Sir Herbert's eldest son and his existence must be inferred from the lives of his widow and son. He was married to Margaret, the daughter of Robert and Pavia Maluvel of Rampton in north Nottinghamshire.⁶ They had two sons – William born in about 1176/77, and another, probably the older of the two, whose name is unrecorded. Sir Herbert's eldest son died in about 1176/1177 when the Sheriff took over the estate in Staffordshire and Warwickshire on behalf of his minor sons. Following his death, his widow and her sons probably remained at Rampton with her family since later events showed that William was close to his grandmother.

The marriage to Margaret Maluvel extended the Ruffus family connexions to other families in north Nottinghamshire, such as that of Pavia's sister, Isabella, who was married to Robert de Meinil, a benefactor to Blyth Priory. Pavia Maluvel was the daughter and co-heir of Nigel de Rampton, a member of a family with an extensive landholding in Nottinghamshire. Rampton had been allocated as the dower land for Gundreda Musters, the wife of Pavia's son Stephen⁷, but after his death was used by Pavia to establish the Rampton Prebend at Southwell Minster (Rastall, 1787). A dispute over the land started in the 1190s and descended into a welter of claims and counter-claims over a ten year period (*eg* CRR, 21, 2 John, p.383). In 1201/1202 William Ruffus intervened on behalf of his aged grandmother by paying the fine to hold the land until his cousin Robert Maluvel came of age a year or so later (Hardy 1835, Vol.1, p.191; CRR 5 John, 1203, p.66).

SIR WILLIAM RUFFUS, 1176 – 1247, Judge and Escheator

Sir William was born in c.1176/77 in the year of his father's death as he came of age in 1197/98. He held Walsall manor by an archery serjeanty (Hall, 1896, p.348). The pledge for the fine to take control of his estate was given by Hugh de Neville, the

⁵ He had a very successful career as the King's Chamberlain and founded an estate in Wiltshire which was inherited by his nephews.

⁶ William's mother's name appears in documents in which Margaret and her 2nd husband William FitzOdo sued her son William Ruffus for Margaret's dower lands at Caldecote when he came of age (CRR 2 John p.413). Margaret's mother's name appears in a document dated 1202 in which Pavia de Ramton, was described as William jnr's grandmother [*Pavia avia ipsi Williamus*] (Hardy, 1835, Vol.1, p.191). Thoroton (1790/97, Vol.3, p.243) indicates this in the family tree for Rampton/Maluvel but does not give the mother's name.

⁷ Gundreda was a member of the Musters family based at West Hold manor in Treswell, about a mile from Rampton.

Chief Forester from 1198.⁸ Sir William's career represented a further move up the social ladder from that of his father and grandfather. He spent most of his life in the law and there is evidence of at least one case in which he acted as attorney to a member of the de Camville family⁹. He was Forest Justice for Staffordshire in 1219 and more generally in 1229¹⁰. He served as an Assize Judge in Nottinghamshire in 1227 and 1228 and in Staffordshire between 1229 and 1232¹¹. Most importantly, he was one of the King's escheators during 1232-1233 (Vincent, 1996, p.351; Cazel, 1982).

In 1232 Peter de Rivallis was given control of the royal escheats, with the actual work being done by his deputies, William Ruffus and Bernard of Grimsby. The King was initially impressed by the improved flow of funds into his coffers. However, poor record keeping and generally lax administration left de Rivallis and his deputies open to accusations of mismanagement, fraud and corruption, and the King was obliged to intervene (Vincent, 1996, pp.353-355). During 1233 and 1234 various steps were taken to retrieve lands in the custody of Sir William Ruffus, and to force him to make appropriate repairs where needed¹². Early in 1235 he obtained a pardon from the King and although he was still in court over these debts as late as 1242, in financial terms he seems to have escaped relatively lightly¹³. This may have been due to intervention by Ralph de Neville, then Chancellor and former Dean of Lichfield, who examined the Escheators' accounts (Young, 1996).

Sir William's land holdings were more extensive than those of his father and grandfather, including the estates at Walsall and Caldecote and his wife's half share in the de Arches estate. He was certainly more interested in improving Walsall and Caldecote than his predecessors had been. At Walsall he built a house, created a large park with a herd of deer, and made efforts to encourage the development of a borough at Walsall by granting freedom from most forms of taxation (Brown, 1977). In 1220 the Crown granted William Ruffus a market and a fair in Walsall, which continued to operate into the 20th century.

In 1202/03 William married Isabella the daughter of Gilbert II de Arches and co-heir with her sister Theophania to an estate which included lands in Grove, Weston and West Retford, held of the Honour of Tickhill in Nottinghamshire (Thoroton, 1790/97, Vol.3, p.261). There were other properties at Nettleworth Manor and at Kingsmore, which may have been a farm within the manor of Eaton, just west of Grove. There are records of William and Mauveisin de Hercy, Theophania's husband, holding the de Arches fees between 1211 and 1242/3 (*eg* Hall, 1896 p.534).

William and Isabella had one surviving child, a daughter called Emecina, born in about 1203/04. The name Emecina may have been that of Herbert's wife or of Isabella's mother, neither of which is known. The name is quite rare but was used during the 12th and 13th centuries by the Cantaloupe, d'Eville and d'Oiri families, who held land in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire among other counties (Major, 1984). The Ruffus use of the name suggests contact with, if not a

⁸ Pipe Roll 46, (ns.8), 9 Richard I, p.233

⁹ CRR, 4/5 Henry III, p.319

¹⁰ CPR, 3 Henry III, p.213; CCR, 14 Henry III, p.382

¹¹ *eg* CPR, 11 Henry III, p.165; CPR, 14 Henry III, p.357

¹² CLR, 17 Henry III, 1233, p.215

¹³ CPR 19 Henry III, 1235, p.95

direct family connexion to, this group of families, who were affluent and had local influence.

Isabella seems to have died by about 1234 and Sir William made a late second marriage to Isabella de Trihampton, a member of a family based in west Lincolnshire around the villages of Lea and Gate Burton, about three miles from Rampton (Lyte, 1920-1931, p.345(a)). Her father was probably Roger de Trihampton, who granted the advowsons of the churches there to Spalding Priory in about 1195 (VCH Lincolnshire, Vol.2, pp.118-124). Sir William and the second Isabella had a daughter Margaret or Margery, born in about 1240.

William died in 1247 leaving two daughters, one almost forty years older than the other, who survived him as co-heirs. Despite his problems as an Escheator, he had had a successful legal career and his development of the estates had positioned his family socially and financially to move further up the social hierarchy – and through his grandsons this potential was partially realized.

SIR WILLIAM RUFFUS'S DAUGHTER EMECINA

Emecina was married first to Eustace Morteyn the son of Eustace Morteyn and Hillaria Salvain¹⁴. On the death of his father c.1223, he inherited a valuable estate of three fees of the Honour of Peverel in Eyam, Cossall and Wollaton, and Tilsworth. He was also heir to his mother's brother, Richard Salvain, from whom in 1227 he inherited fees in Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and Nottinghamshire (Moriarty, 1925).

Eustace and Emecina had three sons – William, born in about 1221, Roger and Robert. Eustace died on 20 February 1234 and his estate was inherited by his eldest son¹⁵. The youngest son Robert was given his mother's share of the de Arches estate at Grove shortly after his father's death as he did not have any other inheritance (Moriarty, 1925)¹⁶. Roger died young and his son Roger inherited from his uncle William. Emecina's second marriage was to Geoffrey de Bakepuz, a career knight with fees held at Alkmonton and Risley near Derby (Lyte, 1920-31, pp.994, 996). Geoffrey spent time abroad on military service at various times. He did homage for the estate at Walsall following Sir William's death in October 1247. He was listed in 1254/1255 as the lord of the manor of Walsall, together with *the son of Richard de Alansun*, [who was] *married to Margaret, daughter and heir of William le Rus* (Wrottesley, 1884, pp.107-108). He probably died shortly after this while Emecina lived to a great age, dying after 1276.

Emecina was probably typical of ladies of her time and her activities were the more conventional ones associated with the 13th century such as raising a family and making donations to religious institutions. She was, however, frequently drawn into the legal cases involving her half-sister Margery and her son William. Nothing about Margery's life was ever calm and considered and the feisty approach she took to controlling her inheritance and opposing the wishes and desires of the men of her family was far from typical of the period. She was an interesting, if difficult, personality.

¹⁴ The article in VCH Staffordshire, Vol.17 suggests that Emecina married a William Morteyn and they had a son called William. There is however, no evidence for two Williams – see the section on Wollaton in Thoroton (1790/97, Vol.2, pp.208-212).

¹⁵ In August 1234 William, *the heir of the late Eustace de Moreton*, was placed in the custody of Ralph FitzNicholas. (CPR 18 Henry III, p.64)

¹⁶ Moriarty quotes the Welbeck Cartulary (Harl MS 3640, fo. 95d).

SIR WILLIAM RUFFUS'S DAUGHTER MARGERY

William Ruffus's second daughter Margaret, usually known as Margery, was an *infant*¹⁷ in the care of her mother Isabella le Rus at the time of her father's death in 1247 (Roberts, 1835/36, Vol.2, p.28). She had married Richard de Alencon by 1253. He was a career knight some twenty years her senior, with knight's fees at Reepham and Fulnetby, just north east of Lincoln, and two more at York (Lyte, 1920-31, pp.1066, 1076, 1093). Richard was born after 1216, the son of Richard de Alencon and the daughter of William Haunselin (Hardy, 1835, p.573)¹⁸. He had a distinguished military record which included service in Wales and Gascony (*eg* CPR Henry III, AD 1232-1247, p.279).

At the start of the Barons War (1264), when Margery and Richard had been living at Walsall for about eight years, she was said to have been abducted by John de Lay for a short time¹⁹. Richard was said to *have withdrawn to distant parts from fear*, but was probably away on military duties in Wales²⁰. Four children born of this marriage during the 1250s and 1260s survived to adulthood - Thomas, John, Alice and Florence. However, the marriage had probably broken down by 1270 when Margery brought a case of disseisin against her husband and her nephew William Morteyn who was twenty years older than she was (Wrottesley, 1885, p.52). It was said that Margery and Richard were *never divorced in the face of the Church*²¹ but a divorce must have occurred because in 1292/93 Margery and John were fined 10 marks for not having the king's permission to marry (Wrottesley, 1885, p.268). Margery and John had at least two sons – Richard and Ralph.

On 22 June 1298 John Paynel was murdered at Walsall and Margery was accused of the crime (Wrottesley, 1885, p.75). After a period on the run and imprisonment in the Marshalsea in London, in 1301/02 she was finally acquitted by the King and a jury (Wrottesley, 1885, p.75-76). Margery died late in 1303 aged about 63, while Richard seems to have outlived her as a man of that name was holding the fee at Reepham at that date.

SIR WILLIAM RUFFUS'S GRANDCHILDREN

In the career of Emecina's eldest son the family appeared to be continuing on a path that promised greater things. Sir William Morteyn had a distinguished military career and continued to hold all the fees inherited from his father (Lyte, 1920-31, pp.977, 997). He supported the King in the civil war in the 1260s and was rewarded with land grants from the confiscated properties of the adherents of the Earl of Leicester and later with the sheriffdom of Leicestershire and Warwickshire from 1270 to 1273 (CFR, Vol.1, 1272-1307, p. 16). It has been suggested that William was less than scrupulous as sheriff and was given to improving his income with bribes and the double payment of fines (Templeman, 1948). He was married to Joan Marmion, one of the three co-heiresses of Philip Marmion of Lutterworth and Scrivelsby. At his death

¹⁷ The word *infant* simply denotes that she was not yet of full age but she must have been a young child.

¹⁸ Ralph Haunselyn owned considerable property at Shelford near Bridgeford, Nottinghamshire during the reign of Henry II.

¹⁹ John de Lay may have been related to William de Lay living in Walsall in 1261 (Willmore, 1887, p.226).

²⁰ CIM, Vol.1, pp.417-418, no.1477

²¹ CIM, Vol.1, p. 418, no.1481

in 1283 he held a considerable estate in Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire as well as Staffordshire. He left a widow Joan but no children and his heir was his nephew *Roger de Morteyn, the 21 year old son of Roger de Morteyn* (Wrottesley, 1885, p.133)²².

Sir William Morteyn took over the management of his mother's share of the Ruffus estates at Walsall and Caldecote following the death of her second husband in about 1255, while Sir Richard de Alencon handled the inheritance of his wife Margery. However, from 1271 she took over the management of her inheritance herself and this was marked by constant dispute within the family and with her neighbours, occasionally leading to violence. In 1276 William de Morteyn, his brother Robert and her husband, together with four others, were sued by Margery for coming to her home in Caldecote, imprisoning and ill-treating her and taking away goods to the value of £300 (Wrottesley, 1885, p.73). William de Morteyn, Emecina de Morteyn (now aged about 72!) and Margery le Rouse were ordered to appear before the king at a case heard at Westminster on 12 May 1276. The court noted that there had been a long dispute between them *in the king's court and out of it concerning damages, waste done, prises and imprisonments and other matters...*²³ Margery agreed to the subsequent settlement and an uneasy peace followed. The estate was worth fighting over - in an undated document Margery granted her great-nephew Roger Morteyn *a moiety of the profit of every kind of mineral as well as sea-coal as well as iron mines* and fishing rights (Gillespie, 1914, p.35, no.xxxi).

Following William's death in 1283, Roger Morteyn claimed his inheritance and at some stage after 1284 he and Margery came to an agreement over the Rous inheritance (Byerley, 1986). In 1304, following Margery's death, he and Sir Thomas le Rus ran Walsall manor jointly. Roger began to use his share of the manor as security for loans and by 1313 he had lost his share to the lender, Sir Ralph Bassett (Gillespie, 1914, pp.76-77, no.lxxxvii).

Margery was succeeded by her son Thomas le Rous, the elder of Sir Richard de Alencon's sons, who was a career soldier like his father. He held the arms *Ermine a chief endented gules, two escallops silver* and appeared in the Caerlaverock Roll of Arms (Humphery-Smith, 1984)²⁴. His career included representation of Staffordshire as Knight of the Shire at the Parliament of 1316, which met quite briefly at Lincoln in February of that year (Johnstone, 1921). In October 1321 Thomas reached the pinnacle of his career when he was appointed Sheriff of Leicestershire and Warwickshire (HMSO, 1898, p.145). He was also Commissioner for Array during the period 1321 to 1327 and was responsible for raising considerable numbers of men in Staffordshire and in Leicestershire for military service (Wrottesley, 1887, p.42; Bateson, 1899). He took custody of Kenilworth castle in 1322 and garrisoned it after Lancaster's defeat.²⁵ Thomas probably died in about 1328 when his son Thomas confirmed all grants that his father had made within the family (Gillespie, 1914, p.49, no.li). Sir Thomas had at least two sons, Thomas jnr and John. The younger Sir Thomas was a career soldier like his father and his name appeared constantly during

²² For an account of his career see Ellis (2004) pp.232-240.

²³ CCR 4 Edw I, p.339.

²⁴ These arms are very similar to the arms of William de Morteyn (*Ermine a chief gules*) and almost identical to the arms of Edmund Bassett. The Harley Ms of 1323/4 incorrectly listed him as *Sir Thomas le Rouse of Staffordshire* with a coat of arms of *per pale blue and gules, a lion rampant ermine*. These were the arms held by his contemporary Sir Thomas le Rous of Harescombe in Gloucestershire.

²⁵ Ancient Petitions: to the King, 1322-1327. National Archives, SC 8/69/3418.

the 14th century in lists of Staffordshire tenants on military service (Wrottesley, 1887, p.28). He married Alice the daughter of Malcolm de Coughton in Warwickshire (Wrottesley, 1893, p.36)²⁶.

Margery's second son John le Rous was mentioned in 1294 in a list of men on the king's service (Wrottesley, 1887, p.28). In May 1312 John and his wife Joan entered into a land agreement with Florence de Verney and her husband Philip. The fairly unusual name Florence echoes the name of one of John's sisters and this may be a reference to his daughter and her husband (Anon, 1911).

Margery had a more turbulent relationship with her daughters than with her sons. Alice married Nicholas Archer of Sibbertoft in Northamptonshire and they engaged in some fairly bitter legal cases against her mother right up until the end of Margery's life. An early attempt to marry Alice to Sir Ralph Bassett's brother did not eventuate but Alice continued to claim the share of the Walsall estate with which she had been enfeoffed at the time. Florence was married to William Tromwyn, one of the Hereditary Foresters in Cannock Forest. In 1287 Florence and William accused Margery and John of disseising them of lands and rent at Walsall although they later withdrew the writ (Wrottesley, 1885, p.128).

SIR HERBERT'S OTHER DESCENDANTS

Herbert's second son Richard served the Duke of Saxony as a chamberlain until 1189 when he moved to Walsall, paying 20 marks for having custody of his *nephews* in Walsall, implying that there were, at that stage, still two boys²⁷. He may be the Richard Ruffus who participated in a number of legal cases in Warwickshire in the period 1200/1201. It seems likely that the members of the Rous family who appeared at Ragley and Arrow in the 14th and 15th centuries were his descendants but research on that is ongoing.

Sir Herbert may also have had a third son named Robert Ruffus, a farrier in the service of the Bishop of Coventry. Robert was given land in Morughale (later called Bexmore Farm) by Geoffrey Muschamp, Bishop of Coventry and witnessed charters for the Bishop. He had numerous descendants in Staffordshire.

CONCLUSION

The Ruffus family of Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire were energetic and ambitious and during the 12th and 13th centuries they were moving steadily from a lowly social position to an excellent rank within county society, notably in Staffordshire and Warwickshire. If Sir William Morteyn had had strong male heirs, they would probably have been in a position to move onto the national stage. However, the lack of male heirs at various stages in this family meant that they disappeared from the scene. By the end of the first quarter of the 14th century Walsall and Caldecote were in other hands and the Morteyn inheritance also trickled away. Most gentry studies focus on the 14th and 15th centuries but the study of enterprising families such as this one suggests that gentrification may have been occurring earlier, and for quite lowly but ambitious Norman families the climb up the social and political ladder was pursued with enthusiasm.

²⁶ Sir Thomas held land in Coughton in right of his wife Alice.

²⁷ Pipe Roll 39, ns.1, 2 Richard I, Mich 1190, p.17.

Table I. Descendants of Sir Herbert Ruffus

- A1.** Herbert Ruffus b.c.1115, d. post 1166
- B1.** [William Ruffus], b. c.1145/1150, m 1. c.1170, Margaret (dau of Robert Maluvel and Pavia de Rampton; d.c.1177
- C1.** Son, died after 1189.
- C2.** William Ruffus, b.c.1175, m. 1, 1203, Isabella de Arches (dau of Gilbert de Arches of Grove, Notts, b.c.1185, d. by 1234); m.2. Isabella de Trihampton; d.1247
- D1.** Emecina Ruffus, b.c.1203/1204, m. 1, c.1220, Eustace Morteyn (of Eyam, Derbs, d.1234); m.2. by 1247 Geoffrey de Bakepuz (of Alkmonton, Derbs, d.c.1255); d.c.1276
- E1.** William Morteyn, b.c.1221; suc to Walsall, m. Joan Marmion (dau of Philip Marmion); d.s.p.1283
- E2.** Roger Morteyn, b.c.1220s
- F1.** Roger Morteyn, b. 29.09.1252, m. Isabella dau of William Touchet. Heir to uncle, William Morteyn.
- E3.** Robert Morteyn, b.c.1220s, given Grove, c. 1234
- F1.**Eustace
- D2.** Margaret/Margery Ruffus, b.c.1240, m.1 by 1253, Richard de Alencon, divorced after 1270; m.2 John Paynel (he was murdered 06.12.98); died 1303
- E1.** Thomas [Alencon] le Rous, b.c.1250s, d.c.1327/8
- F1.** Thomas m. Alice the daughter of Malcolm de Coughton, WAR. d.c.1345
- G1.** Elena fl 1345
- F2.** John
- E2.** John [Alencon] le Rous, b.c.1260s, m. Joan, d.c.1344
- ?F1.** Florence, m. Philip Verney, d.s.p. by 1344
- E3.** Alice [Alencon], m. Nicholas Archer, b.c.1260s; d. post 1339
- F1** John
- E4.** Florence [Alencon], b.1260s, m. William Tromwyn
- F1.** Isabel, m. John Salwey Esq. of Leycroft, Staffs.
- E5.** Richard [Paynel] Rous, b.c.1270s, m. Isabella; ?d.c.1334
- F1.** John Paynel fl 1334
- F2.** Richard
- E6.** Ralph Paynel
- B2.** Richard Ruffus, b. c.1145/1150;?ancestor of the family in Warwickshire and Worcestershire.
- B3.** Robert Ruffus
- C1.** Daughter
- C2.** William
- D1.** Reginald fl 1240s
- E1.** Robert fl 1298
- E2.** Reginald fl 1300

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