

# The Sidneys of Penshurst and the Monarchy, 1500–1700

Michael Brennan



**THE SIDNEYS OF PENSHURST AND  
THE MONARCHY, 1500–1700**

*To*  
*Mary and James Brennan*  
*and*  
*Geraldine, Christina and Alice Brennan*

# The Sidneys of Penshurst and the Monarchy, 1500–1700

MICHAEL G. BRENNAN  
*University of Leeds, UK*

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

Copyright © Michael G. Brennan 2006

Michael G. Brennan has asserted his moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Brennan, Michael G

The Sidneyes of Penshurst and the monarchy, 1500–1700

1. Sidney, Philip, Sir, 1554–1586 – Political activity 2. Sidney (Family) 3. Sidney (Family) – Political activity 4. Penshurst Place (England) 5. Monarchy – Great Britain – History – 16th century 6. Monarchy – Great Britain – History – 17th century – 7.

Great Britain – Politics and government – 1485–1603 8. Great Britain – Politics and government – 1603–1714

I. Title

942'.05'0922

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Brennan, Michael G.

The Sidneyes of Penshurst and the monarchy, 1500–1700 / Michael G. Brennan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7546-5060-X (alk. paper)

1. Sidney family. 2. Sidney, Philip, Sir, 1554–1586—Political activity. 3. Great Britain—Politics and government—1485–1603. 4. Great Britain—Politics and government—1603–1714. 5. Monarchy—Great Britain—History—16th century. 6. Monarchy—Great Britain—History—17th century. 7. Sidney family—Political activity. 8. Penshurst Place (England) I. Title.

DA306.S6B74 2005

942.05'092'2—dc22

2005013065

ISBN 13: 978-0-7546-5060-7 (hbk)

# Contents

<i>List of Plates</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>Table: The Sidney Family</i>	x
<i>Table: The Dudley Family</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1 The Sidneys, Brandons, Guildfords, and Dudleys, 1500–1554	8
2 The Dudleys and Sidneys, 1554–1572	28
3 The Ascendancy of Philip Sidney, 1572–1577	48
4 Great Expectations for the Sidneys, 1577–1585	69
5 The Last Years of Queen Elizabeth, 1585–1603	93
6 The Sidneys and King James I, 1603–1621	114
7 The Sidneys and Royal Service, 1621–1644	133
8 The Survival of the Sidneys, 1644–1700	149
<i>Postscript</i>	169
<i>Bibliography</i>	170
<i>Index</i>	177

# List of Plates

The plate section can be found between page 82 and 83

- 1 George Vertue, Mary Tudor, widow of King Louis XII of France and Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk
- 2 English School, Sir Henry Sidney
- 3 John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland
- 4 Jacobus Houbraken, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester
- 5 Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick
- 6 Sir Philip Sidney
- 7 François, Duke of Alençon
- 8 (from) John Derrick, *The Image of Ireland* (1581)
- 9 Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke
- 10 Paul von Somer, Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester
- 11 William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke
- 12 Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery
- 13 Lady Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), title page
- 14 Cornelius Janssens (Jonson), Robert Sidney, second Earl of Leicester
- 15 Dorothy Percy Sidney, Countess of Leicester
- 16 Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland
- 17 (attributed to) Gerard Honthorst, Philip Sidney, Viscount Lisle, later third Earl of Leicester
- 18 Algernon Sidney
- 19 Dorothy Sidney Spencer, Countess of Sunderland
- 20 Henry Spencer, first Earl of Sunderland
- 21 Robert Spencer, second Earl of Sunderland
- 22 George Vertue, Penshurst Place in 1747 in Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (Canterbury, 1778–99)
- 23 Baynard's Castle, London
- 24 Houghton Park House, Bedfordshire

# Acknowledgements

My greatest debt while writing this book is to Philip Sidney, Viscount De L'Isle, MBE, DL, and also to his father, the late William Sidney, Viscount De L'Isle, VC, KG, for their generosity and prolonged support in allowing me access to their remarkable collection of family papers and portraits. I am most grateful to Lord and Lady De L'Isle, as well as to their daughter Sophia and son Philip, for their welcoming hospitality at Penshurst Place during the celebrations on 25 April 2002 to mark the 450th anniversary of the granting of the Penshurst estate to Sir William Sidney. During a brief tour of the portraits in the Solar or State Dining Room, the idea for this book was first conceived. I am also grateful to Bonnie Vernon at Penshurst Place for her assistance in obtaining photographs of the Sidney family portraits included in this study.

Without the long-term collaboration and friendship of two distinguished Sidney scholars, Margaret Hannay and Noel Kinnamon, this book would not have been written. For well over a decade, we have constantly exchanged our thoughts and materials on the Sidneys, very often on a daily basis through emails. The richness of their knowledge and rigour of their scholarship, coupled with their willingness to share stimulating and challenging ideas, have provided me with an ideal forum for debate and historical discovery. No less important are my earliest debts in Sidney studies to my undergraduate tutor, Glenn Black, who first introduced me to the intellectual richness of *Astrophil and Stella* and the *Arcadia* and then to the joint supervisors of my D.Phil. thesis, Katherine Duncan-Jones and Penry Williams, who were both unfailingly generous with their time, advice, and knowledge of the period.

I also owe much to a memorable colloquium, hosted by Lord and Lady De L'Isle and their son Philip, at Penshurst on 7–8 July 2003. This event, 'The Textures of Life at Penshurst Place, 1552–1743', was convened by Germaine Warkentin and Susie West under the sponsorship of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and CRASSH (University of Cambridge). I have drawn much in this book from informative papers delivered at this colloquium by Germaine Warkentin, Susie West, Lisa Celovsky, Margaret Hannay, Roger Kuin, Elizabeth Goldring, Hilary Maddicott, Gavin Alexander, and Joseph Black. Their knowledge was often supplemented in fruitful discussions by other delegates, including Christy Anderson, Clare Browne, Ian Donaldson, Karen Hearn, Stephen Hipkin, Maurice Howard, Arthur Kinney, John Morrill, Linda Peck, and Robert Shephard.

This book has depended heavily upon the published findings of many other researchers into the cultural and political activities of the Sidneys, including John Buxton, Peter Croft, Jan van Dorsten, Katherine Duncan-Jones, Alan Hager, Millicent Hay, Alan Houston, Bent Juel-Jensen, Dennis Kay, Richard McCoy, James Osborn, William Ringler, Jr., Josephine Roberts, Jonathan Scott, Victor

Skretkowicz, Alan Stewart, Malcolm Wallace, Andrew Weiner, Blair Worden, and Henry Woudhuysen. Other scholars, especially Peter Beal, John Gouws, John Pitcher, Will Ryan, and Andrew Wawn, have also greatly assisted my researches.

The staff of the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds have been unfailingly helpful and I am very grateful to Chris Sheppard, Deputy Keeper of Special Collections, and to Jill Winder, for their invaluable assistance in locating illustrations and arranging photographic work. I am also grateful to the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the British Library, the Leeds Library, and the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, where most of the Sidney family's papers are now held. At Ashgate Publishing, I have been fortunate to be able to draw upon the advice and expertise of its commissioning editors, Tom Gray and John Smedley; its editorial manager (humanities), Ann Newell; Nicole Norman (publicity); Emma McBriarty (desk editor); and Alyson Lacewing (proof-reader). I have been greatly assisted in producing the final typescript and electronic drafts of this book by Pamela Rhodes and Naomi French at the School of English.

The research and writing of this book was supported by a period of study leave from the School of English, University of Leeds, and a matching award under the AHRC Research Leave Scheme: for both I am most grateful. I conclude by acknowledging the constant support of my parents, Mary and James Brennan, my wife Geraldine, and our daughters, Christina and Alice. This book, focusing upon the potency of the Sidney family line, is dedicated to those closest to me in blood and name.

The dustjacket portrait and Plates 2, 10, 14, and 17 are reproduced by kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection. Plates 6, 12, 13, 15, 21, and 22 are reproduced by permission of the Brotherton Collection, University of Leeds; and Plate 8 by permission of Edinburgh University Library. All others are from engravings owned by the author.

# Abbreviations

<i>APC</i>	<i>Acts of the Privy Council</i>
<b>BL</b>	<b>British Library</b>
<i>CSPD</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</i>
<i>CSPF</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers French</i>
<i>CSPS</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Spanish</i>
<i>CSPV</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Venetian</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>HMC, Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place, 1925–66</i>
<b>HMC</b>	<b>Historical Manuscripts Commission</b>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>M.G. Brennan and N.J. Kinnamon, A Sidney Chronology 1554–1654, 2003</i>
<b>SP</b>	<b>State Papers, TNA</b>
<b>TNA</b>	<b>The National Archives (formerly Public Records Office)</b>

# Table: The Sidney Family

■ **NICHOLAS SIDNEY** (c.1451–1512) m. Anne Brandon, sister of Sir Thomas Brandon (d.1510) and aunt of Charles Brandon (c.1484–1545), Duke of Suffolk

■ **William** and □ **Francis**

**Sir WILLIAM SIDNEY** (c.1482–1554) m. Anne Pakenham (d.1543), widow of Thomas Fitzwilliam, the elder brother of William Fitzwilliam (c.1490–1542), Earl of Southampton

□ **Mary** (d.1542) m. Sir William Dormer

□ **Jane** (1538–1612), m. Gomez Suárez de Figueroa (c.1520–71), Duke of Feria

■ **Henry**

□ **Lucy** m. Sir James Harington of Exton

□ **Anne** m. Sir William Fitzwilliam (1526–99)

□ **Frances** (c.1531–89) m. Sir Thomas Radcliffe (c.1526–83), Earl of Sussex

□ **Mabel** and □ **Elizabeth**

**Sir HENRY SIDNEY** (1529–86) m. **Mary Dudley** (1531–86)

□ **Philip** (1554–86) m. **Frances Walsingham** (1567–1632), who married (1590) **Robert Devereux** (1565–1601), Earl of Essex; and (1603) **Richard Burke** (1572–1635), 4th Earl of Clanrickarde

□ **Elizabeth** (1585–1612) m. **Roger Manners** (1576–1612), Earl of Rutland

□ **Mary Margaret** (1556–8)

□ **Elizabeth** (1560–7)

□ **Mary** (1561–1621) m. **Henry Herbert** (c.1538–1601), 2nd Earl of Pembroke

□ **William** (1580–1630), 3rd Earl of Pembroke m. **Mary Talbot** (1580–1650)

□ two illegitimate children, **William** and **Katherine** (both b.c.1623) by his cousin, **Mary Sidney Wroth**

□ **Katherine** (1581–4)

□ **Anne** (1583–c.1606)

□ **Philip** (1584–1650), Earl of Montgomery and 4th Earl of Pembroke m. (1) **Susan Vere** (1587–1629)

m. (2) **Anne Clifford** (1590–1676)

■ **Robert**

□ **Ambrosia** (c.1564–75)

□ **Thomas** (1569–95) m. **Margaret Dakins** (1571–1633)

**Sir ROBERT SIDNEY (1563–1626), Viscount Lisle and 1st Earl of Leicester**  
m. (1584) (1) Barbara Gamage (c.1559–1621), heiress of John Gamage of Coity  
m. (1626) (2) Sarah Blount (d.1655), widow of Sir Thomas Smythe (d. 1625)

- Mary (c.1587–1653) m. (1604) Sir Robert Wroth (1576–1614)
  - James (1614–16)
  - two illegitimate children, William and Katherine, (both b.c.1623) by her cousin, William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke
- Katherine (c.1589–1616) m. Lewis Mansell
- William (1590–1612)
- Henry (b.d.c.1591)
- Elizabeth (c.1592–1605)
- Philippa (Philip) (1594–1620) m. John Hobart
- **Robert**
  - Bridget (1597–9) and □ Alice (1598–9)
  - Barbara (1599–1644)
    - m. (1) Thomas Smythe (d.1635), Viscount Strangford
    - m. (2) Thomas Culpepper
      - Philip (b.1634), Viscount Strangford m. (1650) Isabella Sidney
- Vere (1602–6)

**ROBERT SIDNEY (1595–1677), Viscount Lisle and 2nd Earl of Leicester**  
m. Dorothy Percy (1598–1659), eldest daughter of Henry Percy (1564–1632), 9th Earl of Northumberland

- Dorothy (1617-84)
  - m. Henry Spencer (1620–43), 1st Earl of Sunderland
    - **Robert** (1641–1702), **2nd Earl of Sunderland**
    - Henry (1643–8)
- **Philip**
  - Algernon (1623–83)
  - Lucy (1623–4) and □ Lucy (b.1625)
  - Anne
  - Robert (1626–68)
  - Mary (1629–48)
  - Frances (1630–51)
  - Isabella (b.1634)
  - Elizabeth (d.1650)
  - **Henry** (1641–1704), **1st Earl of Romney**
  - Diana (d.1670)

- **PHILIP SIDNEY (1619–98), Viscount Lisle and 3rd Earl of Leicester**  
m. Catherine Cecil (c.1628–52), daughter of William Cecil (1591–1668),  
2nd Earl of Salisbury

- Algernon (1647–8)

- **Robert**

- (illegitimate) three sons and one daughter

**ROBERT SIDNEY (1648/9–1702), Viscount Lisle and 4th Earl of Leicester**  
m. Elizabeth Egerton

- **Philip**

- **John**

- **Jocelyn**

- (illegitimate) one daughter

- **PHILIP SIDNEY (1676–1705), Viscount Lisle and 5th Earl of Leicester**

- **JOHN SIDNEY (d.1737), Viscount Lisle and 6th Earl of Leicester**

- **JOCELYN SIDNEY (d.1743), Viscount Lisle and 7th Earl of Leicester**

# Table: The Dudley Family

- **JOHN SUTTON** (1400–87), Baron Dudley, also known as John Dudley  
m. Elizabeth Berkeley (d.1478), widow of Edward, Lord Charlton  
(d.1421)

- Edmund (d.1483) m. Joyce, daughter of Lord Tiptoft, from whom descended the Barons Dudley, including Edward Baron Dudley (d.1643)

- **John**

- William (d.1483), Bishop of Durham
    - Oliver (d.1469) m. Katherine Neville
    - Margaret, Jane, and Eleanor

- **JOHN DUDLEY** (d.1502) m. Elizabeth Bramshott (d.1498)

- **Edmund**

- Elizabeth m. Thomas Ashburton
    - Anne m. Robert Hall
    - John and Peter

- **EDMUND DUDLEY** (c.1462–1510)  
m. (1) Anne Windsor (d.1500/3)

- Elizabeth (c.1499–c.1560) m. William, Baron Stourton

- m. (2) Elizabeth Grey (c.1482–1525/6), m. (1511) Arthur Plantaganet  
(d.1542), Viscount Lisle, illegitimate son of Edward IV

- **John**

- Jerome (d.c.1555)
    - Andrew (c.1507–59)
    - Bridget

- **JOHN DUDLEY (1504–53), Earl of Warwick and Duke of Northumberland**  
m. Jane Guildford (1508/9–55), daughter of Edward Guildford (c.1479–1534), under whose care Dudley had been placed following his father's execution in 1510

- John (c.1527–54), Viscount Lisle and Earl of Warwick  
m. Anne Seymour, daughter of Duke of Somerset
- Ambrose (c.1530–90), Earl of Warwick  
m. (1) Anne Whorwood (d.1552)  
□ Margaret (d.1552)  
m. (2) Elizabeth Talboys (1520–63), widow of Thomas Wimbish  
m. (3) Anne Russell (1548/9–1604), daughter of Francis Russell (1526/7–85), 2nd Earl of Bedford
- Henry (c.1531–57)
- **Robert**
- Guildford (c.1535–54) m. Lady Jane Grey (1537–54)
- Mary (1530/5–86), m. **Sir Henry Sidney**
- Katherine (c.1538–1620), m. Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon

- **ROBERT DUDLEY (1532/3–88), Earl of Leicester**

m. (1) Amy Robsart (1532–60)

m. (2 – disputed) Douglas Howard (1542/3–1608), Lady Sheffield

- Robert Dudley (1574–1649), declared illegitimate

m. (3) Lettice Knollys (c.1540–1634), widow of Walter Devereux (1539–76), 1st Earl of Essex. She was the mother of Penelope (1563–1607), Lady Rich, and Robert (1564–1601), 2nd Earl of Essex. She later married Sir Christopher Blount (1555/6–1601)

- Robert Lord Denbigh (1579–84)

# Introduction

Penshurst Place, near Tonbridge in Kent, was originally built in the fourteenth century by a wealthy merchant and Lord Mayor of London, Sir John de Pulteney, and it has been the major residence of the Sidney family since 1552. At the heart of the house are three spectacular rooms: the original Baron's Hall (completed 1341), the Solar or State Dining Room (originally the withdrawing room of the medieval house), and the Long Gallery (completed 1607). The huge Baron's Hall, with soaring chestnut vaulting sixty feet above its stone flooring, is probably the most magnificent fourteenth-century English domestic room still in existence and offers a lasting monument to Pulteney's wealth and social status. Decorated in later Tudor style, the Solar and Long Gallery commemorate through their rich collection of family portraits the lives and public prominence of the Sidneys. As the contrasts between the pre- and post-Reformation elements of Penshurst's external architecture and interior decoration illustrate, generations of Sidneys have placed particular emphasis in their guardianship of this great house upon preserving the memory of both its illustrious royal history before their ownership and its focal role in the development of their own familial identity.

The iconography of Tudor and Stuart formal portraits can still speak informatively of their sitters' carefully modulated self-image and public status. Those of the Sidneys in the Solar and Long Gallery offer a powerful celebration of successive generations of a family who placed particular value upon their own sense of dynastic identity, both locally in Kent and more widely in London and its royal courts, as well as in Ireland, Wales, and the Low Countries where they frequently held high office. As these portraits eloquently testify, the Sidneys were intent on preserving a lasting historical sense of the importance of their family name. Along with the architectural fabric of Penshurst, these portraits combine with the Sidneys' remarkable collection of family and estate papers (now at the Centre for Kentish Studies at Maidstone) to offer an unrivalled interpretative framework for tracing the narrative of the public and private lives of a talented English family between 1500 and 1700. The Sidneys' close and sustained personal interaction with members of the royal court at this period can only be rivalled by a few other influential families, such as the Herberts (Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery), Percys (Earls of Northumberland), Cecils (Lord Burghley, and Earls of Salisbury and Exeter), Talbots (Earls of Shrewsbury), and Howards (Earls of Arundel, Northampton, Nottingham, Suffolk, and Surrey, and Earls and Dukes of Norfolk) – many of whom had close personal and official dealings with the Sidneys themselves. But, above all, it is the Sidney family archive of personal and estate papers – first sampled in Arthur Collins' two-volume *Letters and Memorials of State ... Transcribed from the Originals at Penshurst Place* (1746), and later catalogued in the six volumes of the Historical Manuscripts Commission's *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place*

(1925–66) – that render the history of the Sidneys of Penshurst between 1500 and 1700 so fascinating and detailed.

Over the generations, through the historical sensibilities of family members and their associates, many thousands of documents have been accumulated (including private letters and official correspondence, notebooks, family genealogies, estate papers, political reports, and personal miscellanea), offering a fascinating insight into the public careers and family lives of their writers and recipients. For example, in the case of Robert Sidney (1563–1626), first (Sidney) Earl of Leicester – who built the Long Gallery at Penshurst and whose portrait now hangs in the Solar – the family archival holdings, supplemented with materials from several major institutional libraries, document the full span of his varied and active life. They trace his education and military service in the Low Countries with his uncle, Robert Dudley, first (and only Dudley) Earl of Leicester, and elder brother, Sir Philip Sidney. Numerous papers and letters also survive relating to Robert Sidney's lengthy governorship of Flushing, his political ambitions at the English court, his foreign embassies, his duties as Lord Chamberlain of Queen Anne's court, and his elevation to the Earldom of Leicester in 1618. But interspersed with these papers are many other written records of Robert Sidney's concern for the health and well-being of his wife and children (whose portraits are now displayed alongside his own in the Solar), his aching resentment at being separated from them for long periods by official duties, his constant delight in the orchards, gardens, and architectural vistas of Penshurst, and his private worries over the crippling expenses of his prominent role at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts.

It is just this kind of archival blending of public and private documentation that renders a narrative of the Sidneys' interaction with the English monarchy between 1500 and 1700 so revealing. Not only do we have in these papers ample evidence of the facts of their personal and ceremonial contacts but we can often also tease out what they privately thought of their public roles and individual members of the royalty. The Sidney family's rising fortunes and personal contacts with the English monarchy originally derived from Sir William Sidney (c.1482–1554) who served Henry VIII with distinction both as a naval commander and at the Battle of Flodden against the Scots in 1513. This carefully promulgated identity of an heroic warrior-courtier who founded the family's fortunes through military prowess in the royal service continued to inspire the Sidney family's later preoccupation with its own chivalric and heroic image, as found, for example, in the controversial literary and visual representations of Sir William's son, Sir Henry Sidney, in Ireland; Sir Henry's own sons, Sir Philip and Sir Robert, in the Low Countries; and various later family members, including two brothers, Philip (later third Earl of Leicester) and Algernon Sidney, who served as military commanders during the English Civil War.

As a Knight of the Garter and privy councillor, Sir William was chosen by Henry VIII to supervise the education of his only son and heir, later Edward VI. This appointment owed much to his personal intimacy both with the king's long-time friend Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and with another rising force at the English court, John Dudley, son of the notorious Edmund Dudley, the ruthless reorganizer of Henry VII's taxation system who had been executed on a charge of

constructive treason in 1510 soon after Henry VIII's accession. In 1539 Sir William's own son, Henry, became one of the young prince's closest companions or 'henchmen', along with two of Dudley's sons, Robert and Ambrose. The parallel importance of the Dudley family to the court preferment of the Tudor Sidneys was confirmed when in March 1551 Henry Sidney married Mary, one of the daughters of John Dudley, then Earl of Warwick but soon to be elevated to the dukedom of Northumberland, in the following October. In April 1552 the Sidneys' ascendancy into the highest levels of court favour was marked by a royal grant of the Penshurst estate in Kent to Henry's father, Sir William. So close did Sir Henry Sidney (who received a knighthood in October 1551) remain to the royal household that he was the courtier who cradled in his arms the young king as he lay dying in July 1553. Edward's demise triggered John Dudley's ruthless promotion of the Lady Jane Grey conspiracy and it was Mary Dudley Sidney (Sir Henry's wife), no doubt acting on her father's instruction, who first imparted to her the momentous news of Lady Jane's supposed accession to the English throne.

Whether through a finally tuned sense of personal survival or sheer good fortune, Sir Henry Sidney successfully extricated himself and his wife from the inevitable retributions following Northumberland's attempt to usurp the English throne. In fact, he seems to have rapidly established himself as a trusted court and diplomatic servant of the Catholic Queen Mary, partly through his friendly dealings with the Spanish Duke of Feria, who later married his niece Jane Dormer (Sir William Sidney's granddaughter), and with Philip of Spain himself. In March 1554 Sir Henry had been chosen as a member of the magnificent entourage led by the Earl of Bedford and Lord Fitzwalter sent to escort Philip back to England for his marriage. In a pointedly calculated gesture towards this personal intimacy with the future King Philip II, Sir Henry chose to name his first child Philip, born on 30 November 1554, in honour of the new Spanish husband of the queen of England.

Immediately following the death of Queen Mary in November 1558, Sir Henry's niece, the Duchess of Feria, was obliged to exile herself to the Spanish court. In contrast, Sir Henry had himself remained suitably *politique* in his outward religious allegiances during the Catholic reign and he set about cultivating the favour of the new Protestant queen. He was significantly assisted in this goal though her enduring but complex intimacy with his brother-in-law, Robert Dudley, who in 1564 was created Earl of Leicester. This ancient title, dating back to the eleventh-century Beaumont earls, had various powerful royal associations. As both the Dudleys and Sidneys would have been well aware from the English chronicles, the title had been held in the mid-thirteenth century by Simon de Montfort, who had seized power in May 1264 over the throne of England in a military dictatorship. Following his defeat and death at Evesham in August 1265 by King Henry III's son, Prince Edward (King Edward I from 1272), the Leicester earldom had been granted in October 1265 to Edmund 'Crouchback', the youngest son of Henry III. In the fourteenth century it was held by King Edward III's redoubtable son, John of Gaunt, and then by his own son Henry Bolingbroke, later King Henry IV. The granting of this title to a non-royal subject of the queen in 1564 was a remarkable confirmation of Elizabeth's signal favour towards Robert Dudley. Also, the Leicester title was successfully reclaimed in 1618 for the Sidney-Dudley

dynasty by Sir Henry's second son, Robert, through his prominent service at the courts of James I and Queen Anne of Denmark. The earldom was retained by the family until the death in 1743 of Jocelyn Sidney, the seventh and last Sidney Earl of Leicester.

Despite the best efforts of Sir Henry Sidney and his sons, a complex web of political and personal reasons ensured that Queen Elizabeth never entirely trusted the Sidneys. Nevertheless, Sir Henry loyally sought to serve her for long periods both as President of the Council in Wales and as her Lord Deputy in Ireland. These two difficult and physically testing appointments outwardly confirmed the Sidneys' high status as capable royal servants but also raised nagging private concerns (frequently expressed in their writings) over their queen's pragmatic desire to distance them from the political centre of court life. Sir Philip's own career at court, his extensive Western European travels, diplomatic service, and military action in the Low Countries were similarly poised between high ambition and frustration at what he increasingly regarded as Elizabeth's unfounded suspicions over his family's trustworthiness, administrative competence, and intimacy with the Dudleys. Although Sir Philip's death on 17 October 1586 from wounds received at Zutphen occasioned a memorable outpouring of national mourning, his younger brother Sir Robert considered that the queen also wished to distance him from court life by appointing him to the endlessly problematic governorship of Flushing. However, from the late 1580s Sir Robert began assiduously to cultivate his relationship with James VI of Scotland (who venerated the heroic memory of his elder brother) and after his accession as James I of England the Sidneys visibly prospered. Created Baron Sidney (1603), Viscount Lisle (1605), and first Earl of Leicester (1618), Robert Sidney was also appointed as Queen Anne's Lord Chamberlain, a position which placed him at the centre of court and royal family life.

Robert Sidney (1595–1677) succeeded his father as second Earl of Leicester in the year following Charles I's accession. For the next two decades, Robert was engaged in close and fruitful royal service, being appointed as English ambassador to Paris and occupying a prominent position in court politics and Irish affairs. However, following an outright betrayal of trust in 1643 by an increasingly beleaguered king, the second Earl pointedly withdrew from court life into the rural seclusion of Penshurst and his London mansion situated on the modern Leicester Square. After Charles I's execution, he and his wife were entrusted by Parliament with the care of two of the royal children, Henry Duke of Gloucester and Princess Mary, who resided for a short period at Penshurst. A scholarly and bookish man, the second Earl compiled an informative and brooding diary of the English Civil War period which traces the Sidneys' diverse allegiances, both to king and Parliament, during this tumultuous period.

The second Earl of Leicester's second son, Algernon Sidney (1623–83), is now remembered chiefly for his republican sympathies, long continental exile, and execution in 1683 on a dubious charge of high treason for his complicity in the 'Rye House Plot'. Although Algernon's career has long been of central importance to English constitutional historians, this study will seek to view his political stances

from the point of view of his closest relatives by setting his activities within the context of his own immediate family's dealings with Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, and Charles II. His elder brother, Philip Sidney (1619–1698), third Earl of Leicester, although historically overshadowed by Algernon's posthumous reputation, played a significant role in ensuring the survival of the family and its estates during the latter half of the seventeenth century. The Sidneys remained at the centre of various constitutional and monarchic crises through Philip and Algernon's mercurial younger brother, Henry Sidney (1641–1704), who was one of the leading figures in the deposition of James II in favour of the Prince of Orange, leading to his own prominence at the court of William III and Queen Mary and his elevation in 1694 as first Earl of Romney.

Henry Sidney was born in the same year as his nephew, Robert Spencer (1641–1702), and they became lifelong friends. Robert was the eldest surviving son of Henry's sister, Dorothy, who had been widowed when her royalist husband, Henry Spencer, first Earl of Sunderland, was killed in 1643 aged twenty-two at the Battle of Newbury. Their then infant son, Robert, second Earl of Sunderland, grew up to become one of the most ruthless political operators during the reigns of Charles II and James II. Together, the Earls of Romney and Sunderland also played major roles in the peaceful accession in 1689 of the House of Orange to the English throne. The third Earl of Leicester's eldest son, Robert Sidney (1649–1702), the fourth Earl, then ensured the survival of the Sidney's title and family reputation until the mid-eighteenth century by siring three sons (Philip, John, and Jocelyn) who successively succeeded to the Leicester earldom.

The diversity and comprehensiveness of the Sidney family archive also allows us to trace how at this period the public fortunes of the male members of the Sidney family at the royal court often rested heavily upon the loyal support, personal family connections, and political instincts of their wives, sisters, and daughters. Predictably, generations of Sidney women played dominant roles in the domestic management of Penshurst, the care and education of the Sidney children during the frequent absences of their fathers due to official duties, and the intellectual and cultural prominence of the family. Sir William Sidney's wife, Anne Pakenham, was the widow of Thomas Fitzwilliam who had died at Flodden and she brought the Sidneys into close association with various family members who already enjoyed close Henrician court connections through their military and mercantile activities. As already noted, Sir William's son, Sir Henry Sidney, made the most important dynastic union for the family in the mid-sixteenth century when he married Mary Dudley, the daughter of John Dudley, Earl of Warwick and Duke of Northumberland, and sister of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick. Sir Henry's sister, Frances Sidney, formed another crucial political connection for the family when she married Thomas Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex (and later founded Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge). Of Sir Henry Sidney's daughters, the most renowned in literary terms is Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, whose marriage in 1577 to the second Earl of Pembroke forged a long-lasting personal and political bond between the Sidneys

and the powerful Herbert family which lasted until the death in 1650 of Philip Herbert, fourth Earl of Pembroke.

Mary Sidney Herbert's younger brother, Robert, later first Earl of Leicester, married in 1584 a rich Welsh heiress, Barbara Gamage, and their extensive private correspondence provides a vivid and often moving insight into the family's domestic history at Penshurst and in London from the time of the Spanish Armada until Barbara's death in 1621. Their daughter, Mary Sidney Wroth, married one of James I's favoured hunting associates and she became an assiduous courtier who performed in several of Queen Anne's masques. In later years, her personal position at the royal court was complicated by her authorship of the controversial prose romance *Urania* (1621) and by her becoming the mistress of her cousin, William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, whose mansion at Baynard's Castle had been regularly used by the Sidneys as their London base from the 1570s onwards.

Other influential female members of the family include the second Earl's formidable wife, Dorothy Percy Sidney, whose letters illustrate how she efficiently ran her husband's finances and the Penshurst estate, along with supervising the education, introduction to court, and marriages of their children. Their daughter, Dorothy Sidney Spencer, was commemorated as 'Sacharissa' in Edmund Waller's love poetry and, as noted, married the royalist war-hero Henry Spencer, Earl of Sunderland. The brief marriage of Philip, third Earl of Leicester, to Catherine Cecil reasserted the Sidneys' strong familial bond with the Cecils, dating back to their productive dealings with William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and his son Robert, Earl of Salisbury, during Elizabeth's reign. Similarly, the long political career during the second half of the seventeenth century of the second Earl of Sunderland, in both its ambitious ascents and testing declines, was always potently supported by the loyalty and personal connections of his wife, Anne Digby, a daughter of the Catholic royalist Earl of Bristol.

Within the broadly chronological development of this study specific attention will be also be paid to the social and political commentaries offered by the Sidneys through their extensive writings and related activities. Like many other major English families of the period, the Tudor and Stuart Sidneys were preoccupied by the historical status of their own lineage. Consequently, they commissioned family genealogies (blending antiquarian exactitude with imaginative glosses) and commemorated their own connections through marriage with several of the most influential English aristocratic families, including the Dudleys, Percys, and Spencers. The Sidneys were also prolific authors of prose fiction, poetry and drama, personal and official letters, diaries, and miscellanies. Many of these works circulated in print while others in manuscript are preserved in the family archive at Maidstone. Insistently, their creative writings – especially those of Sir Philip Sidney and his siblings, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester, as well as the latter's daughter Lady Mary Wroth – engaged both implicitly and explicitly with issues of monarchic power, authority, and national government. The Sidneys' extensive activities as patrons of scholarship, creative writings, popular and court drama, theological and political tracts, the visual arts (especially portraiture), and architecture (most notably, Penshurst Place in Kent and Leicester House in London) also readily illustrate how

they interpreted and publicly projected their social roles as leading members of the Kentish gentry and court aristocracy.

The Sidneys frequently compiled for their own use, and occasionally for public dissemination, analyses and polemical tracts on current political issues. These documents include Sir Henry Sidney's tracts and letters on Ireland; Sir Philip Sidney's vigorous defences of his father's Irish policies in a 'Discourse on Irish Affairs' and of his uncle Robert Dudley in his 'Defence of the Earl of Leicester', as well as his dangerous attack on the Anjou marriage proposals, 'A Letter ... to Queen Elizabeth, Touching Her Marriage with Monsieur'. Other such texts encompass the private diary, personal correspondence, and notebooks of Robert Sidney, second Earl of Leicester, covering the Civil War and Restoration periods; works relating to the Sidneys' sustained interest in Tacitean modes of historical and political analysis; and the political tracts and letters of the second Earl's sons, Algernon Sidney and Philip Sidney, reflecting the crisis of the English monarchy, their parliamentary involvements, and the former's interest in republican modes of government.

More implicit but no less controversial commentaries on monarchic, aristocratic and republican authority offered in their fictional works will also be considered, especially Sir Philip Sidney's interrogation of the scope and abuses of royal and princely power in his *Arcadia*; the musings of Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester, on the vicissitudes of royal service; and the fascination of his daughter, Lady Mary Wroth, in her prose *Urania* with the royal courts of James I and Queen Anne and the dilemma of their exiled daughter, Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia. Alongside these questioning perspectives on royal authority will be placed various panegyrics addressed by members of the Sidney family to their respective kings and queens, including Sir Philip's *Lady of May*; the family's various New Year's Day gifts to the monarch; Mary Sidney Herbert's homage to Queen Elizabeth in her poems 'A Dialogue ... in Praise of Astrea' and 'Even Now That Care'; Philip's and Mary's collaborative versifications of the Psalms of David (intended as both a royal literary tribute and a new devotional mode of English religious worship); and the wide range of correspondence maintained by the Sidneys with Tudor and Stuart monarchs.

Finally, this study is geographically and domestically anchored by the centrality of Penshurst Place to the Sidneys' family life and public identities as courtiers, diplomats, and friends to English monarchs from Henry VIII until William III. In keeping with Ben Jonson's renowned idyll of domestic and estate harmony in 'To Penshurst', the Sidneys viewed Penshurst as the crowning achievement of their sustained royal service, an inviting family home, the centre of their county influence, and a secure haven from the pressurized and corrupting worlds of the royal court and the metropolis. From 1552 until 1700 Penshurst Place, along with its rural landscapes and parish church of St John the Baptist, acted as an inspiring or consoling point of unification for the public ambitions, personal losses, and family triumphs of successive generations of the Sidneys.

## Chapter 1

# The Sidneys, Brandons, Guildfords, and Dudleys, 1500–1554

### **The Rise of the Sidneys and the Battle of Flodden (1513)**

An influential Tudor family's retrospective narrative of its own rise to public prominence was often a useful element in confirming its current social status. The Sidneys were no exception in that by the second half of the sixteenth century the courtly and military distinction of their forebears was well defined and systematically maintained. For the generation of Sir Philip Sidney and his siblings, two key elements of their family's historical identity mattered above all else: the ancient respectability of the paternal Sidneys and the aristocratic potency of the maternal Dudley line. 'I am by my father's side of ancient and always well esteemed and well matched gentry', insisted Philip's 'Defence of the Earl of Leicester' (c.1584/5); but his 'chiefest honour' was that he was 'a Dudley in blood', and he was determined to live up to the 'nobility of that blood whereof I am descended'.<sup>1</sup> So proud were the Sidneys of this connection that when Philip's father Henry had married his mother, Mary Dudley, on 29 March 1551 he was granted permission to quarter his own family crest, the porcupine, with that of his wife, the bear and ragged staff (appropriated in 1547 by John Dudley from the fifteenth-century Beauchamp Earls of Warwick). This combination of heraldic devices was to define symbolically the fortunes of the Sidneys for the rest of the sixteenth century.

For upwardly mobile Elizabethans, genealogy could offer a utilitarian blend of diligently researched antiquarianism and myth. As far as is now verifiable, the Sidneys possessed an entirely respectable lineage for a gentry family, traceable back to one John de Sydenie, a Surrey yeoman from the parish of Alford during the reign of Edward I. One of his descendants, Nicholas Sidney (the father of Sir William Sidney to whom Penshurst was granted in 1552), married Anne Brandon, the aunt of Charles Brandon, Viscount Lisle, later Duke of Suffolk and the husband of Henry VIII's sister Princess Mary. This was a connection of conspicuous distinction but some time before 1580 Sir Henry Sidney also commissioned a detailed family genealogy from the (inventively fraudulent) herald Robert Cooke. He claimed to have traced the family back to one William de Sidne, supposedly a personal servant of Henry II in Anjou before his accession and later his court chamberlain. There was a specific calculation in this newly coined ancient family tradition of royal service in that it neatly prefigured the service of Sir Henry's own father, Sir William Sidney, who had acted as chamberlain to Edward VI before his