

THE CROFT FAMILY
in the Parish of Eardisland

Throughout this Paper I make no attempt to relate in detail the individuals mentioned to the main branch of the Croft family at nearby Croft Castle. It is however quite probable that the earlier persons mentioned were related and it is also likely that the Crofts of Aymestrey sprang from the same ancestry.

Currently the earliest date at which a member of the Croft family is to be found involved in affairs within the Parish of Eardisland is 1379 when Johanne Croft was assessed to pay 4d Poll Tax¹; the next being in 1423/1424 [2 Henry VI] when a John Croft is mentioned in the Inquisition as to Proof of Age² of Thomas Downton, this being relevant to the Lordship of the Manor of Burton. The wording makes it clear that he, Croft, was in a position of authority involving the well-being of the young Thomas Downton; but no other detail is immediately to hand.

Next, in 1442, there is record that the executors of the Will of John de Barew of Eryslane were Isabel his relict and Nicholas de Croft. Probate was granted at Pembridge, dated 27 Nov. 1442.³

My research then jumps forward to the period 1508 to 1533 when there are three mentions of Edward Croft being “receiver of the lord King there”⁴ - “there” being “Hynton”, twice, and “Erleslane” once. In current parlance, Hinton and Eardisland. The specific identity of this Edward Croft is not established, but he being a knight it is quite possible, indeed likely, that he was of the main family, of Croft Castle.

Whatever the identity of the above-mentioned Edward, a family of the same surname, much lower down the social hierarchy, was living somewhere in the manor of Burton, and, subject as they were to the Courts held by the Lord of that manor, may well have been there for several generations. Two members of the family are mentioned in the proceedings of the same Court in 1527:

*“18 Henry
Burton*

View of Frankpledge with the Court of..... 18 day of March in the reign of Henry VIII. [15th March 1527] A penalty is laid against John Croft that he well cleanses (scours) one ditch at Calewall before the feast of the Invention of St Cross under penalty 12d..... The same penalty against Richard Croft for a certain ditch at Ledacre under the same penalty and day.”⁵

¹ Fenwick, Carolyn C. (Ed) “The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381” OUP (for the British Academy). 1998.

² Chancery Inquisitions Post Mortem, 2 Henry VI, No.48 via Duncumb Mss and Edith Clowes Papers.

³ FARADAY M.A. (Ed) *Calendar of Probate and Administration Acts 1407-1550 in the Consistory Court of the Bishops of Hereford. With an Appendix of Will Abstracts 1552-1581*. Publ. The Geoffrey Walter Smith Fund and the Woolhope Naturalists’ Field Club. 2008.

⁴ (i) Bailiff’s Account “Hynton” 24 Henry VII to 1 Henry VIII [viz. 1508-1510] where his name appears to be spelled “Croste”. [Nat. Arch. SC6/HEN VIII/1273 m.7d]. (ii) Bailiff’s Account “Erleslane” 25-26 Henry VIII [viz. 1533-1535] where he is “Edward Crofte knight”. [Nat. Arch. SC6/HEN VIII/1297 m.1d]. (iii) Bailiff’s Account “Hynton” 25-26 Henry VIII [viz. 1533-1535] where he is “Edward Crofte”. [Nat. Arch. SC6/HEN VIII/1297 m.2d].

⁵ Transcribed by Mrs M. Tomkin in 2008.

Another member of the Croft family, this time of good standing, is named in a document dated *18 Feb. 4 Ed 6*. This works out as 18th February 1550. Under a heading “Conventual Leases” is:

*A Grant to Thomas Crofte gent of all those four pastures.....lying in the Manor of Kygeslane Co. Heref:.....tog^r with a watermill in Ereslane with the appurts late parcel of the possions of the Earl of March for the term of 21 years under the yearly rent of £4.0.0 for the pastures and £2.0.0 for the Mill. Dated 18 Feb. 4 Ed 6.*⁶

This is the only mention of this Thomas Crofte of which I am aware. Only the watermill links him to Eardisland. I deal with the question of which watermill is being referred to in my Paper covering that topic.

The reign of Charles I [1625-1649] embraces the first time when a historian, in this instance John Duncumb in his manuscript notes of circa 1804⁷, has a member of the Croft family as owner of Burton Court and Lord of the Manor of Burton:

Elena Downton m. John Cotes of Woodcote Salop with whose descendants it⁸ continued until purchased by the Crofts tempore Charles I...and then sold to John Brewster.

Whilst there is not absolute clarity of the tenure of the manor of Burton between 1641⁹ and 1662¹⁰, I have found no contemporary record that a member of the Croft family ever held the lordship of that manor.¹¹

Two references in the Court Rolls of Burton from the reign of Charles I make it clear that, whilst a John Croft did live in Burton in 1626, he was not the Lord of the Manor, that was John Cotes:

*At a Court Leet at Burton on 1st May 2 Charles [1st May 1626] John Crofte gent was the first listed of fourteen jurors. Later that year a View of Frankpledge with Court Baron of John Cotes Esq took place on 30th September 2 Charles [30th September 1626]. John Crofte gent. is listed as one of five people who were excused attendance.*¹²

Rather less than two years later there is record of the baptism of *John Croft, s. of John and Anne, 8th May, 1628*

This detail being from a succession of footnotes to the Eardisland page of Robinson, Reverend C *History of the Mansions and Manors of Herefordshire*. London 1873, and having checked that the footnotes do indeed refer to entries in the Eardisland Parish register, I summarised them into the traditional ‘Tree’ format:

⁶ HRO CF50/92.

⁷ HRO CF/-

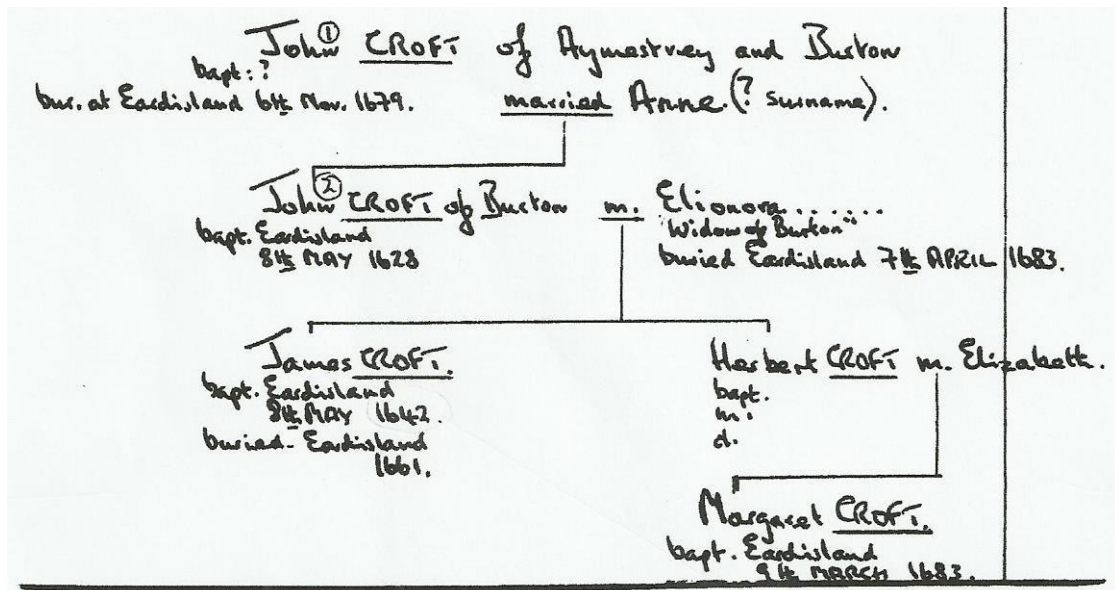
⁸ References in the same document, both before and after this quotation, make it clear that it is Burton Court being referred to.

⁹ When dated *1st October 17*. Car 1 John Cotes sold *Burton Court etc to Henry Hyet* (and others) [HRO BC79/17/7. f66].

¹⁰ When *1st & 2nd Apr. 1662*. By *Indenture.....Henry Hyet Gent...* (and others) ... *convey the Capital Messuage of Burton Court & the lands etc. to John Brewster Gent...* [Ibid].

¹¹ It is disappointing that subsequent historians, some quite recent, have blindly followed Duncumb, and in some cases have read incorrect meaning into other, later, records, to justify the Duncumb assertion. I will restrict myself to quoting the later source references themselves, but will not include the interpretations of others.

¹² Court Rolls of Manor of Burton. Muriel Tomkin transcripts, 2008.



After the baptism of John son of John and Anne Croft in 1628, my next record is dated 1637:

Earslande

The estate of our parishe is as foloweth

John Coates Esq owner of the Manor of Burton

This is followed, several items further down, by:

John Crofte gent: the lower Farm in Burton.

James Munne gent; a livinge in Burton.

Richard Morris 2 houses & lands in Burton.....¹³

There are no other entries which include Burton.

This list is also recorded by Reeves in his Notebook No.9, and subsequently in "Leon Valley"¹⁴ at page 176. Also in Notebook No.9 he records that, again in 1637:

Mr Coleman, Chief Constable of Stretford 100 [sic] reports.....arrears of Ship Money. Lady Croft 2s/ No distress to be found¹⁵

Unusually, Reeves in this case quotes his source: *1637 Dom. State Papers Vol 375. No 72.*

Next, dated to 1641, there is record that a John Croft was one of the Receivers/Trustees in connection with the Whittington Bequest, after matters had gone awry. The Bequest was in connection with the setting up of Eardisland Free

¹³ HRO SR62, being PRO Transcripts II. British Museum Portland Loan. Harley Papers. Loan 29/172.

¹⁴ Reeves, Norman C *The Leon Valley. Three Herefordshire Villages. Kingsland, Monkland & Eardisland. Phillimore & Co. Ltd. 1980.*

¹⁵ Whether or not related to this Lady Croft, it should be noted that it has been written: "At a local level, there were few changes of officials. The Hundred of Stretford had the same high constable, Jon Crofte, from 1641 to 1646" This is from Ross, David *Royalist, But...Herefordshire in the English Civil War, 1640-1651* Logaston Press, 2012. Pages 129-130.

It is quite possible that at some date these Crofts were resident at Burton Court, although if so, not as owners/Lord of the Manor. But it is much more likely that they were the Croft family at nearby Lower Burton Farm, referred to in the Portland Loan document which I have already quoted from.

Grammar School.¹⁶ This same John Croft was party to an Indenture, also in connection with Eardisland School, in 1652.¹⁷

8th May 1642 saw the baptism at Eardisland of James son of John & Elionor Croft.¹⁸ James died and was buried in Eardisland in 1661.

And so to 1663 when a John Croft held estate in the parish of value £18-0-0 per annum as assessed under the Militia Acts of 1662 and 1663¹⁹. This was by no means the highest assessment in the parish. For example the tabulation also includes:

Henry Hyett £140-0-0
Rich: Dolphin £40-0-0
Nicholas Deyos £25-0-0

The next taxation record is only two years later, Hearth Tax. The assessment for Eardisland is dated Michaelmas 1665. It includes John Croft assessed to pay for five hearths. The highest assessment in the parish was John Brimster (Brewster), assessed to pay for six hearths. John Brewster was then Lord of the Manor of Burton; it is likely that John Croft was living at what we now call Lower Burton Farm.

Dating to the following year, notes additional to two versions of the same pedigree of the Brewster family mention the Croft family:

This note is written at the top left corner of the document. Lower down, not all in the same handwriting is:

The compiler of the pedigree identifies himself at top right of the document:

(compiled by G. Marshall
Brewster)

This document was in Hereford Library when I photocopied it in September 2000. It is now in Herefordshire Record Office at reference CF58/5.

It can be seen that there is suggestion that a John Croft may have been of *Burton Court*. If it is taken to mean 'Lord of the Manor of Burton' rather than simply resident there, then the statement can not be supported. I deal with the question of

¹⁶ *A Short History of Eardisland Free Grammar School* Published by Leominster Museum. January 1997, page 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Eardisland Parish Register via Robinson 'Mansions and Manors...'*

¹⁹ Faraday M.A. (Ed) "Herefordshire Militia Assessments of 1663" London. Royal Historical Society. 1972. Page 108.

Also at 1679 in my files is:

Item to the said vicar belongs tithes calves in kind (if the compounds not from those respective places as follows viz. the court of Burton, the Broom, Twyford, Henton, the Nun lands and Mr Crofts of Burton. And as for the cows and calves of the other inhabitants of the whole parish according to the custom of this country viz. a penny a cow and half penny a calf and three pence also a colt is due to him.

HRO HD2/3/13 at LH75A (iii), page 1.

and at page 5 of the same:

“.....Mr Croft one days math by Stannett.....”

This does no more than give some idea of Croft's social standing as a landowner. The document cited is a Glebe Terrier.

Taking the view that this is all about the same John Croft, not substantiated, but not unlikely, then the final record of him is:

21 st January 1681. Probate of Will of John Croft, Burton, Eastland. Gent.
He died intestate & his widow not being willing to take on the administration,
it was left to Herbert Croft to do so. There is a long Inventory of Goods etc.
dated 20th (?) November 1679. The appraisors were two members of the Croft family.
Burton Farm?]. This from HRO Woodard Index (Hereford Diocese Probate Index) at
its ref. 73/1/18. My notes are in my HRO. placaj at C. 17.

To maintain chronological order two entries in the same year, shown in the pedigree which I prepared from the information in *Robinson*, need to be repeated, but no additional comment is necessary:

9th March 1683. Baptism of Margaret, daughter of Herbert and Elizabeth Croft

7th April 1683, burial of Elianora croft, Widow of Burton

By 1705 Herbert Croft [see 1683 above] was dead and wherever it was he had lived at Burton was in the occupation of Jno. Bennet(t): "Jno. Bennet for ye Estate yh. was Herbert Crofts of Burton" [served as Overseer of the Poor and Churchwarden].²⁰

Very nearly the same wording is found again at the same HRO reference, dated to 1726:

"Jno. Clarke for ye Estate formerly Herbert Crofts" ... served as Overseer of HRO AJ32/58 at
the Poor and Churchwarden. LH17 Lat
LH115, my Regat.

Similarly, in my same transcript, in 1737 there is mention of:

Tho. Trumper for his house yt. was formerly Herbert Crofts in Eardisland

Just a little later "Circa 1740-1750.." there is further mention, with but scanty detail, of "Mr Crofts of Burton" [referring to Glebe land in Burton] and, later in the same document: "Mr Croft one days math by Stannett,..." This is the same reference that I have recorded herein at 1679. The dating difference reflects only the variant 'expert' opinions as to the dating of this item, judged from the terminology. Knowing such (little) as I do about those who offered the opinions, I think this later date is more likely to be appropriate than the earlier one.

²⁰ HRO AJ32/58.

