

# Hugh Archibald Wyndham (1877-1963): His ancestry and family connections

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Boydell one of the Labour members who spoke v. highly of Hugh...said he was sure Hugh's ancestors had been fighting for freedom for 2 000 years! If only he knew they'd fought steadily against it.

*Hon. Mrs Hugh Wyndham*<sup>1</sup>

## **Background**<sup>2</sup>

Hugh Archibald Wyndham (1877-1963) was the epitome of a nineteenth century English country gentleman. A younger son of a noble family with impeccable connections, he migrated to South Africa in 1901; where, after serving Milner as assistant private secretary, he led the life of an English landed gentleman. He was a member of a political elite reminiscent of eighteenth-century England; he entered

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1. Hon. Mrs. Hugh Wyndham to her mother-in-law, 16 March 1914. West Sussex Record Office (hereinafter WSRO): Petworth House Archives (hereinafter PHA), Maud Wyndham - Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 16 Mar 1914.
  2. Paper presented at the National Conference of the Genealogical Society of South Africa, Vaal Triangle Faculty of the Potchefstroom University for CHE, Vanderbijlpark, 23-24 Sep 2001. I am grateful to Lord Egremont & Leconfield for granting access to the Petworth House Archives; to Mrs Alison McCann for facilitating this access; and to the University of Stellenbosch for financial assistance.

South African politics as a Unionist, advocating stronger ties with Britain; he bred horses on his estate near Standerton; and, in true gentlemanly fashion, commanded his own regiment. A prolific writer and astute thinker, and for ten years shadow defence minister, Wyndham helped shape early-twentieth-century South Africa and particularly the early Union Defence Force. Disillusioned he returned permanently to England in 1930; and, in 1952, succeeded his brother as the fourth Lord Leconfield.

This article is an attempt to place the Hon. Hugh Wyndham, in his setting, explore his extraordinary background, and analyse the extent and importance of the social network of a man who was an anachronism in a modernising South Africa, of a man who lived beyond 'his time'. To record that he was born on 4 October 1877, at Petworth and to an aristocratic family is an insufficient prelude to a consideration of his life and work. We have to grasp something of what it was like to be reared in a country house in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Here he developed that awareness of background as well as that love of horses and racing that came from Charles Seymour, the 'Proud Duke' who built the palace at Petworth. Petworth House, Sussex, the main Wyndham residence since 1750, and other houses like it, were special places, with an atmosphere that – in 1901 at least - seemingly still gave a valuable start to a unique career.

Family history, in the traditional, narrow sense, is not highly acclaimed by historians and sociologists. It is fobbed off as an innocent pastime for pensioners and, as *petite histoire*, delightful for those involved, but otherwise of little value. Lord Rosebery, British prime minister and Hugh Wyndham's uncle, caught the spirit of the worst of this genre. He commenced his biography of Chatham with the words:

There is one initial part of a biography which is skipped by every judicious reader; that in which the pedigree of the hero is set forth, often with warm fancy, and sometimes at intolerable length.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, as Dutch social historians have pointed out, this limited meaning is not inherent to the genre.<sup>4</sup> Writers seem to forget that the provinces of history, biography and family history, though they often overlap, are essentially distinct. History records the life of nations, biography the life of individuals, and family history the vicissitudes of families. And genealogy – the laying out of ancestral

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3. LORD ROSEBERY, *Chatham: his early life and connections* (London 1910), p 1.

4. See, for example, J. AALBERS en M. PRAK (eds.), *De bloem der natie: adel en patriciaat in de Noordelijke Nederlanden* (Amsterdam 1987) and in particular C. SCHMIDT, 'Een lengteprofiel van het Hollandse patriciaat: Het geslacht Teding van Berkhout 1500-1950', pp. 129 et seq. Terrick FitzHugh does not go quite as far with his *How to write a family history: the lives and times of our ancestors* (Alphabooks, London, 1988). See the review of this work in *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 5(1) 1990, pp 30-31.

charts and ‘family trees’ - is a tool in the hands of the historian, who aims to place an individual or group of individuals within their family (clan or coterie) setting.

The sociological approach to family history, as propagated by Dr C. Schmidt of the University of Amsterdam, casts light on the circles to which a family belonged, and more importantly the extent to which the circles formed an ‘organic whole’ within national life. Such a study exposes the structure and functions of large-scale social developments and so the history of a single family can inform us of intimate and often unknown aspects of *grande histoire*. Families like the Wyndhams of Petworth had socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural power. They formed over centuries the richest segment of their societies; they created local, regional and national policy; and they belonged to the most esteemed, refined and developed class of the nation. The prefix ‘socio’ in each case indicates that the family members enjoyed a ramified network of influential relatives, friends and associates, which in short translated to ‘social power’.<sup>5</sup>

The Wyndhams, a gentle and honourable Norfolk family since Norman times, employed several strategies in the accumulation and preservation of their social power. These strategies may be categorised as financial control (including capital formation, investment and succession strategies); political control; and social control (including upbringing and education, the making of marriage alliances, and the conducting of public relations). And, over the nine hundred years stretching from the Norman Conquest, some four phases may be identified in the family history of the Wyndhams of Petworth.

- *Phase 1*: the period of original accumulation in which the senior and richest branch of the family developed from Norfolk gentry to statesmen (to 1750);
- *Phase 2*: the period of consolidation of accumulated power (1750-1875);
- *Phase 3*: the period of struggle to retain power (1875-1920);
- *Phase 4*: the period of decline (from 1920).

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5. C. SCHMIDT, ‘Een lengteprofiel van het Hollandse patriciaat: Het geslacht Teding van Berkhout 1500-1950’ in J. AALBERS en M. PRAK (reds.), *De bloem der natie: adel en patriciaat in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, pp 129-30.

These phases correspond substantially with the development and decline of the European aristocracy as a whole and of their British counterparts more particularly.<sup>6</sup>

### **Original accumulation (c. 1066-1750)**

There are, of course, many aspects from which one might consider the Wyndhams. One might ramble out over Sussex into Somerset, and to Orchard Wyndham, or over to Norfolk and across the fens to Felbrigg and Crownthorpe, to Leconfield, Wressle and Spofforth in Yorkshire and to Cockermonth and Egremont among the English Lakes, and still one should not feel guilty of irrelevance. Of whatever English county one speaks, one is still aware of the relationship between the English soil and this very English family. But more especially does one feel this concerning Sussex and Norfolk, and concerning the roads over which the Wyndhams travelled so constantly between estates. Whole districts are littered with their associations, whether a village whose living lay in their gift, or a town where they endowed a college or an almshouse, or a wood where they hunted, or the village church where they had themselves buried. Norfolk, in fact, was their cradle long before they came into Sussex; and Felbrigg, which they had owned since the mid-fifteenth century, was at one time larger than Petworth.

The original accumulation of Wyndham power rested upon commercial-agrarian activities. At the time of the Norman Conquest the Wyndhams were Anglo-Saxon and had been associated with the Norfolk manor of Wymondham, from whence they took their name, for some time. Slowly, the descendants of Ailwardus of Wymondham commenced their ascent. The manors of Crownthorpe and Wicklewode were acquired in the reign of Edward II and John Wyndham purchased the manor of Felbrigg, which became their main place of residence, in around 1450. And this John Wyndham was sufficiently powerful to sit as one of the knights representing Norfolk in parliament. The deployment of political power, at this point at a regional level, followed shortly on their attainment of economic power. And the Wyndhams, like other families of the same standing, owed their financial increase and political ascendancy to ability, prudent marriage alliances, considerable ambition and, of course, a measure of luck. One John Wyndham,

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6. For general treatments see M. BUSH, *The European nobility, 1: noble privilege* (MUP, Manchester, 1983), and M. BUSH, *The English aristocracy: a comparative synthesis* (MUP, Manchester, 1984). At an individual level, Wyndham's father-in-law, Lord Cobham, and several of his brothers and sisters-in-law were in severe financial difficulty by 1916. WORCESTERSHIRE RECORD OFFICE: Lyttelton Papers, parcel 18 'Notes made by Lord Cobham for the guidance of his executors', especially pages 2-3, 19 and 33; and BODLEIAN LIBRARY, OXFORD: Violet Milner Papers, Box 19, Ivor Maxse – Violet Cecil, 20 Jan 1915 and 6 Feb 1915.

according to Trevelyan, even “proposed to sell to a London merchant the right to dispose of his young son in marriage.”<sup>7</sup>

The Wars of the Roses did little to break the path of ascent. Sir John Wyndham was the first national figure. He gambled on marriage to a daughter of the Duke of Norfolk, fought under the Yorkist banner at the battle of Stoke, and was beheaded during the reign of Henry VII. Their son, Sir Thomas, a renowned naval commander and West African trader, married an heiress: a pattern followed by the four succeeding generations. Sir Thomas left three sons. Edmund, as the eldest, inherited Felbrigg and was sheriff of Norfolk; John married an heiress and acquired the estate of Orchard in Somerset; while William (c.1510-53), their half-brother, was one of the founders of the Barbary Company, traded along the West African coast from Agadir to Elmina and died from disease in the Bight of Benin.<sup>8</sup>

This John Wyndham of Orchard was knighted at the coronation of Edward VI and moved to Somerset, where his estate still retains the name of Orchard Wyndham. His sons and grandsons took up the law as a profession and established numerous branches of Wyndhams and Windhams. Many of these scions, over several generations, distinguished themselves. Several maintained a presence at the Courts of the Common Pleas and of the King’s Bench. Two received baronetcies; while the Wyndhams of Ufford are now represented by the Earls of Dunraven. Thomas, a distinguished lawyer and Lord Chancellor of Ireland was raised to the Irish peerage as Baron Wyndham of Finglass in 1731.

The senior branch at Felbrigg failed with the death of Sir Frances, a judge of the Court of the Common Pleas, and the Wyndhams of Somerset, who now became the senior line, inherited this property. They preferred to live at their Orchard estate and so Felbrigg Hall, although longer in Wyndham possession, was presented to a younger son at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> Such inheritance strategies allowed the senior line to continually upgrade residence, dispose of supernumerary houses, and, at the same time, provide younger sons and their

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7. G.M. TREVELYAN, *English Social History: a survey of six centuries Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982), p 80.

8. B. BURKE, *A genealogical history of the dormant, abeyant, forfeited, and extinct peerages of the British Empire* (London, 1883; reprinted Baltimore, 1985), pp 594-5; T. WINDHAM, “The First Voyage to Guinea and Benin” in R. HAKLUYT (ed.), *The principal navigations, voyages, traffiques, and discoveries of the English nation*, VI, (Glasgow, 1904); and J.W. BLAKE (ed.), *Europeans in West Africa, vol II* (Hakluyt Society 2/87 1942).

9. The Hon Edward Wyndham explained the difference between a hall and house in a letter to his sister. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Edward Wyndham - Lady Mary Maxse, 18 Sep 1916.

descendants with landed gentry status and access to political power. And William Windham of Felbrigg, who died in 1810, was a statesman of some note.<sup>10</sup>

John Wyndham's great grandson and the heir male, William Wyndham of Orchard Wyndham, was created a baronet on 9 September 1661<sup>11</sup> and it was his grandson, Sir William, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet (1688-1740), who through marriage and political activity established the family's fortune. He was the second of his family to secure a marriage with a ducal house and the first to hold a cabinet position. Like so many of his ancestors, he was a Member of Parliament and, as a High Tory, served under Queen Anne as Secretary for War and then as Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the accession of George I he was involved in the Jacobite intrigues which culminated in the 1715 Rebellion and was tried and committed to the Tower. His incensed father-in-law, the Duke of Somerset, who considered the King had broken a pledge to pardon Sir William if he surrendered voluntarily, expressed his resentment with such pungency that he was obliged to give up his Mastership of the Horse. Somerset is reputed to have delivered up his insignia and royal liveries by pitching them into a dustcart and ordering his servants to shoot 'all the rubbish' into the Courtyard of St. James's Palace. Sir William was released the following year and returned to the House of Commons. His Jacobite sympathies cooled but he remained a Tory leader. His party did not return to power until after his death and so he never again held office. As an active and influential member of the Opposition he was greatly admired and respected and among many tributes at his death was Alexander Pope who wrote of him: 'If I see any man merry within a week after this death, I will affirm him no true patriot.'<sup>12</sup>

Yet it was Sir William's marriage to the daughter and eventual co-heiress of the second temporal peer of the realm, Charles Seymour (1662-1748), the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset, that established the Wyndham fortunes. The Wyndhams, until then relatively minor gentry, were catapulted into the nobility and within one generation. This union eventually brought titles and vast estates in several counties stretching across the length of England, at the centre of which stood the manor of Petworth.

### **Petworth and the Percy inheritance**

British genealogist, Terrick FitzHugh, has suggested two criteria for the setting of family history parameters. Firstly, that one should limit the study to the all-male-

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10. B. BURKE, *A genealogical history of the dormant, abeyant, forfeited, and extinct peerages of the British Empire*, pp 595, 596.

11. *Ibid.*, p 595.

12. G. JACKSON-STOPS, *Petworth House, West Sussex* (The National Trust, London, 1978), p. 43.

line-of descent; and, secondly, include within this scope all siblings of ancestors. One can readily agree with the second: it certainly allows a more complete, nuanced picture. But the first - derived from arguments based on continuity of family name and background, and the social continuity conferred by the historical role of the male, whose occupation decided the family's social status - presents grave problems in the case of the Wyndhams of Petworth.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the marriage contracted between Sir William Wyndham, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bt., and Lady Catherine Seymour, daughter and eventual co-heiress of the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset, the Wyndhams, so to speak, lost some of their identity. Sir Charles Wyndham, 4<sup>th</sup> Bt., became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Egremont and the family's chief seat switched from Orchard Wyndham to Petworth, a monument erected by the 'Proud Duke' of Somerset to himself. This generation of Wyndhams moved from Somerset to Sussex (a change in background) and assumed the social status of their *maternal* relatives.

A rigid application of the FitzHugh criteria would rob the Wyndham family history of the fullest explanation of the founding of the Somerset (and, before them, of the Percy) fortunes, which so embellished those of the Wyndhams, who were but county gentry until their senior branch assumed the titles (and sometimes the names) of families in their female line of ascent. Hugh Wyndham (1877-1963), who wrote the history of the Wyndhams of Petworth during the London Blitz, fell exactly into this trap. And Gladys, wife of his brother Edward, thought their sister, Lady Mary Maxse, would have "advanced a brighter vein & less political correspondence."<sup>14</sup>

"Fancy not even mentioning the name of the Petworth heiress! Surely if you write an account of a family how - & where from - that family became possessed of its most cherished possession is of some importance? ...of course the present is almost a hopeless time to collect data. But I fear the kind of data we all long for will always be conspicuous by its absence."<sup>15</sup>

Gladys Wyndham was correct on two accounts: the heavy emphasis on the political activities of male Wyndham ancestors and the absence of women in the family story, including the name of Lady Catherine Seymour, the great heiress. Her father - the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset - largely created the Petworth House of today after his wife inherited the property. She was the sole heiress of the Percies of Northumberland whose possession Petworth had been since 1150, when Queen Adeliza, wife of Henry I, presented the manor to her brother, Joscelyn Percy. Petworth had the chief Percy residence in the south, while Leconfield and Spofforth castles (also to pass to the Wyndhams in 1750) assumed this position in

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13. T. FITZHUGH, *How to write a family history: the lives and times of our ancestors*, pp 17-18.

14. WSRO: Maxse Papers 315, Gladys Wyndham - Lady Mary Maxse, 16 Sep 1941. Underlining is Gladys Wyndham's.

15. WSRO: Maxse Papers 315, Gladys Wyndham - Lady Mary Maxse, 27 Sep 1941.

the north, at least until the Percy power base moved further north to Alnwick. And so, Petworth remained a secondary seat until the early seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup>

The great-grandson of Henry Lord Percy, who crenelated Petworth in 1293, became in 1377 the first of those eleven Earls of Northumberland, who played such an important, often tragic, role during the three turbulent centuries that followed.<sup>17</sup> Henry Percy (1564-1632), the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl and in many ways the most distinguished of his line, brought a revival in Petworth's fortunes. Implicated in the Gunpowder Plot, he was forced to live in the south at a much-neglected Petworth. His southern estates yielded only a small proportion of his revenue (table 1) and so while this was largely raised in the north, it was mostly spent in the south - also on the renovation Petworth, which now became the chief Percy residence, and the laying out of its Elizabethan gardens.<sup>18</sup>

Year	Southern Estates (chiefly the Honour of Petworth)	Northern Estates
1582	£ 544.13s.9½d.	£ 3,056.17s.0½d.
1636	£ 1,576.4s.10d.	£10,895.5s.4d.

**Table 1: Revenue of the Earl of Northumberland, 1582 and 1636.**

His household papers, which show the management of the great household residing at Petworth, were edited and published by the Camden Society in 1962; while the layout and rebuilding of the house there has been the subject in several issues of the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*.<sup>19</sup> A learned man and a patron of the arts, he amassed a fine library, much of which is still at Petworth. He and his son, Algernon Percy (1602-68), the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl, who freely spent much of his time at Petworth, were responsible for beginning the collection of pictures which is one of its chief glories. Joscelyn (1644-70), the 11<sup>th</sup> Earl, survived his father by only two

16. G. BATHO, 'The Percies at Petworth, 1574-1632', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 95, 1957, p 2.

17. G. JACKSON-STOPS, *Petworth House, West Sussex*, p 40.

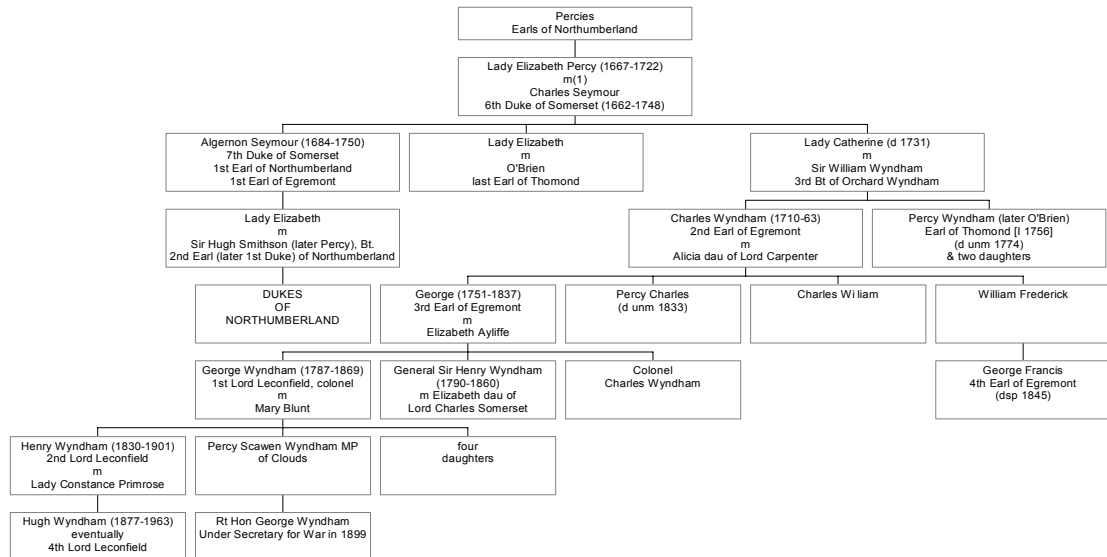
18. G. JACKSON-STOPS, 'Wilderness to Pleasure Ground', *Country Life*, 26 Jun 1975, p 1686.

19. G.R. BATHO (ed.), *The household papers of Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632)*, Camden Society 3rd series, 93 (1962); G. BATHO, 'The Percies at Petworth, 1574-1632', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 95 (1957), pp 1-27; and G. BATHO, 'Notes and documents on Petworth House, 1574-1632', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 96 (1958), pp 108-34.



years and dying at the age of twenty-six left an only daughter, Elizabeth, as sole heiress of the vast Percy estates. She married the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset in 1684.<sup>20</sup>

Genealogy 1: The Wyndhams of Petworth, showing the Percy and O'Brien successions



Four years later, the Duke and Duchess commenced their transformation of Petworth from what was essentially a crenulated manor house into a palace. Yet, despite their wealth and ostentation, they were content to remodel rather than rebuild. They erected a Baroque entrance front on the west to mask the irregularities of the old house behind. While a new approach through the park to the north-west disguised the fact that Somerset's palace lay only a hundred yards from the market square, a site better suited to a medieval fortress than a country seat.<sup>21</sup> Many of the inside walls were retained, although of the rooms of the old house only the cellars and the chapel, one of only a few remaining 13<sup>th</sup> century

20. B. BURKE, *A genealogical history of the dormant, abeyant, forfeited, and extinct peerages of the British Empire*, p 425.

21. G. JACKSON-STOPS, 'Petworth and the Proud Duke', *Country Life*, 28 Jun 1973, p 1870.

chapels at ground level, survive.<sup>22</sup> Somerset employed Grinling Gibbons for woodcarving, Laguerre for wall and ceiling decoration of the grand staircase.<sup>23</sup> William III visited Petworth in 1693, and must have been impressed by the Stuart palace of his proud subject, who, in the words of Macaulay, “was in truth a man in whom the pride of birth and rank amounted almost to a disease.”<sup>24</sup>

<i>County</i>	<i>Sir Hugh Smithson (heir general)</i>	<i>Sir Charles Wyndham (favoured grandson)</i>	<i>Charles, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Rutland (grandson of 'Proud Duke' by 2<sup>nd</sup> wife)</i>	<i>Sir Edward Seymour (heir male)</i>
Cumberland		Egremont & Cocker-mouth castles		
Northumberland	Alnwick, Prudhoe & Warkworth castles			
Suffolk			Cheverley Park	
Surrey	Syon			
Sussex		Petworth		
Yorkshire		Leconfield, Spofforth & Wressle castles		
Titles	2 <sup>nd</sup> Earl of Northumberland, & Baron Warkworth, of Warkworth Castle	2 <sup>nd</sup> Earl of Egremont, & Baron Cocker-mouth, of Cocker-mouth Castle		8 <sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset & Baron Seymour
Names	Surname substitution (Percy in lieu of Smithson)	Use of surname (Percy) as first name for second Wyndham son		

**Table 2: The division of the Somerset estates and titles in 1750 and the subsequent use of the Percy name by the Smithson and Wyndham families.**

22. The chapel’s proximity to the old main apartments reflected the need of the early Percies to have their chaplain at hand for religious and secretarial duties. The chapel is lower than and out of alignment with the rest of the remodelled house; and this is compensated for by the enormously thick wedge-shaped walls built either side. The window arcades are in the purest Early English style with colonnettes of local marble contrasting with the creamy limestone of the walls, and probably date from around 1309 when Henry, 1st Lord Percy, was given licence to crenellate at Petworth. See M. WOOD, *The English Mediaeval House* (Bracken: London, 1983), pp 230-235; and G. JACKSON-STOPS, *Petworth House, West Sussex*, pp 28-9.
23. A. FOSS, *The Dukes of Britain* (Herbert: London, 1986), p 27.
24. T.B. MACAULAY, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, vol II (London 1850), p 269.

In addition to social standing, the Somerset marriage eventually brought a number of estates to the Wyndhams, although they were only second in line to the Somerset inheritance. The 'Proud Duke' had conceived an intense dislike for Sir Hugh Smithson, the spouse of his granddaughter and heir presumptive, and planned to make Sir Charles Wyndham - his grandson and namesake - principal heir to the Percy estates and have the ancient earldom of Northumberland restored in his favour. Smithson, determined to reap the full harvest offered by his marriage, partially thwarted these plans. When the 'Proud Duke' died in 1748 his son Algernon, Smithson's father-in-law, who as Lord Hertford had had a distinguished career under Marlborough, succeeded as the 7<sup>th</sup> Duke. In the following year George II granted him the earldoms of Northumberland and Egremont and when he died in 1750, without a son, his estates and titles were divided between several heirs (table 2):

- His son-in-law, Sir Hugh Smithson, changing his surname to Percy, succeeded as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Northumberland and to the Northumberland and Surrey estates now held by his descendant the present Duke of Northumberland;
- Charles Wyndham (1710-63), the son of his sister Catherine succeeded as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Egremont and to the fine Stuart palace erected by the 'Proud Duke' at Petworth, Sussex, and to the old Percy estates in Yorkshire and Cumberland;
- Cheverley Park, Suffolk, an old Seymour seat passed to a nephew, the Duke of Rutland (grandson of the Proud Duke by his second wife); while
- The Dukedom of Somerset passed to the heir male, a distant cousin, Sir Edward Seymour of Berry Pomeroy Castle, Devonshire.<sup>25</sup>

### **Consolidation, 1750-1875**

Although deprived of the Northumberland estates and perhaps ultimately a dukedom, Charles Wyndham succeeded his uncle - the 7th Duke of Somerset - in the earldom of Egremont that had been specially created to pass to him. Together with this all-important peerage went vast estates, including the old Percy castles at Egremont and Cockermouth in Cumberland, and at Leconfield, Wressle and Spofforth in Yorkshire, and Petworth House in Sussex.

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25. P. ROEBUCK, *Yorkshire Baronets, 1640-1760: Families, Estates, and Fortunes* (University of Hull 1980), pp 297-298; and B. BURKE, *A genealogical history of the dormant, abeyant, forfeited, and extinct peerages of the British Empire*, p 425.

As we have seen, the division of the Percy inheritance among the grandchildren of the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset and Lady Elizabeth Percy was acrimonious and the Smithson and Wyndham heirs competed for pride of place. The first round took place on the nominal front. The English aristocracy introduced name-changes to perpetuate the name of a maternal forebear where, as in the case of the Percies and Seymours, demographic crises resulted in direct-male-line extinction and inheritance by someone bearing a different surname. Here, three options were available: the oldest was the use of a surname as the first name, the second was surname substitution, and the most modern, surname hyphenation.<sup>26</sup> Such name substitution was often stipulated in a testamentary disposition and indeed, in terms of his father-in-law's will, Smithson changed his surname to Percy and became a duke (of Northumberland), and so his family underwent a total transformation. For all practical purposes the Percy line continued unbroken. The Wyndhams, although also changing counties, lost less of their identity. They assumed the social status of relatives on the distaff side and, to indicate continuity of inheritance at Petworth, Percy now became the name of the second Wyndham son, with Charles (the 'Proud Duke's' first name) used as an alternative for other sons. [vide genealogical table 1.]

The Wyndham-Somerset marriage also brought another inheritance: that of the Thomond O'Briens. The last O'Brien Earl of Thomond was married to another of the Proud Duke's daughters and dying without issue in 1741, left his estate to Percy Wyndham, the younger brother of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Egremont. He duly took the surname O'Brien, was created Earl of Thomond in the Irish peerage in 1756, and dying without issue in 1774, the estates passed to his nephew the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Egremont, who, briefly taking the surname of O'Brien, inherited some 6269 acres and so became the largest landowner in Limerick.<sup>27</sup> This massing of estates and formation of capital in the senior line was inheritance strategy at its best.

A building race, part of enormous publicity campaigns launched by the 'new Percies' and the Wyndhams, also ensued. Between 1755 and 1766 the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Northumberland restored Alnwick Castle and transformed Syon House into a London palace. Concurrently, Charles Wyndham (now the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Egremont) employed the young 'Capability' Brown to landscape Petworth Park and Matthew Brettingham to refurbish many of the rooms. He, the first 'grand tourist' of his family, visited the continent on what was an intensive course in languages and culture; and imported the Roman statuary and funerary urns from Italy, which are

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26. L. STONE and J.C. FAWTIER STONE, *An open elite? England, 1540-1880* (OUP: Oxford and New York, 1986), pp 80-1.

27. 'Property owners County Limerick 1870', <http://www.cmcpr.net/Limerick/Landowner5.htm>, 31 Jan 2001; and B. BURKE, *A genealogical history of the dormant, abeyant, forfeited, and extinct peerages of the British Empire*, pp 595-6.

still at Petworth.<sup>28</sup> Another avid racing man, he formed the stables in about 1760 out of an existing complex of sixteenth and seventeenth century outbuildings, and built the symmetrical coach house with low-pitched roofs and pediment.<sup>29</sup>



Petworth House, West Sussex: chief seat of the Wyndhams since 1750. (G. Jackson-Stops, *Petworth House* (The National Trust: London, 1978), p 4.

The world of the nobility radiated around great houses such as Petworth; and the interlocking and closely-woven marriage ties forged between landed families, ensured that vast country estates, enormous wealth and political influence were all strung together.<sup>30</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Egremont was, like his father, a Secretary of State. Socially and politically, he belonged to the ‘Cobham’s Cubs’ circle, a small group of young men devoted to Richard Temple, the 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Cobham – all later allied by marriage - which helped lift Robert Walpole from the prime minister’s chair. Within a generation or two, the Cobham coterie had flourished

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28. G. JACKSON-STOPS, 'Wilderness to Pleasure Ground', *Country Life*, 26 Jun 1975, p 1686; and S. JONES, *The Eighteenth Century: Cambridge Introduction to the History of Art* (CUP: Cambridge, 1985), pp 6-8.
29. G. JACKSON-STOPS, *Petworth House, West Sussex*, p 38.
30. R. PORTER, *English society in the eighteenth century* (Penguin: Harmondsworth 1986), pp 70-71; Worcestershire Record Office: Lyttelton Papers, vol 6, George Grenville – Lord Lyttelton, 2 Aug 1767; and Earl of Chatham (William Pitt) – Lord Lyttelton, 22 Jul 1772 and 21 Jun 1773.

and Egremont's relatives in parliament included such formidable surnames as Pitt, Temple, Grenville, Stanhope and Lyttelton. Described by Michael Roberts as "the very last example of the eighteenth-century type of personal family group" in Parliament, it was headed by the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, who could personally command as many as ten or eleven votes in the House of Commons.<sup>31</sup> Though less distinguished than his father, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl was a capable and likeable man, and maintained a reputation for honesty at a time when many politicians were corrupt. He was appointed Ambassador to the Congress of Augsburg in 1761, and later in the same year succeeded Pitt as Secretary of State for the South. He died in 1763, leaving a beautiful widow (who married Count Bruhl, the Saxon Ambassador) and several children.<sup>32</sup>

The eldest, George (1751-1837), succeeded as a boy of twelve and as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Egremont ruled at Petworth for sixty-five years. Petworth was then a small town with a thousand inhabitants, serving the local farming community and provisioning the earl's house and estate. Some five percent of the town's population were professional – clergy, doctors, lawyers – and a further twenty percent were commercial – merchants, shopkeepers, innkeepers, millers, maltsters, tanners and the like. The inventories of Petworth tradesmen show about thirty percent leaving goods and property worth between £100 and £500.<sup>33</sup> Although the pivot of his world, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl grew up a remarkable man: humane, cultured and distinguished both as patron of the arts and as agriculturist. Though the admired friend of Charles James Fox, he forsook a political career and did not enter government; although, "if he had so chosen, he would have made a considerable figure in politics."<sup>34</sup> He served as lord lieutenant, *custos rotulorum* and vice admiral of Sussex, but preferred the accompany of painters, sculptors and men of letters and his hospitality was famous. Burke spoke of him as "delighting to reign in the dispensation of happiness"; while Benjamin Haydon, the painter, wrote that

his greatest pleasure was sharing with the highest and humblest the luxuries of his vast income. The very animals at Petworth seemed happier than in any other spot on earth.<sup>35</sup>

Turner was a close friend, and spent much time at Petworth where he was at ease; and, having a studio at his disposal, painted several of his most important works here. A good example of which is 'Petworth Park: Tillington Church in the Distance'. The painters Thomas Phillips and James Northcote, and the sculptor,

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31. See LORD ROSEBERY, *Chatham: his early life and connections*, p 239 et seq. and M. Roberts, 'Lord Charles Somerset and the Beaufort Influence', *Archives Year Book for South African History* 1951 II, pp 21-22.

32. G. JACKSON-STOPS, *Petworth House, West Sussex*, p 43.

33. R. Porter, *English society in the eighteenth century*, p 96.

34. L. Sanders, *The Holland House Circle* (London 1908), p 233.

35. As quoted by G. JACKSON-STOPS, *Petworth House, West Sussex*, p 44.

John Edward Carew, were amongst Lord Egremont's other protégés. To house their work, he created the North Gallery as part of the reception rooms at Petworth, where he kept open house, combining the pleasures of sociability and friendship with those of display and ostentation: in 1814 he received the Allied Sovereigns at his museum-palace. He truly introduced a golden age at Petworth.<sup>36</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl was also an avid horse breeder and racer and a progressive farmer. He served for many years on the Board of Agriculture, where he promoted new farming methods directed at the improvement of the lot of the small tenant. During the years of deepest agricultural depression he continued to give annual feasts at Petworth for his own tenantry and workers. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl was immensely wealthy, particularly after he inherited the O'Brien estates in Limerick. He, however, dropped the ancestral baton in the relay race of family destiny.<sup>37</sup> Dying in 1837 without legitimate issue, family continuity - the keynote of family success - was broken with his death. The momentum of the ascent was lost and the peerages were separated from the estates: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl was succeeded by his nephew as the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Egremont; while his natural son, George Wyndham (1787-1869), succeeded to the estates in England and Ireland. These estates were considerable. In 1880 the 2<sup>nd</sup> lord was the twenty-third largest landowner in the United Kingdom with some 109 935 acres and a gross annual income of £88 000.<sup>38</sup> The earldom of Egremont became extinct on the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl's death in 1845 and fourteen years were to pass before another of this branch of Wyndhams was to sit in the House of Lords.

Inheritance was everything and it was not long before George Wyndham, the inheritor of the estates, consolidated his position and started a fresh ascent. He was created Baron Leconfield (taken from the Yorkshire estates) on 14 April 1859. His son, Henry (1830-1901), who succeeded in 1869, married Lady Constance Primrose, a sister of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Rosebery, on 15 July 1867. This union drew the Wyndhams back into the hub of power, particularly after Lady Leconfield's brother, Lord Rosebery, became prime minister in 1894. They employed Salvin to make a number of alterations to the house between 1869 and 1872. Although tennis has been played at Petworth since the sixteenth century, the existing court

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36. See I. Warrell, "'Lord of the soil': a re-appraisal of Turner's Petworth patron [George, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Egremont]", in M. Butler, M. Luther, and I. Warrell, *Turner at Petworth: painter and patron* (1989), pp 105-23; as well as A. Howkins, 'J.M.W. Turner at Petworth: agricultural improvement and the politics of landscape', in J. Barrell, *Painting and the politics of culture: new essays on British art 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1992), pp 231-52.

37. This metaphor was coined by Roy Porter in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp 70-71.

38. See Appendix A: The Greatest British Landowners, c.1880 in D. CANNANDINE, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (Macmillan: London and Basingstoke, 1992), pp 710-11.

was added in 1872 and replaced an earlier court that stood against the east side by the North Gallery.

The letters between Constance Leconfield and Hannah Rosebery reflect a close family bond. The Rosebery's children spent time at Petworth and young Wyndhams holidayed at Mentmore Towers and the Rosebery estates in Scotland, and raced with the Rosebery's at Newmarket.<sup>39</sup> And these visits were reciprocated. The visiting children were always treated as 'little treasures': welcome distractions for the ladies but less so for the men. Lady Rosebery in a letter to Lady Leconfield addressed the stayover at Petworth by her infant daughter while they recuperated at the hot spas of Germany in the following terms:

Archie & I think you are very kind to ask Sybil. She can go to you for a fortnight whenever you & H[enry] arrange if Henry will not consider her stay at Petworth too long. I have written to tell her she is to be very [good] in the drawing room. I do not want her to be in the way, if you like to have her sometimes perhaps you will send for her to your drawing room. If you do not mind she had better bring her own lady & perambulator. You know she is accustomed to be made a great deal of & I hope will not be disappointed, but the children will puzzle her.<sup>40</sup>

And indeed her Wyndham cousins were "very kind to her."<sup>41</sup> Such girls "were brought up in an atmosphere of young ladyhood with all the restrictions and taboos of the later Victorian era."<sup>42</sup> They were raised largely to please their husbands, run efficient households and act the graceful hostess at house parties. Leisure hours were spent in social talk, visitors and friends, conducting an extensive correspondence, reading mainly but not exclusively novels, and playing endless games of cards.

Younger brothers too had little choice regarding careers. The impoverished gentleman of leisure was something of the past. Trade was shunned. The Church held no promise of financial fortune. The armed forces, financially little better, held the promise of "tailors & uniforms & all the pomp of war"<sup>43</sup> to the more extrovert and (possibly) less intelligent. During the eighteenth, nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries the Wyndhams, like much of the English aristocracy, packed most of their younger sons off into the armed forces, with one in each

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39. WSRO: PHA 9680, Hannah, Countess of Rosebery – Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 4 Dec 1879.

40. WSRO: PHA 9680, Hannah, Countess of Rosebery – Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 25 Jul 1880.

41. WSRO: PHA 9680, Hannah, Countess of Rosebery – Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 18 Aug 1880.

42. Susan Tweedsmuir et al, *John Buchan: by his wife and friends* (Hodder and Stoughton: London 1947), p 20.

43. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA: Wyndham mss., Earl of Egremont - Colonel Charles Wyndham, c.1828.



generation representing West Cumberland in the Commons.<sup>44</sup> The Wyndhams tended to rise to colonel with half passing through to general's rank. Of the younger brothers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Leconfield, Henry (1790-1860) was a general, Charles (1796-1866), who served in the Peninsula wars and India, a colonel.<sup>45</sup> This General Sir Henry Wyndham, commanded the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars, was MP for the family borough and married a daughter of Lord Charles Somerset, who when governor of the Cape raced horses called Wyndham and Egremont.<sup>46</sup> The younger brother of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord was MP for West Cumberland and held a captaincy in the Coldstream Guards. Three brothers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord served with the Life Guards, one attaining general's rank, and the fourth, Hugh, was a colonel in the Union Defence Force of South Africa.

The only feasible options open to the brighter and more ambitious younger sons, were those offered by government, either in the home country or in one of the colonies, or the post of private secretary to a statesman, politician, or bureaucrat.<sup>47</sup> And so in 1901, at the age of 23 and with an excellent education behind him, Hon. Hugh Wyndham set out to seek his fortune in South Africa. As a young man he suffered from tuberculosis and South Africa's dryer climate no doubt influenced his move: Buchan described the Transvaal as "one of the healthiest places in the world."<sup>48</sup> Yet his desire to assist Milner in establishing British ascendancy in a new outpost of the Empire was at least as important. He arrived in South Africa at the height of the guerrilla phase of the Second Anglo-Boer War and on 13 October 1901, was appointed by Milner, on cousin George Wyndham's recommendation, as an (unpaid) assistant private secretary.<sup>49</sup> Hugh was independent with largely a free hand to deal with matters and 'devil' for Milner. After a year or two he would then strike into South African politics on his own account, which, according to George Wyndham, then Under Secretary for War, was "the best way now into Imperial politics at Westminster."<sup>50</sup>

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44. L. Stone and J.C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880*, p 154.
  45. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA: Wyndham mss., Charles Wyndham - Earl of Egremont, 13 Jun 1813, and 9 Jul 1829.
  46. MP for Cockermouth, later West Cumberland. N.B. Leslie, *The Succession of Colonels in the British Army From 1660 to the Present Day* (Society for Army Historical Research: London and Aldershot, 1974), p 26; and H.A. Wyndham, *The early history of the Thoroughbred Horse in South Africa* (Oxford, 1924).
  47. L. Stone and J.C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880*, pp 148-154.
  48. J.A. Smith, *John Buchan; a biography* (London 1965), p 107.
  49. John Marlowe, *Milner, Apostle of Empire* (Hamelton: London, 1976), p 135; and the *Transvaal Official List of the Civil Service* (Pretoria 1903), p 9.
  50. WSRO: PHA, George Wyndham – Hugh Wyndham, 17 Jun 1901; and Milner – Hugh Wyndham, 1 Aug 1901.

During this period the Wyndhams and their immediate relatives also exercised social power and this was used to the advantage of younger sons, who, with the right education, might acquire a post somewhere in the fast-expanding empire. This always held the prospect of power and prestige, and possible wealth, in some far-flung colony. Many a younger son returned wealthy from the colonies and settle in a country mansion of his own. Wyndham children enjoyed the finest upbringing and the best in education. Charles, later the 3<sup>rd</sup> lord, went to Winchester. Hugh and the other brothers were educated at Eton College, one of England's great public schools,



Hugh Wyndham  
sketched by Maud, his  
wife, in 1914.

(Petworth House  
Archives: Courtesy of  
Lord Egremont and  
Leconfield.)

founded by Henry VI in 1440 and through which many of their ancestors and close relatives - including Lord Rosebery - had passed before them.<sup>51</sup> Here a reinterpreted medieval knightly code of chivalry, stressing honour, bravery, loyalty, courtesy, generosity, mercy and self-sacrifice was transmitted and became the dominant ethos of the upper and upper-middle classes; an ethos that would take

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51. WSRO: PHA 1700 and 1701 Eton school reports for Hugh and Edward Wyndham, 1895-1901; and General Hon. SIR NEVILLE LYTTELTON, *Eighty years; soldiering, politics, games* (London 1927), p 19.

the cream of these classes to their deaths in France.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, when Hon. Reginald Wyndham was killed in November 1914, his brother considered it “a great consolation that it happened in a fight” and “one wanted to be on active service with him to fully realize what a magnificent fellow he was.”<sup>53</sup>

The marriage market was also carefully played, as indeed it had been since the earliest record of these Wyndhams. Through much of the Middle Ages, family interest in the choice of spouse was paramount and until at least the sixteenth century the selection of spouse, made primarily on economic or political grounds, was made for the child by the parents or guardians. This gradually changed and by the mid-eighteenth century it was common to select one’s own spouse: the parent at best having something of a veto. This shift in decision-making and the partial shift of motives from ‘family interest’ to affection brought a decline in marriages with heiresses after 1750.<sup>54</sup>

<i>Period</i>	<i>Total marriages</i>	<i>Marriages to heiresses</i>	<i>Marriages to daughters of gentry</i>	<i>Phases in family’s history</i>
1350-1550	6	1	1	Accumulation of power
1550-1750	7	4	1	
1750-1950	5	0	4	Consolidation and preservation of power

**Table 3: Wyndham marriages in the direct senior line, 1350-1950.**  
**[Direct patrilineal descent of Hugh Archibald Wyndham, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Leconfield.]**

The Wyndham’s fit this pattern. There are 18 recorded marriages in Hugh Wyndham’s direct patrilineal descent, covering the six hundred years from 1350 to 1950 (*vide* table 3). During their early accumulation, the Wyndham’s managed

52. M. GIROUARD, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (YUP: London, 1981), pp 7, 16, 235.
53. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Humphrey Wyndham – Mary Maxse, 10 Nov 1914 and 22 Nov 1914.
54. L. Stone and J.C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880*, pp 75-7.

only one marriage with an heiress. While, in the following period (1550-1750) four out of seven marriages were contracted with heiresses: the last being the Somerset marriage that had so vastly expanded the Wyndham economic and political resources. While there were more heiresses on the market (an increase from 15% in 1600 to 36% in 1700), the making of the best strategic alliances, such as the Wyndham-Seymour marriage, required determination and ability.

Families such as the Wyndhams largely married within their own social class. They aspired to marry up and, unlike other noble counterparts, never married down for the sake of large quantities of money. According to Lawrence Stone

Whether marriages are determined by parents or by children, both opportunity - the chance of meeting at a reception, a ball, or in the hunting field - and inclination - the affinity of cultural like to like - will always make social endogamy the norm. The heir of a squire who marries a milkmaid may occur in fiction, but very rarely in real life, where he is, if carried away by sexual passion, more like to become entrapped by a singer or actress.<sup>55</sup>

Although rare, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Egremont formed such a *mésalliance*, without actually contracting a marriage. This was a radical deviation from the Wyndham pattern, being the only one of the five alliances between 1750 and 1950 not made with a daughter of the landed gentry (table 2). The absence of a marriage contract and not the social status of his common-law wife brought the separation of the estates from the Egremont titles: his natural son, who was created Baron Leconfield in 1859, succeeded to the estates; while a nephew assumed the titles of 4th Earl of Egremont and Baron Cockermouth. But this was the exception. The 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Leconfield married a Blunt of nearby Crabbet Park. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord married the daughter of a Scottish earl. And Hugh, himself, married a Lyttelton of Hagley: like the Wyndhams, an ‘establishment family’ descended from Cobham’s Cubs.<sup>56</sup>

In matters concerning ‘family interest’ Hugh Wyndham’s grandmother, the old Duchess of Cleveland, seemingly played a large role until her death whilst holidaying at Wiesbaden on 24 May 1901.<sup>57</sup> Born Lady Catherine Stanhope, her immediate relatives included many statesmen and writers of note, and all descended from the same Georgian oligarchs as the Wyndhams did (figure 2). This lady, seated at Battle Abbey, on the site of the battle that brought the Normans to power in England, clearly dominated her family.<sup>58</sup> The Duchess wrote the *Life and Letters* of her traveller-aunt, Lady Hester Stanhope<sup>59</sup> as well as the three-volume

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55. L. STONE and J.C. FAWTIER STONE, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880*, p 75.

56. D. CANNANDINE, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, pp 237 and 724.

57. East Sussex Record Office (hereinafter ESRO): Webster of Battle Abbey Papers; and L. van der Pas, ‘Descendants of Henry Primrose’, <http://www.worldroots>.

58. When Rosebery refused office in 1880, his poor countess had to “write to the duchess.” WSRO: PHA 9680, Hannah, Countess of Rosebery – Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 27 Apr 1880.

59. DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND, *Life and Letters of Lady Hester Stanhope* (London 1914).

*Battle Abbey Roll*, published in 1889 and containing a great deal of sound Norman genealogy. Her brother, the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Stanhope, was the well-known historian who produced the *Life of William Pitt* (1861) and *History of England* (1870), and established the Stanhope Essay prize at Oxford. The succeeding generations, which really fought the battle for power retention, followed in this tradition. Lord Rosebery, was a copious historian producing several works, including biographies of *Pitt* (1891) and *Chatham* (1910), prime-minister-relatives.<sup>60</sup> Hugh Wyndham wrote histories of several of his family's manors as well as the aforementioned account on the earls of Egremont at Petworth;<sup>61</sup> while his wife edited the letters of her great-grandmother, Lady Lyttelton (born Lady Sarah Spencer), which her uncle, General Neville Lyttelton, described as "very good reading."<sup>62</sup> Hugh's sister, Margaret, produced a *Catalogue of the Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the Possession of Lord Leconfield* that was privately published by the Medici Society in 1915 and his great-nephew and heir, the present Lord Egremont & Leconfield, has himself produced a lively account of the lives of George Wyndham and Wilfred Blunt, as well as the best-to-date portrait of Balfour.<sup>63</sup> Such publications fostered not only good public relations but also 'chain awareness' among succeeding generations. And as the battle to retain power became more difficult such books, proclaiming prestige and nobility of descent, seemingly increased in importance.

### **The battle to retain power and decline (from 1875)**

The agricultural revolution, set in motion during the late 1870s, brought enormous financial losses upon large, land-owning, wheat-producing families like the Wyndhams of Petworth. The cold wet summers, reported every year between 1877 and 1882, coincided with the opening of alternative wheat supplies from North America and the resulting competition sent prices crashing everywhere. Urban demand, rail transport and the need of farmers to diversify production, which encouraged the development of market gardening, exacerbated this. And local specialisation in response to markets, suddenly made accessible through the

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60. Rosebery's other biographies were of *Peel* (1899), *Napoleon* (1900) and *Cromwell* (1900).

61. H.A. WYNDHAM, *A family history 1688-1837: the Wyndhams of Somerset, Sussex and Wiltshire* (1950).

62. N. LYTTTELTON, *Eighty years; soldiering, politics, games*, p 13.

63. *The cousins* (Collins, London, 1977) and *Balfour: A life of Arthur James Balfour* (Phoenix: London, 1998).

railroad network, transformed the face of agriculture.<sup>64</sup> For a land-based aristocracy this was of extreme concern. In 1904, Hugh Wyndham was 'very distressed' about the Crewe finances and considered the purchase by Lord Crewe of a London house just before 'extraordinary'.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, for the Wyndhams at least, the process of decline was until 1914 almost imperceptible. Their agricultural income showed no dramatic decline: their farm rents actually increased between 1895 and 1900. They continued to spend lavishly. Petworth was redecorated and new plumbing was installed in 1906. A complete new electrical system was added three years later. The gardens were not neglected. Between 1870 and 1914 the Leconfield ladies carried out an imaginative planting of rhododendrons including rare Himalayan species.<sup>66</sup> The Wyndhams also continued to give unstinting hospitality. At a ball in 1908, the guests downed 62 bottles of gin, 8 of peach brandy, and 89 of claret. The size of the household did not decrease: there were still thirty-two servants in 1902 including such non-functional, status-enhancing domestics as footmen. Lord Leconfield maintained his private pack of hounds until after the Second World War, employing kennelmen, gamekeepers, huntsmen and whippers-in. Reginald, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord's third son, owned twelve hunters, hunted seventy days a year, and paid ten thousand guineas for a share in a racehorse. A big game hunter, he made several trips to South Africa and the United States.<sup>67</sup> Strong affective bonds and loyalties remained within the family. Lord and Lady Leconfield also continued to play their accustomed roles as household managers and local community leaders: their relations with servants and tenants still marked by the expected attitudes of paternalism and reciprocating deference. Their household papers suggest that country life at Petworth persisted well into the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup>

For the Wyndhams the first major break came with the First World War. Petworth Park was used as a remount depot from 1914, and in 1916 its use as a concentration camp for German prisoners was rumoured, which rather 'amused'

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64. E. ROYLE, *Modern Britain: a social history, 1750-1985* (Edward Arnold: London, 1987), pp 4-5; and J. FARNCOMBE, "On the Farming of Sussex" in *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, XI 1850, pp 75-88.

65. His cousin, Lady Margaret Primrose, married the Marquess of Crewe, as his second wife in 1899. WSRO: PHA, Hugh Wyndham - Constance Leconfield, 7 May 1904; and MARQUIS DE RUVIGNY, *The Titled Nobility of Europe* (London 1914, reprinted 1980), p 542.

66. G. JACKSON-STOPS, "Wilderness to Pleasure Ground", *Country Life*, 26 Jun 1975, p 1687.

67. PRETORIA ARCHIVES (hereinafter PA): archives of the Commandant General (hereinafter KG), CR 6353/96, Coloniale Secretaris Kaapstad Verzoekt dat permit verleend worde aan zekeren Heer Wyndham om zijne revolvers binnen dezen staat mede te bregen, 1896.

68. P. BLACKWELL, "An Undoubted Jewell": a case study of five Sussex country houses, 1880-1914", in *Southern History* 1981, 3, pp 183-200.

Humphrey Wyndham.<sup>69</sup> The enormous human losses of the Great War were less amusing. Wyndham younger sons all went to fight; while their eldest brother, Charles, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Leconfield, remained in England to manage the family's affairs<sup>70</sup> - a situational contrast that not escape Edward, who, from a Flemish trench, enquired of his sister: "How many times a week is Charles hunting?"<sup>71</sup>

The first weeks of combat saw the young aristocratic cream was spilled out into the soil of France. Relatives and friends swelled the casualty lists. George Cecil, son of Lord Edward Cecil and Violet Maxse, was killed in action on 1 September 1914, in the first hours of fighting.<sup>72</sup> When Reginald Wyndham followed in November 1914, Violet Cecil lamented to her sister-in-law: "I don't know what there is for any of us to say to each other."<sup>73</sup> The deaths of John Cavendish, Neil Primrose, Percy Wyndham, Edward Tennant, Richard Stanhope, and Ego and Ivo Charteris followed.<sup>74</sup> Humphrey, Edward and 'Willie' Wyndham were wounded.<sup>75</sup> The enormous losses in the trenches on the Western Front impacted severely upon families like the Wyndhams, who believed that all officers were gentlemen. Humphrey doubted the value of the new officers, drawn from the middling classes, and the fairness of the New Armies:

The question which everyone wants to know is exactly how we stand with regard to all these officers in K's army who are becoming Captains & Majors with a few months service. When they come out will they go over the heads of all the subalterns who have been fighting since the war began?<sup>76</sup>

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69. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Humphrey Wyndham – Mary Maxse, 7 Aug 1916. During the Second World War Petworth housed a girls' school evacuated from London. See Bodleian Library, Oxford: Violet Milner Papers, Box 17, Violet Leconfield – Olive Maxe, 21 Sep 1939.
  70. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Charles, Lord Leconfield - Mary Maxse, 11 Sep 1914.
  71. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Edward Wyndham - Mary Maxse, 14 Nov 1915.
  72. BODLEIAN LIBRARY, Oxford: Violet Milner Papers, Box 14, Frédéric Halinbourg – Lady Edward Cecil, 12 May 1916; and P. TOWNEND (ed.), *Burke's genealogical and heraldic history of the peerage, baronetage and knightage, Privy Council and order of precedence*, 105th edn. (Burke's, London, 1970), p 2214.
  73. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Lady Edward Cecil – Mary Maxse, 12 Nov 1914.
  74. L.G. PINE, *The New Extinct Peerage 1884-1971: Containing Extinct, Abeyant, Dormant & Suspended Peerages with Genealogies and Arms* (Heraldry Today: London, 1972), p 67; J. ABDY and C. GERE, *The souls: an elite in English society 1885-1930* (Sidgwick & Jackson: London, 1984), pp 15, 185; WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Edward Wyndham – Mary Maxse, 29 Oct (1914?); and WSRO: PHA, Maud Wyndham - Constance Leconfield, 29 Oct 1916.
  75. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Constance Leconfield - Mary Maxse, 2 Dec 1914; and Humphrey Wyndham - Mary Maxse, 28 Feb 1915.
  76. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Humphrey Wyndham - Mary Maxse, 19 Dec (1915?).

The sudden proliferation of young widows whose almost indecent haste to remarry, angered officers who had lost dear friends. Humphrey, although “expect[ing] the next few months [would] see a large no of our widows to the altar”, was nonetheless astonished at the engagement of Lady Guernsey and Geoffrey Fielding and “interested to hear” that Rosabelle Bingham was remarried.<sup>77</sup> Yet it was perhaps the mothers who grieved the most. In 1914 Lady Edward Cecil, devastated by the death of her son, George, despaired at not being able to

choose & have then what comes along and stagger under it as best we may. The penalty for living ... in war in an unprepared nation is certainly a high one.<sup>78</sup>

Little did she know exactly how high and under what weight the upper classes would have to stagger. The lifestyle of aristocratic families suffered as a result of the financial losses and the impact of the two world wars. London residences were sold, many demolished. The serving staffs at country houses, including Petworth, were reduced. The first servants left in 1914: Humphrey encountered a man in France who had served the family as a footman at Petworth.<sup>79</sup> In 1914, the Hugh Wyndhams lost their dairyman at Kromdraai as well as their chauffeur and their German cook, while their butler rejoined the Grenadier Guards.<sup>80</sup> Maud's maid opened a dressmaking business in 1915. The elite was losing their personal servants and all were not replaced at the end of the war.

By the 1930s, taxation and death duties were biting hard and the Wyndhams were in difficulty. The death of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord, presented the Leconfield family had a heavy death duty bill and they were forced to hand over family pictures at ridiculous values.<sup>81</sup> Hugh and his brother Edward chose not to take on Petworth and the estates, both to alleviate the family from the crushing effects of death duties and also to avoid having to uproot themselves and move into a huge mansion lacking in modern comforts and somewhat in need of improvement and repair.<sup>82</sup> While the 6<sup>th</sup> Lord disposed of all the family lands in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Dumfries, and 20 000 in Cumbria and 7 000 acres in Sussex.<sup>83</sup> The moated and ruined castle of Egremont was lost. Cockermouth Castle, with Norman remains was retained and modernised, and now serves as a dower residence.<sup>84</sup> The

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77. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Humphrey Wyndham - Mary Maxse, 27 Jan (1916?).

78. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Lady Edward Cecil – Mary Maxse, 5 Jan 1915.

79. WSRO: Maxse Papers 455, Humphrey Wyndham – Mary Maxse, 7 Aug 1916.

80. WSRO: PHA, Maud Wyndham - Constance Leconfield, 11 Aug 1914.

81. R. LACEY, *Aristocrats* (Fontana: London, 1983), p 190.

82. Letter Miles Costello, Petworth – I. van der Waag, Jan 2001.

83. LORD EGREMONT, *Wyndham and Children First* (1968), p 95.

84. Letter Lord Egremont – I. van der Waag, 19 Jun 1981.



2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Leconfield had some 109 900 acres in 1876, the 7<sup>th</sup> Lord (and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Egremont) was left with only 13 000 in 1976.<sup>85</sup>

Britain's colonial retreat brought on another crisis. The Empire had stood for many things: a tacit proof that Britain was 'Great', an inspiration for poets, a provider of jobs for colonial administrators and officials. According to Martin Kitchen

They needed the Empire not simply because they were trained from earliest childhood to administer distant lands, but also because the Empire confirmed their sense of superiority, their authority, their mission, their purpose in life, their dearest and deepest values.<sup>86</sup>

The politics of empire had troubled the Wyndhams and their relatives for some time. As a governing aristocracy under threat, imperial concerns formed their staple debate. Family currents were strong<sup>87</sup> and with the writing on the wall, younger sons and even heirs (including Hugh's cousin, the Marquess of Queensberry) left Britain for the colonies: some for a vocation, others for health reasons, but most went to create a lifestyle of choice elsewhere.

### **Hugh Wyndham and South Africa 1901 -1930**

The 523 letters (1904-7, 1909-1921) written by Hugh and his wife to his mother, Lady Leconfield, provide a vivid picture of their attempts, having escaped a changing society at home, to re-create a vanishing lifestyle in South Africa. After Eton, Hugh went on to New College, Oxford, where he read history and the classics, and made the acquaintance of John Buchan, Robert Brand, Philip Kerr and others, all of whom were later drawn to South Africa by Milner. These men had no fortunes of their own: many, like Wyndham, were younger sons or the sons of younger sons of gentry, who, needing to make their own way, went out to South Africa to assist in the exciting task of reconstructing the former Boer republics.<sup>88</sup> Eagerly they left the country houses and the palaces of Park Lane for a Johannesburg, where everything was "new, raw, and fortuitous."<sup>89</sup>

With the process of aristocratic decline still almost imperceptible at Petworth, Hugh, in 1901, had no reason to leave England, other than for health (he suffered

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85. See Appendix H: Patterns of Estate Ownership, 1876-1976 in D. CANNANDINE, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, pp 710-11.

86. M. KITCHEN, *British Empire and Commonwealth: a short history*, p 59.

87. See, for example, WSRO: PHA 9680, Hannah, Countess of Rosebery – Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 3 Jul 1886.

88. WSRO: PHA 1700 and 1701, Eton school reports for Hugh and Edward Wyndham, 1895-1901. On the kindergarten, W. NIMOCKS, *Milner's young men: the "kindergarten" in Edwardian Imperial affairs* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968). D. CANNADINE, *The decline and fall of the British Aristocracy*, p 426.

89. J.A. SMITH, *John Buchan; a biography* (London, 1965), p 113.

from tuberculosis) and imperial adventure. For the moment he would assist Milner in establishing British ascendancy in this newest outpost of the Empire and share digs with Buchan and others.<sup>90</sup> George Wyndham, Under Secretary for War, former chairman of the South Africa Association (the principal jingo pressure group in England) and leader of the Milnerites in the Commons, was Hugh's cousin and eased his appointment to Milner's staff: as indeed he had done for Westminster, his ducal stepson.<sup>91</sup>

Wyndham did not remain on Milner's staff for long. His position was an unpaid stepping-stone and the time had come for him to strike out into South African politics. Yet he was "no friend with that strange conglomeration of nations known as the Uitlander population"<sup>92</sup>, who, according to Marguerite Chaplin, were "ambitious for money, & society, pushing to a degree & knowing where & when to push."<sup>93</sup> He chose to settle in the country and in December 1902 explained to his sister that the labour question, which would never be satisfactorily resolved, was "sure to wreck the political influence of Johannesburg from any Imperial point of view [and] as far as I can see the best thing to do will be to get out of it as soon as possible."<sup>94</sup>

This he did. He built a country house at Kromdraai, near Standerton, where he led the life of a landed gentleman. Here he bred and raced horses, wrote extensively and even commanded his own regiment. He built, rebuilt, remodelled and improved - all aristocratic diversions. Without a professional occupation, Wyndham had a great deal of time on his hands. There were of course administrative responsibilities at Kromdraai, the local party circuit (less extensive than in England), the races and evening cards. And then there was the care of his tenants, the distribution of charity in the district - probably never a significant sum in comparison with his overall income and expenditure - and his duties as a justice

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90. BODLEIAN LIBRARY, Oxford: Milner Papers 71, diary, 16 Nov 1901; PA: Secretary to the Governor (hereinafter GOV) 543, file P.S.167 Housing of Government Officials, Milner - Chamberlain, 22 Sep 1902; W. NIMOCKS, *Milner's young men: the "kindergarten" in Edwardian Imperial affairs*, pp 27, 46; and J.A. SMITH, *John Buchan*, p 107.

91. BODLEIAN LIBRARY, Oxford: Milner Papers 205, George Wyndham - Milner, 9 Aug 1898, Milner Papers 207, George Wyndham - Milner, 23 Jun 1899; WSRO: PHA, George Wyndham - Hugh Wyndham, 17 Jun 1901; and Milner - Hugh Wyndham, 1 Aug 1901.

92. WSRO: Maxse Papers 50, Hugh Wyndham - Lady Mary Maxse, 21 Jun 1902.

93. UCT LIBRARIES, BC831 Drummond Chaplin Collection. Diary of Lady Marguerite Chaplin, 27 Oct 1896. Lady Chaplin was referring to the Goldman brothers.

94. WSRO: Maxse Papers 50, Hugh Wyndham, Lady Mary Maxse, 15 Dec 1902.

of the peace and member of the St George's Society and the Standerton Liquor Licensing Court.<sup>95</sup>

Wyndham married Maud Lyttelton, daughter of the 9<sup>th</sup> Viscount Cobham, in 1908. And they and their relatives formed an 'Imperial connection' in South Africa. His wife's brother, Jack Lyttelton was Lord Selborne's private secretary and her uncles included General Sir Neville Lyttelton (General Officer Commanding SA Military Command, 1902-04) and Alfred Lyttelton (Colonial Secretary 1903-05). George Wyndham (Under Secretary for War and later Chief Secretary for Ireland), Neville Talbot (Bishop of Pretoria), Sir Arthur Lawley (lieutenant governor of the Transvaal, 1902-05) and Herbert Gladstone (South Africa's first governor general, 1910-14) were their cousins; while John Buchan, Lionel Hitchens and Geoffrey Robinson all later married cousins (*vide* genealogical table 2).

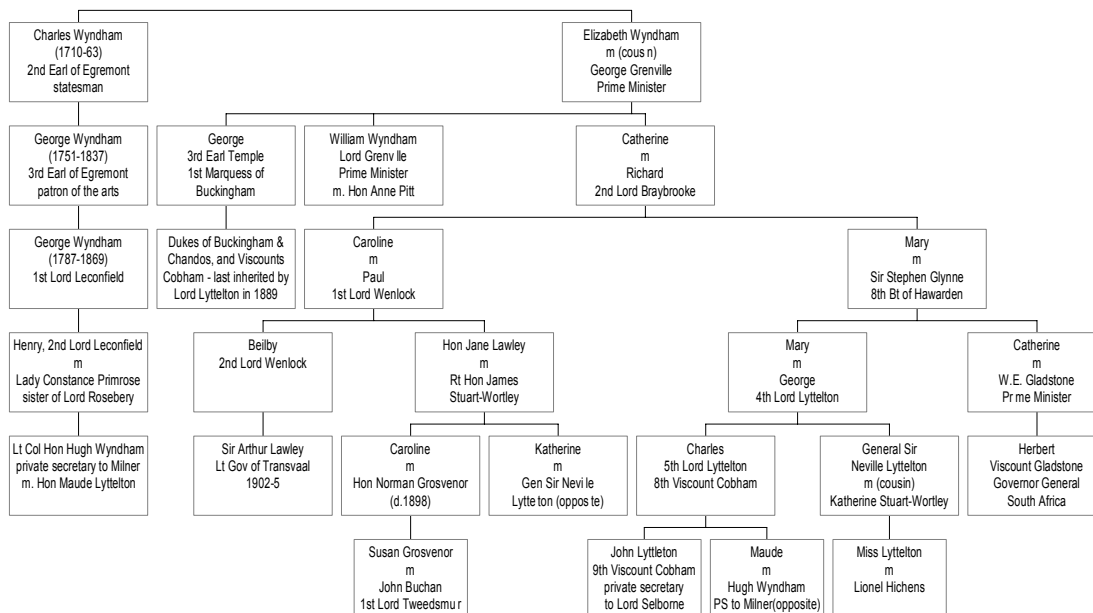
The electoral defeats of 1907 (Transvaal) and 1908 (Free State) and, more importantly, the apparent weakness and failure of the British government, had an enormous effect on the position of the British population in South Africa. The atmosphere had become "very uncongenial": the resident magistrate at Wolmaransstad even declared a wish "to leave this awful service [and] leave this county."<sup>96</sup> Kindergarteners were affected directly and several were summarily dismissed: Dougal Malcom, Selborne's private secretary, was in 1909 the only member of the kindergarten still in government employ. While most drifted back to England, Hugh Wyndham remained on in South Africa and achieved eminence as a progressive farmer and breeder of thoroughbred stock and took a leading part in public and sporting affairs, both in Standerton and in Johannesburg. He entered South African politics and after an unsuccessful, rather messy attempt against Louis Botha at Standerton (1907), won the Turffontein seat in 1910 as a Unionist.

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95. PA: LD 747, file AG2610/04 Justice of the Peace, H.A. Wyndham vice Kelby; WSRO: Maxse Papers 50, Hugh Wyndham - Lady Mary Maxse, 15 Oct 1904; and PA: URU 75, file 99 Cancellation of the commissions as justices of the peace granted to A.J. Malherbe, C. Power and the Hon. H.A. Wyndham.

96. CA: Sir Lewis Michell Collection, vol 1, P. Jourdan - Sir Lewis Michell, 12 Sep 1907.

Genealogy 2: Hugh Wyndham and the ‘Imperial’ connection in South Africa



Advocating stronger ties with Britain, he called for the integration of imperial and dominion defence and the design of a Union Defence Force for South Africa along British lines. He was for ten years (1910-20) shadow defence minister and, as a member of the parliamentary select committee on defence, an architect of the *South Africa Defence Act* (1912). During the First World War he served as Chief Intelligence Officer for the Union, as official historian of the German South West Africa campaign and from 1917 to 1921 on the Defence Council, where he vocalised ideas on land, naval and air power. He also took up several civil liberty and progressive issues: he brought a private bill in 1914 to provide for the women’s franchise and another (with Patrick Duncan) in 1917 to regulate the wages of women and young persons. He, again with Duncan, also protested vigorously against the deportation of the 1913 strike leaders, an action that threatened to split the Unionists.<sup>97</sup> Wyndham’s apparent and vehement support for the defenceless led Thomas Boydell, a Labourite, to believe that “Hugh’s ancestors

97. RHODES HOUSE, Oxford: Feetham Papers, Box 3, file 2, Feetham – Mother, 19 March 1914; Woman’s Enfranchisement Bill (6 of 1914); UCT Libraries: BC Duncan Papers, A37.1. Bill to Regulate the wages of women and young persons (15 of 1917).

had been fighting for freedom for 2000 years!” Maud Wyndham saw the irony: she wrote to her mother-in-law, “If only he knew they'd fought steadily against it.”<sup>98</sup>

Wyndham was returned for Turffontein until beaten by ‘a labour man’ in 1920. With the rise of Labour and Afrikaner Nationalism through the 1920s, there was no limelight - only “a little hard grind in the dark for S. Africa” - and with “no great national British question at stake” South African politics had become “dull and degrading.”<sup>99</sup> Disillusioned Wyndham returned permanently to England in 1930 and in 1952 succeeded, as the 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Leconfield, to what remained of the family's estates.

## **Conclusion**

The Wyndham ascendancy and decline, their accumulation of and the subsequent battle to preserve power are mirrored in the broad development of the British aristocracy. The senior line of Wyndhams (of Felbrigg and later Petworth) employed several strategies to consolidate and preserve their social, economic, and political power:

- Strict financial control, including inheritance strategies and marriage alliances, for capital formation and preservation.
- Political control to secure family interests at a local, national and imperial level.
- Social control, including desired upbringing and education, the making of marriage alliances, and conduct of public relations efforts.

Several successive, largely overlapping forces set in motion in the late nineteenth century set the Wyndhams, and indeed most other British aristocratic families, on a steady decline. Their finances were rocked by the changes in agriculture. The First World War decimated their male ranks and exacerbated their demographic failure. The quick succession of heirs, often (as in the case of the Wyndhams) several brothers in turn, brought the crushing effect of twentieth-century death duties to full effect. These forces, particularly since the passage of the Peerage Act in 1911, were out of their control. Some, like Hugh Wyndham, attempted to create lifestyles of choice elsewhere.

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98. WSRO: PHA, Maud Wyndham - Constance, Baroness Leconfield, 16 Mar 1914.

99. CA: Sir Lewis Michell Collection, vol 1, Sir Charles Crewe - Sir Lewis Michell, 11 Dec 1925.

As a younger son in a society that was preferentially primogenital, the mere accident of order of birth debarred Hugh Wyndham from a stable niche within the aristocracy. His fortune had to be mostly of his own making and his only status was that of a gentleman, although one with connections. He could rely on little more than a good, public-school education and a financial leg-up into the world, where his success would depend on either “exploiting his family ties by making himself indispensable to more fortunate relatives and connections, or on his making his way by his own exertions, either by marriage to an heiress, or in a trade or profession.” Wyndham went through both steps in succession, although his wife, who was from an ‘establishment family’, was no heiress. Family connections saw to a job on Milner's staff and inherited money established his later farming and political career. Disillusioned by developments in South Africa, he returned permanently to England in 1930 and, in 1952, succeeded his brother as the 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Leconfield. Yet, through his association with Milner's kindergarten, membership of the Defence Council and albeit short political career as shadow defence minister, Hugh Wyndham helped shape early-twentieth-century South Africa.

### Opsomming

#### **Hugh Archibald Wyndham (1877-1963): Sy afstamming en familieverbintnisse**

Wyndham, ‘n tipiese neëntiende eeuse Engelse landheer, het in 1901 na Suid-Afrika geëmigreer. Hy het aanvanklik as Milner se onbetaalde privaatsekretaris gedien, waarna hy sy kragte in die heropbou van die perdeïndustrie ná die verwoesting van die Anglo-Boere Oorlog gewerp het. Daarna het hy hom in die politiek begewe, eers as ‘n *Transvaal Progressive* en na 1910 as ‘n Unionis. Hierdie artikel plaas Wyndham in sy sosio-ekonomiese milieu, verken sy buitengewone familie-agtergrond en ontleed die omvang en invloed van sy sosiale netwerk. Sy familieverbintnisse het hom ‘n pos op Milner se staf besorg en sy erfgeld het hom daarna as boer en politikus gevestig. Hy was egter ‘n “anachronisme” in ‘n veranderende Suid-Afrika en het in 1930 permanent na Brittanje teruggekeer, waar, soos hy spoedig ontdek het, die winde van verandering ook vaardig was.