

## BARDOLPH AND POINS

In 1933, R.A.Newhall wrote of a Johan Bardolf who was the mounted man-at-arms of Sir John Fastolf, captain of Honfleur in 1428. Noting that Shakespeare had “appropriated and corrupted” Fastolf’s name for his Falstaff, he concludes that

“It would be an unusually strange coincidence that such uncommon names as Fastolf and Bardolf should occur together in the same relationship both in history and in literature wholly by accident, but how Shakespeare could know, if he did, of the historical juxtaposition will probably always be obscure.”<sup>1</sup>

He speculates whether Shakespeare’s Stratford contemporary George Bardolf “boasted an ancestor who had served in the French wars” but it’s not clear that the man’s name really was Bardolf. The entry of the name on a list of Stratford residents not attending church appears to be a clerical aberration, since the man and his family are known everywhere else in the records as “Bardell” or “Bardill”.

Whereas Bardolph and Falstaff first arise in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry IV*, Newhall’s Bardolf was active in the early part of the reign of Henry VI. Johan Bardolf was among a contingent called to reinforce the army besieging Orleans in 1429, and is connected in the records to “Monseigneur de Tallebot”, the historical counterpart of the soldier whom Shakespeare depicts in *1 Henry VI* as so feared that his name alone causes the enemy to flee: “The cry of ‘Talbot’ serves me for a sword”. But there are two earlier Bardolphs that might be considered to have strong connections to the *Henry IV* plays.

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<sup>1</sup> R.A.Newhall, ‘An historical Bardolph’, *Modern Language Notes* 48 (1933).

The first is already known and seems to be the model of *2 Henry IV's* Lord Bardolph, rather than Corporal Bardolph. Thomas, fifth Baron Bardolf (1369-1408) was born at Birling, Kent. In 1403 (the year of the Battle of Shrewsbury, which marks the end of *1 Henry IV*, he and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (whose son, "Hotspur", died in the battle) were joint overseers of Bardolf's mother's will. According to one chronicle, he instigated the 1405 scheme for England to be divided between Northumberland, Owain Glyn Dŵr, and Edmund (IV) Mortimer.<sup>2</sup> In 1408, he and Northumberland raised an army, but their advance south was blocked by Sir Thomas Rokeby, the sheriff of Yorkshire. Shakespeare depicts this event:

"The Earl Northumberland and the Lord Bardolph,  
With a great power of English and of Scots,  
Are by the shrieve of Yorkshire overthrown."

- *2 Henry IV Act 4 Scene 4 (2848-51)*

Thomas Bardolf died of wounds received at the Battle of Bramham Moor, where the Earl of Northumberland was killed.

Shakespeare's more famous Bardolph, however, is the "errant malmsey-nose knave" who is a close associate of Falstaff. This character's name was initially "Sir John Russell". Russell being the family name of the Earl of Bedford, it is thought it may have caused offence and thus was changed to Bardolph. Given that the play already contained a character called Lord Bardolph, this is not the most obvious choice of substitute name. "Peto" was also new, having originally been "Harvey". We would not know about these changes but for an error in the first quarto of *1 Henry IV* (1598), lines 250 to 255, where the names Russell and Harvey were left in the text. It is possible that Poins (who speaks these lines) was also a new name, but in his case there is no trace of it. The characters' names appears to have been changed at the same time that the character Sir John Oldcastle was renamed Falstaff. This occurred some time between the first performance and the 1598 publication of the first quarto, apparently to avoid insulting the Cobham family.

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<sup>2</sup> H. Summerson, 'Bardolf, Thomas, fifth Baron Bardolf (1369-1408), in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004).

The historical Oldcastle (d.1417) became Lord Cobham when he married heir of the Cobham family, Joan, in 1408, gaining land and properties including Cooling Castle in Kent. Surrounding land, including the village of High Halstow, two miles from Cooling Castle, was “[anciently] part of the possessions of the family of Bardolf; from which it passed in like manner to Poinz and Grey”.<sup>3</sup> The area around and including Cooling Castle and High Halstow is known as the Hoo Peninsular. The ancient connection of Bardolph and Hoo ended in the 12th century when Hugh Bardolf’s daughter Juliana married the keeper of Gloucester castle, Nicholas Pointz or Poyntz. Bardolf’s younger daughter, Isolda, married Richard de Grey. Hoo remained in the possession of the Gloucester-based Poyntz family for one and a half centuries, and it appears that the Grey branch of the family also retained their connection to the area. Six generations on, the fourth Lord Poyntz, another Sir Nicholas (whose father had been born in Hoo), enfeoffed “John de Grey of Codenore of the manor of Hoo, co. Kent.”<sup>4</sup>

From the records, this Poyntz was wild, even by the standards of the day. Though a knight, and officially the rector of St Mary’s, Hoo (two miles east of High Halstow), the abbot of Abbotsbury in Dorset complained in 1351 that Poyntz, accompanied by armed men, stole a horse from him, threatened him and his monks and held them to ransom. Poyntz stole a horse from the abbot on at least three different occasions, these horses being valued in the Patent Rolls at 20 marks, 10 marks and 100 shillings respectively. A warrant was apparently issued for Poyntz and his men to be arrested and imprisoned for “felonies, trespasses, conspiracies, extortions and excesses done by them in the county of Dorset”. If Poyntz was imprisoned, it wasn’t for long. Bizarrely, in April 1352 while the case against him for pillaging the abbey of Abbotsbury was ongoing, he was made official protector of the abbey of Bynedon. His bad behaviour wasn’t confined to menacing men of the cloth. A year later in September 1353 the Patent Rolls contain a “complaint by John de Whitfeld,

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Hasted, 'Parishes: Halstow', *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 4* (1798), pp. 16-19. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=53794> Date accessed: 23 October 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Edward III Vol VI 1343-45, 464.

‘chivaler’, that Nicholas de Poyntz, ‘chivaler’, and others ravished his wife Eva at Shirburn, co. Dorset, abducted her with his goods and still detain these from him.”<sup>5</sup>

Though these exploits occurred fifty years before the action of the *Henry IV* plays, which take place from 1402 to 1413, Shakespeare was not shy of altering the historical timeline to suit his purposes, conflating years or even decades; Hotspur (whose real-life counterpart was in his late 30s) and Prince Hal (whose real-life counterpart was 16) are made the same age in *1 Henry IV*. The behaviour of the last Poyntz to own High Halstow might be deemed sufficiently memorable to survive the half century until Sir John Oldcastle became Lord Cobham and potentially -- given the tendency then for families to remain in the same locale -- to be recounted as part of the area’s history even in Shakespeare’s time.

In *1 Henry IV*, Bardolph, Poins, and Falstaff join with Prince Hal to perform a robbery at Gad’s Hill (with a highwayman, in case the geographical reference should be missed, also called Gadshill). Gad’s Hill is less than four miles as the crow flies from High Halstow, across the River Medway. To reach it on horseback as they do in the play, Falstaff’s real-life counterpart, Oldcastle, would have needed to cross the Medway via Rochester Bridge, built around 1380 by his wife’s grandfather, John, third Lord Cobham of Cobham. The total distance from Cooling Castle (Oldcastle’s seat) to Gad’s Hill, via High Halstow (The Bardolph/Poyntz property), is only eleven and a half miles. On first arriving, Poins steals and hides Falstaff’s horse. Falstaff complains “I am accursed to rob in that thief’s company. The rascal hath removed my horse and tied him I know not where.” In *2 Henry IV*, Bardolph goes with Falstaff to recruit soldiers, and does so in the county of Gloucestershire, where the real-life daughter of Hoo’s last male Bardolph travelled in order to get married to keeper of Gloucester castle, thus joining her family with the powerful family Pointz.

In summary, the names Oldcastle, Bardolph and Poins are all historically connected to a part of Kent within a two mile radius of High Halstow, which is itself very close to the robbery scenes of

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<sup>5</sup> Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Edward III Vol IX 1350-54, 203, 204, 249, 264, 380, 517.

*I Henry IV.*<sup>6</sup> In addition, the play's Poins, like the last Poyntz of Hoo, is a nobleman (we can infer this from the fact that he is closest to the prince) who steals a horse and commits robbery. If we assume, as many scholars do, that the character originally called Russell was only called Bardolph when Oldcastle was renamed Falstaff, Bardolph's historical precedent might work (at least to those with some awareness of the history surrounding Oldcastle's seat) as a subtle assertion that Falstaff *is* Oldcastle, despite the reassurance of the text, in the play's epilogue, that "this is not the man". It is possible that the name Poins was also introduced at the same time that Oldcastle became Falstaff, to cement that connection. We are unlikely to be able to determine with any certainty whether the choice of names geographically associated with Oldcastle's seat was deliberate. But if it was not it is worth noting, along with Newhall's Bardolf, as a fascinating case of nominal coincidence.

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<sup>6</sup> Cobhams and Bardolphs were also connected in during Henry IV's reign. The daughter of fifth Baron Bardolph, real-life counterpart of Shakespeare's Lord Bardolph, married Reginald, third Lord Cobham of Sterborough, Kent, after her father's death. This Lord Cobham was the great-grandson of the younger brother of Sir John de Cobham, whose great-granddaughter Oldcastle had married.