

Armour Purchases and Lists from the Howard Household Books

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Part 1 - Armour Purchases

This article is an examination of the armour purchases of Sir John Howard, and the listings of armour loaned out to be used by his retinue. The author's aim is to provide the student of Western European armour with useful data that, when examined in conjunction with other sources, may begin to shed some light on the manufacture and trade in armour in England and The Low Countries.

Sir John Howard was born into a typical East-Anglian gentry family in 1421. His father had married well, to the daughter of Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk; this gave the Howard family a solid connection to a powerful patron, and would influence the course of John Howard's later career. While he served on the council of his cousin, John Mowbray, third Duke of Norfolk, as a young man, John Howard's political life was unremarkable until his open support of Edward IV during the campaigns of 1461. He joined Edward's host as a member of Norfolk's contingent prior to the battle of Towton,¹ where he led a contingent of the Duke's men. Howard's fortunes improved dramatically following the success of Edward's seizure of power. As a reward for his loyalty, Howard was knighted, given a post in the royal household, and received grants of manors. Additionally, he was made Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, as well as Constable of the castles at Colchester and Norwich.

During the first years of Edward IV's reign, Howard served in military campaigns against the Lancastrians in the North of England and Wales. At this point he was acting as the head of Norfolk's contingent, rather than in an independent role. This service, coupled with his position in the royal household, brought him to the attention of the king, and soon Howard began to receive the benefits of royal favour. In 1467 Howard was made a knight of the body, and this was followed a year later by the exceptional elevation to the posts of Treasurer of the Household and Keeper of the Wardrobe, positions normally held by a peer. Early in 1470, the King bestowed on him a barony, making John Howard one of only eight

men elevated to the peerage from the gentry during the reign of Edward IV.

Upon the restoration of Henry VI, Howard did not follow Edward into exile and instead remained quietly on his estates. He was however the first lord in East-Anglia to again rally to Edward upon his return from Burgundy. Howard's diplomatic career restarted soon after, beginning with his appointment as deputy-lieutenant of Calais under Lord Hastings. He served on a number of embassies to France, and was the chief negotiator with Louis XI of the peace that ended Edward's 1475 expedition to France. Howard's shipping interests (he owned some twelve ships, although not simultaneously) and careful management of his estates enabled him to increase his personal fortune by 800£ a year.

On the death of Edward IV in 1483, Howard's support of Richard, Duke of Gloucester's Protectorship and his continued loyalty to that same lord after his crowning as Richard III was rewarded with Howard's elevation to the Duchy of Norfolk (the duchy had been vacant since the death of Howard's cousin, John Mowbray). Much of the land had been awarded to Edward IV's youngest son, which was highly irregular. Although Richard did not restore all of the Mowbray lands to Howard, he made up in part for the diminished title by granting him other manors. Howard remained steadfastly loyal to Richard III. During the Duke of Buckingham's rebellion,² Howard played a notable role in keeping the south-east loyal to the crown. Howard continued his support of Richard during the invasion of Henry Tudor and died leading the Yorkist vanguard at Bosworth.

The Household Books

The Howard household books are important sources of evidence in a number of areas relating to the material culture of England during the fifteenth century. They are unique both in their timespan and in the extent their subject matter, detailing not only household purchases but also