

Lionel Cresswell, 'Royal Descent of A. C. Swinburne',  
*Genealogical Magazine*, 6 (December 1902), 358–60

Lionel Cresswell's piece of genealogical research traces a line back from Swinburne to Henry VII. W. Percy Hedley's *Northumberland Families* (1968), Hutchings and Turley's *Young Algernon Swinburne* (1978) and Kathleen Richardson's *A Bygone Age: Ashburnhams and Brasseys* (1990) are worth consulting for the family history of the Swinburnes, the Ashburnhams and the Gordons.

Swinburne was proud of his Northumbrian ancestry, which went back to the time of Henry II and the twelfth century. This is clearly seen in the autobiographical letter to Stedman, where Swinburne spends much time writing about his ancestors and being descended from Catholic and Jacobite exiles. He defined himself as a 'borderer' and spoke enthusiastically of past Swinburnes who had sacrificed themselves for Mary, Queen of Scots. One of his great-uncles was the Duke of Northumberland. His uncle Edward Swinburne and his aunt Julia Swinburne were both gifted artists, and another ancestor Henry Swinburne (1743–1803) was a renowned travel writer, author of *Travels Through Spain* (1779) and *Travels in the Two Sicilies* (1783–5). In contrast, Swinburne says little about his mother's family the Ashburnhams, despite the antiquity of their line.

Both Sharp and Wratislaw mention Swinburne's family background (see pp. 285–300 and pp. 403–11). In the preface to the Tauchnitz *Atalanta in Calydon and Lyrical Poems*, Sharp wrote:

In that North-Sea province the Swinburnes are an old-established family: even so far back as the time of Henry III one Sir William de Swinburne was a Northumbrian to be reckoned with. The name is probably one of the oldest of Northumbrian clan-names: unquestionably the Swinburnes of Swinburne belonged to the native noblesse. In the time of Edward II, the direct line ended with Adam de Swinburne: and after a lapse we hear of his kinsman, Sir William, but of Swinburne Castle no more. The family seat is now, as it has long been, Capheaton Castle: there the present head of the family, Sir John Swinburne, resides: and there and in the neighbourhood, his cousin, Algernon Charles Swinburne, spent much of his boyhood.

The poet's father, the late Admiral Charles Swinburne, was the second son of Sir John Edward Swinburne: he married Lady Henrietta Jane, daughter of the third Earl

of Ashburnham: and their eldest child, born in London on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1837, is the subject of the present memoir. As the Ashburnham family is also of pre-Conquest days, Mr. Swinburne may certainly claim to be of the oldest blood in the country. (Sharp (intro.), *Atalanta in Calydon and Lyrical Poems* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1901), p. 8)

Notes of caution have frequently been sounded in connection with Swinburne's ancestral claims. Mary Disney Leith commented:

There was a false impression regarding the existence of a French ancestress in the Swinburne family which Algernon himself shared, and he seems to have been unable to divest himself of the idea. Its explanation and refutation have been left in writing by his youngest sister, and I may as well give their substance. The father of their great-grandmother (her name was Christiana Dillon), having married *en secondes nocces* a Miss Dicconson who was brought up in France, lived there almost entirely, and by his children by his second wife were brought up there by their mother after his death. Miss Swinburne [i.e. Isabel] thinks that Algernon may have heard his Swinburne grandfather talk of his French kinsfolk, but there was no blood relationship – as doubtless Algernon, with his strong French proclivities and sympathies, would fain have believed. (Leith, p. 4 fn)

Georges Lafourcade commented further on this legend:

Edward [i.e. Swinburne's great-grandfather] was still in Bordeaux in 1761 when he married Christina Dillon, connected with the Irish family of the Dillons of Roscommon: she was the ancestress to whom Swinburne so often referred as being responsible for the 'Irish particles in his blood'; her mother was Martha Newland of Beckneham, Kent, and her father, Robert Dillon, took as his second wife a Miss Disconson who in 1762 acted as John Edward's god-mother; this lady, who was a daughter of the Governor of Jammes II's eldest son at St-Germain, seems to have had a somewhat remote connection with the French House of Polignac. This was enough for Swinburne to claim with typical alacrity that he was descended from the Polignac family. In his correspondence he often refers to the fact as absolutely beyond doubt, and, when travelling in Auvergne in 1869, it was with great emotion that he visited the ruins of the Castle of Polignac in the company of Burton ... It can be seen from what has been said above how utterly impossible was Swinburne's contention: he was repudiating the wholly uninteresting Miss Newland for the far more attractive step-mother of French extraction, boldly grafting upon the old Saxon stock a delightful, though unreal, Franco-Irish sprout. (Lafourcade, pp. 4–5)

Clyde K. Hyder wrote 'it is certain that he took some liberties with his ancestry, chiefly in according to his ancestors a more important role in the service of Mary Queen of Scots than the facts warranted and in discovering at opportune times French and Irish strains among them' (Hyder, p. 12).

As for the importance of one's 'connections' in times past, in *Swinburne as I Knew Him* (1919), Coulson Kernahan tells the following anecdote:

Two elderly maiden ladies, with whom 'birth' counted for everything, and 'brains', even genius, scarcely at all, chanced to see the exquisitely beautiful miniatures which Lady Henniker Heaton (nee the Hon. Sermonda Burrell) was so kind as to allow to be reproduced in *The Letters of Swinburne*, which Dr Arthur Compton-Rickett and the late Thomas Hake so ably edited.

'Who is this Mr. Swinburne, of whom we hear so much?' the elder lady asked. 'We know, of course, that he is a poet, but who are his people?'

'Oh, he's the son of Admiral Charles Swinburne, who came of an old Northumberland family, and of Lady Jane Ashburnham, of Battle Place, Sussex,' was the reply. 'That,' pointing to the miniature of Isabella Burrell, Countess of Beverley, and ancestress of the present Duke of Northumberland, and Elizabeth Burrell, Duchess of Hamilton and Marchioness of Exeter, 'were his great-grand-aunts.'

'Is that really so!' exclaimed the elder lady, vastly impressed, 'I had no idea he was so highly connected.' Then, turning to her sister: 'Do remind me, directly we get back, to order some of his books.' (Coulson Kernahan, *Swinburne as I Knew Him* (London: John Lane, 1919), pp. ix-xi)


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## 358 THE GENEALOGICAL MAGAZINE

## ROYAL DESCENT OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

By LIONEL CRESSWELL (BARRISTER-AT-LAW OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE).

I. ENRY THE SEVENTH (the first of the Tudors); styled the same as Henry VI.; born at Pembroke Castle July 26, 1455; proclaimed King by Sir William Stanley on the field of Bosworth immediately after the battle, August 22, 1485, and crowned on the 30th of the ensuing October at Westminster Abbey by Cardinal Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury. The King married, January 18, 1486, the Princess Elizabeth Plantagenet, born February 11, 1466, eldest daughter and heiress of King Edward IV., and by her (who died on her birthday, 1503) had issue:

2. THE PRINCESS MARY TUDOR, born 1498; married, first, October 9, 1514, to Louis XII. of France, by whom (who died January 1 following) she had no issue; and, secondly, May 13, 1515, to Sir Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, K.G. (who died February 22, 1545). The Princess died June 25, 1533, having had issue, among others, a daughter:

3. LADY FRANCES BRANDON, who was married to Henry Grey, Marquess of Dorset, K.G. (afterwards Duke of Suffolk), beheaded February 25, 1544; she had, with two others, a daughter (and coheir):

4. LADY KATHERINE GREY (sister of Queen Jane), married, first, to Henry Lord Herbert, and secondly to Edward Seymour, created by Queen Elizabeth Baron Beauchamp and Earl of Hertford. This lady, sister of the unfortunate nine days' Queen, was herself equally unhappy. Upon her pregnancy being discovered she was committed prisoner to the Tower, together with her husband, who was kept a prisoner there nine years, and fined £15,000 by the Star Chamber for having contaminated a maid of the blood-royal. The solidity of their marriage was, however, subsequently established at common law. The Countess herself died in the Tower January 26, 1567, leaving by her second husband a son:

5. EDWARD LORD BEAUCHAMP, born September 21, 1561, who married Honora, daughter of Sir Richard Rogers, Knight, of Brianstone, co. Dorset, and died *vita patris*, being buried at Bedwyn Magna, Wilts, July 21, 1612, leaving two sons. The second,

## ROYAL DESCENT OF SWINBURNE 359

6. FRANCIS LORD SEYMOUR of Trowbridge (created February 19, 1641), born about 1590, married, first, in 1620, Frances, daughter and heir of Sir Gilbert Prinne, Knight, of Allington, Wilts, and had issue :

7. CHARLES, SECOND LORD SEYMOUR, of Trowbridge, born 1621, who married, *secondly*, in 1654, Elizabeth, daughter of William Lord Allington, and by her, who married *secondly* Sir John Ernle of Whetham, and died in 1691, had issue, among others :

8. CHARLES SEYMOUR, SIXTH DUKE OF SOMERSET, "the proud Duke of Somerset, a man in whom the pride of birth and rank amounted almost to a disease"; born August 13, 1662, made K.G. by Charles II., and was of the Privy Council and a Lord of the Bedchamber to King James II. He was, however, a promoter of the Revolution, and in the reign of William was constituted President of the Council. One of the Commissioners for the Union with Scotland, *temp.* Queen Anne, and upon the accession of King George I. was sworn of the Privy Council and appointed Master of the Horse. He married, first, as her third husband, Lady Elizabeth Percy, only daughter of Joscelyn, eleventh Earl of Northumberland, K.G. (descendant and inheritor of the honours of Hotspur), heiress of the illustrious house of Percy. Her Grace was the famous Duchess of Somerset, who succeeded Sarah Jennings, Duchess of Marlborough, as Mistress of the Robes to Queen Anne. By her he had issue :

9. ALGERNON SEYMOUR, SEVENTH DUKE OF SOMERSET, born November 11, 1684, summoned to Parliament at the decease of his mother as Baron Percy. Subsequently created Baron Warkworth, Earl of Northumberland, Baron Cockermouth, and Earl of Egremont. The Duke died February 7, 1750, when the Earldom of Hertford, the Viscounty of Beauchamp, and the Barony of Seymour of Trowbridge, expired. His acquired honours passed according to their respective limitations. Married, in 1713, Frances, daughter of Henry, son of Thomas Thynne, Viscount Weymouth, by whom, who died July 7, 1754, he had a daughter :

10. LADY ELIZABETH SEYMOUR, married to Sir Hugh Smithson, Baronet, who was created Earl Percy and Duke of Northumberland October 22, 1766, and had been created K.G. 1757. He obtained the Barony of Lovaine of Alnwick, with remainder to his second son, Lord Algernon Percy, by patent January 28, 1784, and was succeeded by him in that dignity June 6, 1786.

11. ALGERNON, FIRST EARL OF BEVERLEY, SECOND BARON LOVAINE OF ALNWICK, born January 21, 1780; married, June 8,

360 THE GENEALOGICAL MAGAZINE

1775, Isabella Susannah, second daughter of Peter Burrell, of Beckenham, in Kent, and sister of Peter, first Lord Gwydyr, by whom (who died January 24, 1812) he had issue (he himself died October 21, 1830), among others :

George, third Earl of Beverley and fifth Duke of Northumberland, and a daughter :

12. LADY CHARLOTTE PERCY, married July 25, 1795, to George, third Earl of Ashburnham, K.G., G.C.H., and F.S.A., who had previously been summoned in the Barony of Ashburnham. The Earl was born December 25, 1760, and had issue, among others :

13. LADY JANE HENRIETTA ASHBURNHAM, born July 19, 1809; married, May 19, 1836, to Admiral Charles H. Swinburne, R.N., born April 2, 1797, died March 4, 1877, second son of Sir James Swinburne, Baronet, of Capheaton, Northumberland; she died November 26, 1896, having had issue :

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE, born April 5, 1837.

EDWARD SWINBURNE, born July 14, 1848; married, 1879, Olga Helen, only daughter of Professor Thirmann, of Berlin, and died July 31, 1891 (his widow married, 1895, J. Leach).

(1) ALICE. (2) EDITH, died September 23, 1863. (3) CHARLOTTE JANE, died January 19, 1899. (4) ISABEL.

NOTE.—The Swinburne Baronets are also stated (Burke's "Peerage") to have royal descents through the wives of the first, second, and third Baronets, ladies of the families of Lawson, of Brough, co. York; Englefield, of White Knights, co. Berks; and Bedingfield, Baronets. Mr. Swinburne's genius has obtained him a distinguished position among English poets. Among his published works, "The Queen Mother" and "Rosamond" appeared in 1861, "Atalanta in Calydon" (1864), "Chastelard" (1865), "Poems and Ballads" (1866), "A Song of Italy" (1867), "Songs before Sunrise" (1871), and "Poems and Ballads" (second series, 1878). For criticism see Forman's "Living Poets" and Stedman's "Victorian Poets," etc.

