

**Bellasis family** (*per. c.1500-1653*), gentry, held lands in the bishopric of Durham from at least the mid-fourteenth century. A Durham priory rental of 1340-41 details the landed holdings of William and John Bellasis in Wolviston, in the south-east of the county. About 1380 John Bellasis exchanged these lands for the manor of Henknowle, near Bishop Auckland, which became the principal residence of the family until the sixteenth century. It was in the 1520s that the family began its climb towards the social and political prominence which by 1627 was to result in its elevation to the peerage. The architects of the family's rise to prominence were Richard and Anthony, the sons of Thomas Bellasis (*d. 1500*) and his wife, Margaret Thirkeld or Thirkell (*d. in or after 1545*).

**Richard Bellasis** (*c.1489-1540*), Thomas's heir, married Margery (*d. 1587*), the daughter of Richard Errington of Cockle Park Tower in Northumberland and of Morton Grange in the bishopric of Durham. Little is known of his education and early career. However, during the episcopacy of Thomas Wolsey, who held the see of Durham from 1523 to 1529, Bellasis came increasingly to be associated with the local administrative élite and to enjoy the cardinal's patronage. By 1527 he had been appointed constable of Durham Castle and had acquired some valuable grants of property, including a sixty-year lease of the episcopal manor and grange of Morton, near Houghton-le-Spring. This property, formerly held by his father-in-law, became the focal point of the cadet branch of the family's later coalmining enterprises and remained in the family until the late seventeenth century.

Bellasis's political career after Wolsey's fall was relatively quiet, though seemingly not harmed by his connections with the disgraced cardinal. He apparently played no part in the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, perhaps because by this time his younger brother Anthony was in the service of the king's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell. This connection probably served to advance Richard's political career, for he was subsequently appointed to the newly reconstituted council of the north. In addition Bellasis was one of the commissioners appointed to oversee the surrenders of the dissolved monasteries in the northern counties. As in his earlier career he sought to profit from his involvement in this enterprise. In 1539 he obtained various grants of lands of former monastic properties, including the lease of the priory of Newburgh, in the North Riding of Yorkshire. This property was later to become the principal seat of the Yorkshire branch of the Bellasis family. Richard Bellasis remained active in the sphere of northern politics and administration until his death on 28 March 1540. His inquisition post mortem, taken at Durham on 5 June 1540, named his sixteen-year-old son William as his heir.

Richard's younger brother Anthony Bellasis (*d. 1552*) pursued a dual career in the church and the law. Educated at Cambridge and at a foreign university, he was ordained priest in 1533. Having survived the fall of his master Cromwell he became a chaplain to Henry VIII and went on to acquire a succession of profitable benefices. His legal career prospered to the extent that he was appointed a master in chancery in 1544, and became a member in 1550 of the council of the north, which he served until his death in August 1552. In 1540, following his brother's death, Anthony was granted the house and site of Newburgh Priory, with other lands nearby, but this seems to have been superseded in 1545 by a grant in fee of the Newburgh Priory estate, together with a larger number of other properties, made jointly to Anthony, his mother, and his nephew and ward William. The latter had entered his father's estates in 1545, and following his uncle's death the newly acquired Yorkshire properties also passed into his hands.

Under the direction of **Sir William Bellasis** (c.1524-1604) the geographical focus of the senior Bellasis line shifted from Durham to the North Riding of Yorkshire. William's marriage to Margaret (*d.* in or after 1577), the daughter of Sir Nicholas Fairfax of Gilling, also in the North Riding, further consolidated his kinship ties within the locality. Ultimately Sir William's predilection for enclosing, improving, and expanding his Yorkshire estates enabled him to pass on to his heir an inheritance which was one of the wealthiest in the North Riding. But initially his political career reflected rather his Durham origins. In 1555 he was appointed a JP for Durham, and in 1558 he was knighted at Newcastle. Increasingly, however, his name appeared in connection with commissions in Yorkshire. He had been appointed to the commission of the peace for the North Riding by 1564 and served as high sheriff for Yorkshire in 1574. While there were hints that he may have been a crypto-Catholic, he was nevertheless by 1577 considered sufficiently reliable in religion to be included on the ecclesiastical high commission for the province of York. He died at Newburgh Priory on 13 April 1604 aged eighty-one, and was buried in his parish church of Coxwold, situated on the estate.

**Sir Henry Bellasis**, first baronet (1555-1624), was the second-born but eldest surviving son of Sir William, and consequently succeeded to the main Newburgh and Henknowle estates. He was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, which he entered in 1572. In 1587, during a period of military service on the Anglo-Scottish borders, he acquitted himself with distinction and was mentioned in dispatches. Thereafter he enjoyed a high-profile career in regional and local politics. He served five times as an MP, representing his local borough of Thirsk in 1586, 1589, 1593, and 1601, and that of Aldborough in the West Riding (close to the seat of his father-in-law) in 1597. He was first appointed a JP for the North Riding about 1586-7, though his early career on the bench was somewhat compromised by his uncomfortably close connections with the local Roman Catholic gentry. Nevertheless, by 1601 he had secured his place as a North Riding JP, and thereafter he served regularly until his death. Bellasis was knighted by James I at York on 17 April 1603. He was appointed to the council of the north in the same year and again served until his death. In 1603-4 he also served as high sheriff of Yorkshire. His social and political ambitions reached their apogee when on 29 June 1611, following the creation of the order of baronets, he was one of the first six Yorkshiremen to purchase the title. Shortly afterwards, clearly conscious of his new-found status, he became a leading figure in the dispute within the council of the north concerning the order of precedence to be set for baronets within that institution. In managing his estates Bellasis continued the policy of enclosure, acquisition, and consolidation begun by his father. His landed estate at his death in August 1624 was worth more than £4000 per annum, while his personal estate was valued at some £8000. Bellasis was buried in the church of St Saviour's in York, on 19 August, and is commemorated by a fine wall monument in York Minster. From his marriage to Ursula (*d.* 1633), daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax of Denton in the West Riding, he had one son, Thomas, who succeeded him.

The cadet line of the Bellasis family, which was resident in Durham, also rose to local prominence at this time as a result of the career of **Sir William Bellasis** (c.1593-1641) of Morton House. Sir William was the son of Sir Henry's younger brother Brian (1559-1608), who had acquired the lease of the family's Morton estate in east Durham, and his wife, Margaret Lee. In 1611 he married Margaret (*d.* 1671), the daughter and coheir of Sir George Selby of Whitehouse, a leading coal owner. He was appointed a JP for Durham in 1614 and went on to become a leading member of the Durham administrative élite, gaining a reputation for reliability and application to duty. Knighted in 1617, he was appointed deputy lieutenant of the

Durham ward of Easington in 1621 and served as high sheriff of the bishopric from 1625 until 1640. Bellasis became one of the gentry's leading coal owners and entrepreneurs within the bishopric, playing a leading role in the exploitation of the coal trade within the Wear valley. In 1634 he became the first mayor of Sunderland. Despite his close commercial links with such 'arrant covenanters' as George Lillburne of Sunderland, Bellasis retained his royalist sympathies as the breakdown into civil war approached. He died on 3 December 1641, probably at Morton, during the Scottish occupation of the bishopric. Sir William's sons continued their father's support for the crown during the civil war and subsequently had their estates sequestered for delinquency.

Support for King Charles was a position which Sir William shared with his cousin **Thomas Bellasis** (1577-1653), who became successively Baron Fauconberg of Yarm (1627) and Viscount Fauconberg (1643). Educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he was recorded about 1592, Thomas entered political life in 1597 with his election as MP for his father's former seat of Thirsk. He went on to represent the borough in the parliaments of 1614, 1621, and 1624. In 1601 he married Barbara, the daughter of Sir Henry Cholmley of Roxby in Whitby Strand, thus forming an alliance with a family noted for its strong recusant connections. While outwardly conforming in religion, he retained links with Roman Catholicism and had converted to the Catholic faith by the time of his death. He was knighted by James I at York in 1603 and later served as a JP for the North Riding. In the 1620s he became embroiled in the power struggle for political control within Yorkshire between Sir John Savile, the *custos rotulorum* of the West Riding, and Sir Thomas Wentworth. It was probably as a consequence of his support for Savile, a client of the duke of Buckingham, that in 1627 he was raised to the peerage as Lord Fauconberg of Yarm. Animosities between the Bellasis family and Wentworth deepened after the latter's appointment as president of the council of the north in 1628. In 1631 Fauconberg's son Henry was called before the privy council and suffered a brief imprisonment as a result of his insolent behaviour towards the lord president. In 1633 Fauconberg too was forced to make apology to the council at York for behaviour that culminated in his being arrested for contempt of court.

The Bellasis family's enmity towards Wentworth and towards the arbitrary government with which the latter was associated continued until his fall in 1640. Nevertheless, during the civil war Fauconberg and his sons were staunch supporters of the royalist cause. In January 1643, in recognition of his loyalty, he was created Viscount Fauconberg of Henknowle (his second son, John, was made Baron Bellasis of Worlaby in 1645). After taking part in the battle of Marston Moor in 1644 he fled abroad. His estates were subsequently sequestered for delinquency, with his fine for compounding being set at £5012 18*s*. He returned to the North Riding in 1649 but refused to swear to the oath of abjuration and was convicted of recusancy. He died on 18 April 1653 at Coxwold and was buried in the church there. His eldest son having predeceased him, his title and estates passed to his grandson Thomas, whose political loyalties, unlike those of the other members of his family, had lain with parliament, and who subsequently married Mary, daughter of Oliver Cromwell.

**Christine M. Newman**

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### Archives

BL, family MSS · Col. U., Butler Library, account book and other papers [Henry Bellasis] · Durham RO, deeds and papers pertaining to the family · Harvard U., Houghton L., estate papers [Henry Bellasis] · N. Yorks. CRO, County Durham deeds, Fauconberg (Belasyse) of Newburgh Priory, ZDV, 1, 70 (MIC 1354) · N. Yorks. CRO, Newburgh District deeds, Fauconberg (Belasyse) of Newburgh Priory, ZDV, 1, 5 (MIC 1352) · N. Yorks. CRO, personal and official papers, Fauconberg (Belasyse) of Newburgh Priory, ZDV X (MIC 1282) | TNA: PRO, Durham cursitor's records, class DURH 3 · TNA: PRO, Durham inquisitions *post mortem* · TNA: PRO, Durham Palatine Chancery enrolments

### Likenesses

N. Stone, effigies on monument (Henry Bellasis with wife and children), York Minster · effigies on monument (William Bellasis (c.1524-1604) with family), Coxwold church, North Riding · effigies on monument (Thomas Bellasis with wife), Coxwold church · portrait (William Bellasis (c.1524-1604)), Newburgh Priory; repro. in Ridsdill Smith, *In well beware* · portrait (Henry Bellasis), Newburgh Priory; repro. in Ridsdill Smith, *In well beware*

### Wealth at death

landed estate est. at £4000; personal estate valued at £8000; Sir Henry Bellasis: Cliffe, *Yorkshire gentry*, 96, 110

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**Belasyse, Thomas**, first Earl Fauconberg (1627/8-1700), nobleman, was born at Newburgh Priory, near Coxwold, North Riding of Yorkshire, the son of Henry Belasyse (1604-1647) and his wife, Grace Barton of Smithells, Lancashire. He may have been educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. The first Viscount Fauconberg, Belasyse's grandfather, fled to Europe after Marston Moor (2 July 1644) and died at Hamburg in 1653 after converting to Catholicism. Belasyse succeeded to the title on 18 April 1653. The committee for compounding fined the family £5012. The second lord was in France in spring 1657, after the death in 1656 of his first wife, Mildred Saunderson (whom he had married on 3 July 1651), daughter of the second Viscount Castleton, when negotiations for a new match began. Fauconberg's second wife was Mary Cromwell (*bap.* 1637, *d.* 1713), the third of the protector's four daughters [*see* Belasyse,

Mary]. After assuring himself that Fauconberg was a protestant and that his estate was sufficient—he was said to have about £5000 p.a.—Cromwell gave his blessing. The wedding took place on 18 November 1657 at Hampton Court, and was conducted by John Hewitt, an Anglican divine who in 1658 was executed for treason. The Venetian ambassador, who considered Fauconberg 'an accomplished young man of many talents and undoubted courage' was nevertheless surprised at the match, for he considered Fauconberg a royalist, and had heard that he not only corresponded with the exiled Charles Stuart, but even sent him money (*CSP Venice, 1657*, 134). Even so, the protector was fond of his new son-in-law. He became colonel of Lambert's regiment of horse in July 1657, and was present whenever Cromwell received foreign ambassadors. Cromwell also named him to his 'other house' and he took his seat in January 1658 as Thomas, Lord Fauconberg.

In May 1658 Fauconberg went to France as ambassador-extraordinary, but after the protector's death in September he took steps to safeguard his interests. In October he agreed to provide the French ambassador with political information in return for jewels for his wife and barbary horses for himself. In late spring 1659 he sent £1000 to the future king and retired to the country to avoid further trouble. In September 1659 the council of state ordered his arrest, but he was free in time to greet George Monck as he marched his army through Yorkshire. The general named him colonel of Heselrigge's regiment, and after the king's return he was taken into favour despite his Cromwellian connections.

On 27 July 1660 Fauconberg became lord lieutenant of Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire, although he resigned the former post to the bishop of Durham in September 1661. He served the crown loyally as lord lieutenant and actively pursued sectarians and plotters throughout the 1660s. His prominence in Yorkshire led him to clash with rivals there, however. In August 1666 the second duke of Buckingham challenged Fauconberg to a duel, and though the quarrel was composed without violence, in October he fought Buckingham's erstwhile supporter Sir Thomas Osborne, and was seriously wounded. In October 1669 Charles II appointed him ambassador-extraordinary to Venice, and after his return in 1672 he became captain of the band of gentlemen pensioners and a privy councillor. Though a friend of the duke of Monmouth, he worked hard to secure the election of pro-Yorkist MPs to the Exclusion parliaments. He refused, however, to co-operate with James II's policies, and lost his lieutenancy in November 1687. As early as May 1687 he had met Dykveldt, William of Orange's agent in England, and he played a particularly important role in the convention of 1689. At first identified as a supporter of Princess Mary's sole rule, he soon shifted to support a joint monarchy. For this he was rewarded on 9 April 1689 with an earldom. He also chaired the Lords' committee that negotiated the declaration of rights.

Fauconberg continued to be politically active until 1692, after which he gradually withdrew from politics. In July 1697 he wrote to his dying brother-in-law, Sir William Frankland, *for my own particular, that have seen all the vanities and acted an unhappy part upon all the scenes and stages of human life, it is more than time I should endeavour to get the taste and relish of this world out of my mouth by withdrawing from the noise and bustle of it to a more heavenly conversation.* (Frankland-Russell-Astley MSS, 89)

He died, leaving no children, at Sutton House, his house in Chiswick, on 31 December 1700, aged seventy-two, and was buried at Coxwold parish church on 30 January 1701. He was succeeded by his nephew Thomas Belasyse, the second earl.

**Victor Stater**

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## Likenesses

A. Blooteling, line engraving, 1676 (after M. Beale), BM, NPG · R. White, line engraving, BM, NPG; repro. in J. Guillim, *A display of heraldry*, 5th edn (1679) · sculpture, funeral monument, Coxwold parish church, Yorkshire

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**Belasyse** [*née* Cromwell], **Mary**, Countess Fauconberg (*bap.* 1637, *d.* 1713), daughter of Oliver Cromwell, was born in Ely, Cambridgeshire, and baptized at St John's Church, Huntingdon, on 9 February 1637, the eighth of nine children and the third of four daughters of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), the future lord protector, and his wife, Elizabeth Cromwell, *née* Bouchier (1598-1665), daughter of Sir James Bouchier. She and her younger sister remained in the parental home long after their surviving siblings married and moved away. These included Henry Cromwell and Bridget Fleetwood. Thus she was with her parents when they became protector and protectress, was assigned apartments at Whitehall and Hampton Court, and was often referred to as 'Lady' Mary or 'Princess' Mary. During the 1650s there were rumours of several possible matches until in 1657, with the encouragement of Secretary John Thurloe, almost certainly acting with the explicit approval of Oliver Cromwell, Thomas Belasyse (1627/8-1700), second Viscount Fauconberg and later (from 1689) first Earl Fauconberg, sought and won Mary's hand as his second wife (his first having died in May 1656). Despite the royalist connections of the Belasyse family, the protectoral couple warmly approved the match, providing a dowry of £15,000, and the civil wedding took place in their presence at Hampton Court on 18 November. The celebrations continued at Whitehall and elsewhere including, the earl of Clarendon alleges, a second marriage conducted privately by an ordained minister in accordance with the prayer book (Clarendon, *Hist. rebellion*, 4.34).

For a time the Fauconbergs continued to occupy apartments at Hampton Court and Whitehall. In summer 1658 they travelled north to view the viscount's estates in Yorkshire, returning to

London in time to be on hand for the deaths of Mary's sister Elizabeth Claypole and of her father, a particularly severe blow—Fauconberg wrote that 'I know not what in the Earth to do with' his wife, for 'when seemingly quieted, she bursts out again into passion that tears her very heart in pieces' (Waylen, 100).

Although the couple retired to the countryside after the fall of the protectorate, Fauconberg won renewed favour at the Restoration and resumed his career as diplomat, politician, administrator, and courtier. He and Mary divided their time between their estates in Lancashire and Yorkshire, principally Newburgh Priory, near Coxwold, and their properties in and around London, especially Sutton House in Chiswick, Middlesex, and a new house they built in Soho Square. According to a rather implausible tradition, Oliver Cromwell's body lies buried at Newburgh, rescued by his daughter and carried there soon after his death in September 1658; it is one of many stories concerning the removal and secret burial of Oliver's remains, all of them almost certainly spurious. The Fauconbergs' surviving correspondence suggests that the marriage, though childless, was strong and happy. They were both close to Mary's surviving sister, Frances Russell, and to Fauconberg's nephew Thomas Frankland and his wife, Frances's daughter Elizabeth. Wealthy and contented, they entertained a wide circle of friends and courtiers. Fauconberg died after a long illness in December 1700, and while the title and Newburgh estate passed to his brother's son, his widow retained the bulk of the London properties.

Countess Fauconberg spent her widowhood principally at Sutton House, and was described by one visitor as 'still fresh and gay, though of a great age' (Ramsey, 59). Although in good health, she drew up her will on 27 November 1711, noting that 'the frailty of humane nature, the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the hour thereof' were such that she wished to make her will now so that 'none of the affairs of this present Life may when I come to dye interrupt the peaceable and quiet resignation of my Soul unto the hands of my blessed Saviour and Redeemer'. Her will also emphasizes her wealth, for she left bequests totalling well over £10,000, including £4000 and a share of her plate to her sister Frances and £100 'to my dear brother Richard Cromwell' (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/533, sig. 130). In fact, she outlived Richard Cromwell, proving his will in August 1712. She died, 'a Lady in great Esteem for her exemplary Piety and Charity' (*The Political State of Great Britain, 1713*, 161), on 14 March 1713, probably in London, and was buried on 24 March in Chiswick church.

**Peter Gaunt**

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### **Likenesses**

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### **Wealth at death**

property and bequests totalling over £10,000: will, TNA: PRO, PROB 11/533, sig. 130

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