The Mystery of Thomas Dudley's Paternal Ancestors

By H. Allen Curtis

The maternal ancestry of Thomas Dudley, the first Deputy Governor and several times Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, is noble, regal, and well documented. However, his paternal ancestry has never been completely proven.

It had long been a tradition among the descendants of Thomas Dudley that he descended from John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. John Dudley was executed in 1553 for his major role in establishing Lady Jane Grey as Queen of England. There is no evidence that Thomas Dudley claimed descent from the duke.

After an extensive search of Sutton and Dudley records for his book, George Adlard concluded that "Governor Dudley was not descended in the direct line from John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, yet both were descended from the same ancestry; both used the Dudley coat of arms and lineage"

Dudley Coat of Arms and Lineage

The Sutton-Dudley coat of arms consisted of a green lion rampant (standing erect with one foot on the ground and facing left) on a field of gold. Originally, the lion had a double tail, but in the sixteenth century the herals, due to a dispute, caused the lion to be displayed with a single tail. The herals restored the double tail in the seventeenth century. The lion on the Duke of Northumberland's coat of arms had the double tail but Thomas Dudley's had a single tail. The double tail signifies that the lion's force is doubled due to the great strength in his tail.

The eldest son had the right to bear the paternal arms unchanged. The younger sons were required to make the arms different by adding a mark of cadency. The crescent was the cadency mark on the coat of arms of both the Duke of Northumberland and Thomas Dudley.

Thomas Dudley owned a seal which displayed the above described Sutton-Dudley coat of arms. The only document known to which he affixed his coat of arms with the seal was his will. Thomas Dudley's eldest son, Joseph, by his second marriage also became an important Governor whose seal was used on a number of official documents.

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3 Dean Dudley, *Supplement to the History of the Dudley Family*, (Wakefield, MA, privately printed 1698), 6 (a footnote).
4 Adlard, *The Sutton-Dudleys* [note 2], 17.
5 Augustine Jones, *The Life and Work of Thomas Dudley, the Second Governor of Massachusetts*, (Boston and New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), 5.
Joseph Dudley had the double tail on the Sutton-Dudley lion restored as was allowed in the seventeenth century.\(^6\) This makes one wonder why Thomas Dudley did not also display the double tailed lion on his seal. A logical explanation would be that Thomas Dudley inherited the seal from his father, Roger Dudley, who lived in the sixteenth century in which the single tailed lion prevailed. Thus, it would seem that Thomas Dudley did not regard a coat of arms of sufficient importance to have an updated seal made.

Thomas Dudley’s noted poetess daughter, Anne Bradstreet, wrote in 1641 (published in her first volume of poems in 1650) an elegy upon Sir Philip Sidney in which she pointed out that “she had the selfsame blood in her veins as Sir Philip Sidney”.\(^8\) Sir Philip was a grandson of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. Thus, Anne Bradstreet was providing further evidence of her father’s Sutton-Dudley ancestry.

Thomas Dudley took a great interest in Anne’s education. He especially encouraged her poetic bent. After 1639 when he left Ipswich, where Anne lived, to his new home in Roxbury, much of Anne’s poetry was written for direct presentation to her father.\(^9\) Thus, they would have discussed her elegy on Sir Philip Sidney and Thomas Dudley would have corrected Anne had she been wrong about her blood relationship with Sidney.

Anne Bradstreet’s biographer, Elizabeth Wade White, provided evidence that Thomas Dudley was fully entitled to the Sutton-Dudley coat of arms: “Captain de La Lanne-Mirrlees, then Rouge Dragon pursuivant, in a letter to me (Elizabeth Wade White) dated 9th February, 1953, wrote that the aristocratic background of Susanna Thorne (Thomas Dudley’s mother) ‘indicates that Roger Dudley himself came of gentle stock.’ And in referring to the old governor’s use of the Sutton-Dudley seal, and Anne Bradstreet’s mention of her relationship to Sir Philip Sidney, he made the point that ‘among early New England Puritans . . . no advantage was to be gained from claiming noble blood or a coat of arms, unless they were indeed theirs by right.’ “\(^{10}\) It is worth noting a somewhat similar conclusion made fifty-three years earlier by Augustine Jones: In Thomas Dudley’s time, “Massachusetts was then English territory, and the laws of that country regulated and restricted the use of heraldic arms. They were then a distinguishing mark between noble families, and no high-minded person like Governor Dudley would assume the arms of another family, and no dishonest man would dare to do it.”\(^{11}\)

Captain de La Lanne-Mirrlees of the College of Arms in regard to Thomas Dudley’s seal furthermore said that it provides “reasonable, though inferential proof” of Thomas Dudley’s paternal lineage.\(^{12}\) It should be remarked that inferential proof, if used properly, is good and valid proof.

Cotton Mather, the noted puritan historian, was the grandson of Richard Mather, a contemporary of Thomas Dudley. Cotton’s father, Increase Mather was a young adult

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\(^{8}\) Jones, *Life and Work of Thomas Dudley* [Note 6], 4.

\(^{9}\) White, *Anne Bradstreet* [Note 7], 178, 179.

\(^{10}\) White, *Anne Bradstreet* [Note 7], 13.

\(^{11}\) Jones, *Life and Work of Thomas Dudley* [Note 6], 5.

\(^{12}\) White, *Anne Bradstreet* [Note 7], 13.
during Thomas Dudley’s last few years. Cotton Mather in writing, *Life of Thomas Dudley*, besides contemporary documents would have drawn on the his father Increase’s knowledge of Thomas Dudley’s accomplishments and character. This is what Cotton Mather wrote concerning Governor Dudley in his manuscript of *Life of Thomas Dudley* found in its entirety in Adlard’s book: “He was a man of great spirit, as well as of great understanding; suitable to the family he was, by his father, descended from.”13 Mather touches on Thomas Dudley’s honesty: because of “Mr Dudley’s courage and constancy to the truth, things issued well” during the Antinomian Crisis of 1636 and 1637.14

In view of what has been learned from Anne Bradstreet, Augustine Jones, Cotton Mather, and the expert testimony of Captain de La Lanne-Mirrlees, it is clear that Thomas Dudley’s seal is good and reasonable evidence that he was descended from the Sutton-Dudleys. To assume to the contrary is to say that Thomas Dudley was dishonest and is akin to rejecting, for example, Ann (Dudley) Bradstreet’s birth record (if it had existed) as evidence that she was Thomas Dudley’s daughter because Anne’s birth MIGHT have been the result of a secret affair by his wife, Dorothy Yorke.

In past writings concerning Thomas Dudley’s paternal ancestry, no doubt was expressed about his being entitled to use his coat of arms seal. The coat of arms was justifiably used as valid evidence, as it will be here, that Thomas Dudley was of Sutton-Dudley descent.

The present day accepted and well documented Sutton-Dudley line from the first generation using the coat of arms to and including the generation adopting the Dudley name in brief is as follows15:

1. Sir Richard de Sutton, b. ca. 1266, d. aft. 1346, m. Isabel Patrick, b. ca. 1260, d. by 1318.
2. John de Sutton I, d. aft. 1337, m. Margaret de Somery, b. 1290, d. 1384.
3. John de Sutton II, (descendant of Charlemagne) d. 1359, m. Isabel de Cherleton, d. 1396.
4. John de Sutton III, b 1338, d. 1369/70, m. 25 Dec 1357 Katherine de Stafford (child bride), b. ca. 1347/8, d. by 25 Dec 1361.
5. John de Sutton IV, b. 6 Dec 1361, d. 1395/6, m. Joan.
6. John Sutton V, b. Feb 1380, d. 28 Aug 1406, m. bef. 10 Dec 1401, Constance Blount, d. 23 Sep 1432.
7. John Dudley, b. 25 Dec 1400, d. 30 Sep 1487, m. aft. 14 Mar 1420/1, Elizabeth Berkeley (descendant of Charlemagne), d. shortly bef. 8 Dec 1478.

Thus, without knowing Thomas Dudley’s precise paternal ancestry, we know that it was noble and regal.

**Thomas Dudley’s "Drapers" Line from John Dudley**

George Adlard from his extensive study of Herald's records and Visitations as well as wills and records of birth, marriage and burials was able to formulate a paternal

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13 Adlard, *The Sutton-Dudleys* [note 2], 36.
14 Adlard, *The Sutton-Dudleys* [note 2], 35.
The line in abbreviated form was as follows:
8. Edmund Dudley (first son), d. 1487, m. Joyce Tiptoft.
9. Edward Dudley (first son), b. 1459, d. 1531, m. Cecily Willoughby.
10. Thomas Dudley (younger son, requiring a mark of cadency), d. 1549, m. Margaret, d. 1551.
11. John Dudley, d. 1545, m. Elizabeth Clerke.
12. Roger Dudley m. (Susanna Thorne).

This line was widely accepted by descendants of Governor Thomas Dudley for about ninety years. Thomas Dudley of generation 10 and his son John were drapers. Drapers in a noble family seems unlikely. Adlard noted that Thomas' father was a wastrel who squandered the family fortune; thus, Thomas and his son John turned to trade to make a living. Adlard went on to say that he presumed that Thomas and John were the great grandfather and grandfather of Thomas Dudley, the Massachusetts Bay colony leader.  

In 1886, twenty-four years after the Adlard's book was published, Dean Dudley, who devoted over forty years to researching the Dudley families, was critical of the "drapers" line. Referring to generation 10, he said, "If this was Thomas, the third son of Edward, Baron of Dudley, as Mr. Adlard presumes, why were not his arms set up in the church with the star or mullet, for difference?" Dean Dudley had found a major flaw in the line proposed by Adlard. Governor Dudley's arms had a crescent cadency (for second son), not the star required for the third son.

In 1898 Dean Dudley approved of the "drapers" line. However, his list of the siblings of draper Thomas Dudley was different from that of Adlard’s. Dean Dudley listed the second son as Edward who was without issue, making the draper the second son with male issue and thus entitled to the crescent cadency.

Elizabeth Wade White devoted much of the first chapter of her book to the ancestry of Governor Thomas Dudley. In March of 1956, she obtained records from the Archivist of the Drapers' Company. Those records revealed that the Thomas Dudley of generation 10 of the "drapers" line could not have been the son of Edward Dudley of generation 9. Thomas was born in 1472 or 1473 almost 20 years before the birth of Edward's first son. Furthermore, Thomas' grandson Roger, listed as a draper also, died in 1614, more than 25 years after the actual father of Thomas Dudley, Governor of Massachusetts Bay.

Thomas Dudley's "Sergeant of the Pastry" Line from John Dudley
A replacement line was developed by Mrs. George F. Elmendorf and was accepted as late as 1999. The line in abbreviated form is as follows:

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16 Adlard, The Sutton-Dudleys [note 2], 16 (Chart D).
17 Ibid. at 48,49.
18 Dean Dudley, History of the Dudley Family with Genealogical Tables, Pedigrees, &c, Number I (Wakefield, Mass., Dean Dudley. Publisher, 1886), 29. Adlard on his Chart 16A labeled Thomas Dudley’s name with a 3 to denote that he was the third son.
19 Dudley, Supplement to the History of the Dudley Family [Note 4],7.
20 White, Anne Bradstreet [Note 7], 14
21 Mrs. George F. Elmendorf, The American Genealogist, "On the Ancestry of Governor
8. John Dudley (second son, requiring crescent on arms), d. bef. 26 June 1501 m. Elizabeth Bramshot.
10. Simon Dudley, b. 1505, d. 1555, bef. 1533 m. Emme Saunders
11. John Dudley b. ca. 1528, d. bef. 15 Feb. 1592/3. He was Sergeant of the Pastry of Queen Elizabeth I. In 1588 grant of arms. He left illegitimate issue.
12. Roger Dudley, b. ca. 1552, d. 1585, m. bef. 1576 Susannah Thorne, bp. 5 Mar 1559/60, d. aft. 29 Oct. 1588.
13. Governor Thomas Dudley

   This paternal line has been presented as probable since there is no DIRECT proof that number 11 John Dudley was Roger Dudley's father.

   The arms granted to John Dudley, Sergeant of the Pastry, has been described as "Two lions passant (rather than rampant), azure, within a bordure engrailed, azure." The arms are of the Somerys that came to the Dudleys and were used by some of their branches instead of the Sutton green lion. The engrailed border indicated John Dudley's descent from an illegitimate son.

   This inferior coat of arms to that used by Thomas Dudley casts much doubt that John Dudley was the father of Roger Dudley. From what is known of Thomas Dudley, it is clear that he would not have used a coat of arms to which he was not entitled.

The Preferred Thomas Dudley Line from John Dudley

   Today's preferred Thomas Dudley paternal ancestry line was advanced by Marshall K. Kirk in 1993 in a thorough but unpublished review of the Sutton-Dudleys. An abbreviated form of the line as presented by David Faris is as follows:
8. Edmund Dudley (first son), d. 1487, m. Joyce Tiptoft.
9. Edward Dudley (first son), b. 1459, d. 1531, m. Cecily Willoughby.
10. John Dudley (first son), b. ca. 1495, buried on 18 Sep. 1553, m. Cecily Grey, b. ca. 1497, buried with her husband on 28 Apr. 1554.
11. Capt. Henry Dudley (second son, requiring crescent on arms) b. ca., 1517, d. between 1568 and 1570, m. 1545-1550 Miss Ashton.
13. Governor Thomas Dudley

   This line is considered probable because of much circumstantial (but not direct) evidence that Henry Dudley (though not previously known to have issue) was Roger Dudley's father. Marshall K. Kirk credited the unpublished notes (1968) of Prof. David H. Kelley first observing the foresaid evidence.


22 White, Anne Bradstreet [Note 7], 15.
23 Ibid. at 15. White’s source for this and Note 22 was H. S. Grazebrook, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, “The Barons of Dudley” (Vol. IX, Part II, 1888), 70,71.
24 Faris, Plantagenet Ancestry [Note 15], 123-126.
A Case Study of Possible Dudleys of Generations 8 through 11

To be consistent with Governor Dudley’s coat of arms, the men of generations 8, 9, 10, and 11 must be comprised of either three first sons and one second son with Roger Dudley being the first son of generation 11 or else four first sons with Roger Dudley being the second son of generation 11. There are exactly five such cases.

Case A:\(^{25}\)
8. Edmund Dudley (first son)
9. Edward Dudley (first son)
10. John Dudley (first son)
11. Edward Dudley (first son)

  The latter Edward’s first son, Fernando, was born well after Roger Dudley.\(^{26}\) Thus, Case A could not have provided a connection with Roger Dudley.

Case B:\(^{27}\)
8. John Dudley (second son)
9. Edmund Dudley (first son)
10. John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland (first son)
11. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (first and only son with male issue)

  Robert Dudley’s first son was Robert born in 1572 just three years before Roger Dudley was married.\(^{28}\) Hence, Case B also could not have connected with Roger Dudley.

Case C:\(^{29}\)
8. Edmund Dudley (first son)
9. Thomas Dudley of Yeanwith (second son who had male issue)
10. Richard Dudley
11. Edmund Dudley

  Edmund Dudley of generation 8 had two sons by his first wife, Joyce Tiptoft, but his second son John of Aston le Wells had no male issue; John’s daughter Margaret was his heir.\(^{30}\) Edmund Dudley of generation 11 was succeeded by Thomas, his first son with a male heir.\(^{31}\) Since Edmund’s successor was not Roger Dudley, case C can reasonably be eliminated.

Case D:\(^{32}\)
8. Edmund Dudley (first son)
9. Edward Dudley (first son)

\(^{25}\) Adlard, *The Sutton-Dudleys* [note 2], 16 (Chart A)
\(^{26}\) Ibid at 25, 16 (Chart A)
\(^{27}\) Ibid at 25, 16 (Chart B)
\(^{28}\) Ibid at 25, 16 (Chart B)
\(^{29}\) Ibid at 25, 16 (Chart C)
\(^{30}\) Faris, *Plantagenet Ancestry* [Note 15], 368.
\(^{31}\) Adlard, *The Sutton-Dudleys* [note 2], 16 (Chart C)
\(^{32}\) Ibid at 31, 16 (Chart A) Adlard on this chart labeled Geoffrey Dudley’s name with a 2 to denote that he was the second son.
10. Geoffrey Dudley of Russell’s Hall (second son to have male issue)  
11. Thomas Dudley (first son)  

If draper Thomas Dudley had not been found to have been born too early to have been a son of Edward Dudley of generation 9, this case would have been associated with the drapers line.  

Thomas Dudley of generation 11 was married to Dorothy Lascelles in about 1562. Also, Thomas’ first son Jeffrey (not Roger) was born in about 1563.\(^{33}\) Also, these dates are a little too late for a connection with Roger Dudley who was married in 1575 Thus, cases A through D have been eliminated as a part of Roger Dudley’s ancestry.  

*Case E*\(^{34}\):
8. Edmund Dudley (first son)  
9. Edward Dudley (first son)  
10. John Dudley (first son)  
11. Henry Dudley (second son)  

Of the five cases A through E, one and only one can consist of the ancestors of Roger Dudley. Since the first four cases have been eliminated, it follows that case E must be the one which consists of Roger Dudley’s ancestors.  

Case E was proven to contain Roger Dudley’s immediate paternal ancestors by an indirect method. In mathematics, where rigor is essential, indirect proofs are often preferred. In genealogy, when possible, direct proofs are preferred, but when needed, indirect proofs are perfectly valid.  

Case E includes the generations of the preferred Sutton-Dudley line. Thus, Henry Dudley of case E must necessarily have been Roger Dudley’s father. Therefore, the mystery of Governor Thomas Dudley’s paternal ancestry has been solved.  

\(^{33}\) Dudley, *Supplement to the History of the Dudley Family* [Note 4], Chart of pages 33 and 34.  
\(^{34}\) Faris, *Plantagenet Ancestry* [Note 15], 123-125.