



## The Babingtons, Knights Of St. John

G. T. Clark F.S.A.

To cite this article: G. T. Clark F.S.A. (1879) The Babingtons, Knights Of St. John, Archaeological Journal, 36:1, 219-230, DOI: [10.1080/00665983.1879.10851880](https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1879.10851880)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1879.10851880>



Published online: 14 Jul 2014.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)

## THE BABINGTONS, KNIGHTS OF ST. JOHN.

BY G. T. CLARK, F.S.A.

The archives of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, preserved among the public records at Malta, are by no means rich in memorials of the English branch of the Order. One volume, of much interest, being a roll of their possessions in 1338, was transcribed by Mr. Millward, and published by the Camden Society, in 1857, under the care of Messrs. Larking and J. M. Kemble. Other volumes of interest, to Englishmen, fell under the notice of the present writer, when the guest of Mr. Frere at Malta, in 1840, and were by him examined so far as they related to the Preceptory of Rothley, in Leicestershire, and the family of the Babingtons, who obtained that property at the Dissolution. In this work the writer was subsequently much assisted by his late friend, the Rev. M. D. Babington, who again examined the books. Some other particulars on the same subject have been derived from the public records in England, and from the papers still preserved among the muniments at Rothley. The Malta MSS. are two thin quarto volumes, on paper, vellum-bound. The one (Casella, 41 H) is entitled: "*Lingua Angliæ Liber in quo per minutum exprimuntur reditus Prioratus Hosplis. St' Johns Hierosol<sup>m</sup>i in Anglia: Et omnium ipsius com'darum. secundum valorem currentem anno 1338. Eodemque modo exprimuntur aliqua bona Ordinis Templariorum quæ Ordini St' Johis. Hierosolmi. post extinctionem Ordinis Templariorum fuerunt adjudicata; qui liber confectus est ordinatione fris. Philippi Thame tunc temporis ipsius Prioratus Angliæ Prioris.*"

The other book (Casella, 41 I) is entitled: "*Lingua Angliæ. Liber in quo continentur deliberationes venerandæ linguæ Angliæ ab anno 1524 ad annum 1559.*" The leaves of this book are much mis-arranged. It is an original minute-book, with the autograph signatures of the knights present at each Council.

The names of six knights of the family of Babington appear on the rolls of the Order of St. John, and five of that number belonged to it during that part of the 16th century when the seat of its government was removed from Rhodes, and finally established at Malta.

To be admitted into the Order, it was necessary to prove noble descent on both sides for five generations. "The Spanish knights were," says Cervantes, "to be 'old Catholics' without admixture of Hebrew or Moorish blood." An entry concerning the proofs of each knight appears commonly in the Council-book of the Tongue or National Division of the Order to which he belonged, and that this was more than a mere form appears from the case of Sir Thomas Rawson, whose proofs were declared, 16th October, 1528, "not to be conformable to the establishment."

In the Paston Papers occurs the following passage in an anonymous letter to John Paston, dated "Temple of Sion" (in England), in or about 1464: "Our Master, Thomas Babington, Master and Sovereign of our Order, by the assent of his brethren, be advised," etc. (P. Letters, Gairdner, II, 170). Mr. Gairdner is disposed to regard this letter as referring to some private society or club formed among the prisoners in the Fleet. He thinks it possible that Thomas Babington may be the Thomas who was Reader in the Inner Temple 22 Hen. VII.

Of the other five knights, one certainly was of the Dethick or elder, and one of the Ottery, a junior branch of the family, and the rest seem to have been near of kin one to the other. The two branches were at this time related in the fourth degree only, by common descent from a certain Sir John Babington, who died in 1409.

Sir John Babington, the elder of the five knights, and the highest in rank in the order, was the second son of Thomas Babington, of Dethick, and Editha Fitzherbert, of Norbury, his wife. He was elder brother of Humphrey, lessee and finally purchaser of the preceptory of the Temple.

The date of Sir John's entrance into the order is unknown. Certainly in 1505 he had not attained to any of its dignities. (Harl. MS. 6592, fol. 88.)

In 1509, however, he signed an indenture by anticipation of the Preceptories of Yeavely and Barrow, co. Derby, and in 1518 his name appears as an ex'or. to his

father's will, proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

Before 1522 he farmed the Preceptory of Temple Bruer, and he had instituted, and in that year gained a suit against Thomas de la Laund, for Ashby, co. Leicester.

<sup>1</sup> The first entry in which his name appears in the *Liber deliberationum* is as follows.

"At an asseuble holden the 3rd day of July, a'o. 1526, by licence of my Lord . . . Prior of Lombardie, in presence of Turcopilier Sir Wm. Weston and all the whole tonge, was accepted the meliorments of our well beloved brethern, Sir John Babington, Commander of Dalby and Rothley, and Tresorier of St. John in England, and Sir Edmond, (Port) Commander of Temple Bruer for (proofs) and according to the establishment of (our) religion."

On the 20th February, 1526 (the year ended on the 7th April), his name occurs in the following document.

"Decreto de Gran Maestro e Convento di Rodi, per poter permutare una commenda de Priorato d'Inghilterra col Cardinale Eboracense per maggiore commodità dell' Academia di Osford.

"Fratr Philippus de Villers Lisle-Adam, &c., Venerandis et Religiosis in Christo etc., Thoma de Docray Prioratus nostri Angliae Priori, Albon Pole, Baiulatus nostri de l'Aquila Baiuliori, et Joanni Babington Praeceptae nostrae Balby et Rodley Praeceptor, ac in eodem Prioratu pro nostro communi Thesauro, receptori, salutem. Viterbo 20 Feb. 1526."—*Codices diplom., etc.*, Lucca, folio, 1737, ii, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> In this year also, he was permitted, at a chapter at

<sup>1</sup> The surrender of Rhodes occurred at the close of December, 1523. Vertot states that Sir Thomas Newport with the knights of his nation attempted to succour Rhodes, but was beaten back by a tempest. It is uncertain whether Sir John quitted his leases and anticipations of the temporalities of the order to join in its defence. At the siege of 1480 under D'Aubuisson, Sir Marmaduke Lumley, Grand Prior of Ireland, and at least one English commander and four knights were present.

In January, 1524, the grand master was in London and well received by the king.

Pope Adrian VI died in 1524, and his successor, Clement VII, Julius de Medicis, who had been a knight of the order, offered to it Viterbo, and the Port of Civita Vecchia. The offer was declined, the port not being sufficiently in the van of Christendom; but the Grand Master rested there for a time.

Sir Thomas Dookwray, says Vertot, contested the Grand Mastership of the order with Lisle-Adam, then Grand Prior of France. Sir Thomas is described as wealthy, of elevated genius, and accustomed to treat with sovereigns.

Clerkenwell, to anticipate his revenues for three years, and to leave the preceptory of Rothley to his brother Humphrey and others. Rothley, though called a preceptory, seems always to have been held with, and subordinate to, Dalby; and it seems that the Temple house was occupied as a grange by the bailiff who managed the lands, and several of whose account rolls are preserved there.

Upon the move given by Sir Thomas Dockwray's death in 1528, Sir John appears to have succeeded to the priory, an office, says Boisgelin (i, 266), which ranked twenty-eighth, as that of Grand Prior of England did twenty-fifth in the Great Chapter of the order. This, shortly afterwards, he exchanged with Sir John Rawson, for the very high English dignity of turcopilier, and the commandery of Dinemor. To this the Grand Master having assented, the exchange was confirmed by the chapter, and ordered to be registered in their chancery. The entry of this confirmation is one of the most explicit in the *Liber Angliæ*. No mention is made in the minute of the pension alluded to by Vertot.

On the 3rd of June, 1527, Sir John Rawson appears at the council as Prior of Ireland, and on the 27th June, 1528, Sir John Babington presides as turcopilier.

Boisgelin, quoting probably De Goussancourt (*Martyrologie des Chev. de St. Jean de Hier.*), confuses the dignities and the exchange of them, and enumerates Brother Babington as 14th Grand Prior of *England*, Turcopilier, and Commander of Dinemor. (*Hist. of Malta*, 4to, 1805, ii, 214).

The order was composed of eight nations or "tongues," each of which was lodged in a distinct auberge, had distinct duties allotted to it in the event of a siege, and was ruled under the grand master by its own officers, whose titles varied in each tongue. At the siege of Rhodes, Sir Nicholas Hussey defended the bastion of England, and in later days at Malta the bastion of St. Lazarus was set aside for the tongue of England, in the vain hope that that branch of the order would some day be revived.

The chief officer of the English tongue was the grand

prior, who was summoned to parliament and took his seat at the head of the mitred abbots.

Next in rank was the Turcopilier, an office peculiar to the "tongue" of England. The turcopilier was the conventual bailiff and commander of the cavalry of the order and of the guard stationed in the court. The etymology of the title is uncertain. Boisgelin states the bailiffs of the eight tongues, as chief officers, to have been styled "piliers," and that a turcopilier was a description of light horseman employed in the wars in Palestine and commanded by the English "pilier." Others have suggested that his duty "Turcos expellere" gave name to the office. The word was written indifferently turcopilier, turcopolier, and turcoplyer. (Boisg, *Hist. Malta*, 4to, 1805, i, 9).

Sir Wm. Weston was turcopilier in 1523, nor has any earlier name been discovered. He signs as turcopilier 3rd July, 1526, and continued to hold the office until the 23rd of January, 1527, together with that of Lord Prior of Ireland. As he signs only as turcopilier, this may have been considered as the higher office, as it was certainly the more important one, at the English board.

Vertot (iii, 65) states that Henry VIII in 1525 requested the grand master to confer the Priory of Ireland upon Turcopilier Brother John Rawson, who had done service in that country. However this may be, Weston did not quit the offices till 1527, when on the death of Sir Thomas Dockwray he became Prior of England, and was succeeded in the Irish Priory by Sir John Babington, and in the turcopiliership by Rawson.

It has been already stated that Babington almost immediately exchanged his new office with Rawson for that of turcopilier with the commandery of Dinemor. At this period therefore he seems to have been Turcopilier, Commander of Dalby and Rothley, of Dinemor, and Treasurer. He no doubt was considered to be within a stride of the English Priory, for as part of his exchange with Rawson, he agreed if he became Grand Prior of England, to charge himself with a pension in his favour of £1000.

"At a tong holden the 4th day of November, A<sup>o</sup> 1529, by license of my Lord and Brother Philip de Villers de

Lisle-Adam, in presence of Turcopilier Sir John Babington (and) all the hole tong, were presented the meliorments of our well beloved brother, Sir Roger Boydell, etc."

In this year 1529, in a deed of gift to his brother Humphrey, Sir John is styled Commander of Rothley, Dalby, Dynemor, Garlies ? and Upleddyn, and Turcoplyer of St. John of Jerusalem in England. (Temple MSS.) In this document he gives to his brother certain plate left at Temple Bruer, silver spoons, and goblets parcel gilt, one with the arms of Babington and Fitzherbert (his parents).

Also "at assemble holden the 15th day of May, 1530, by lycens of the Great Lord fr. Philip de Villers Lysle-Adam in the presence of Sir John Babyngton, Turcopyller, these knights following take upon them to make Caravan.<sup>1</sup>

"Sir John Babyngton, now ?

"Commander of Dynemor.

"Sir John Babyngton (his nephew), etc."

Also 16th June, 1530, Philip Villers de Lisle-Adam, Grand Master, William Weston, Grand Prior, and John Babyngton, Turcoplyer, address a Latin letter to the order, dated London. Sir John signs—

J Babyngton	{ Balia de Buckminster } Lyncoln Precep-	
Turcopilerius		{ Balia de Asseby parva } tor'a de Dalby
		et Rothley

Also, "at assemble, etc., 18 (?) Novr., 1530, by lycens of my Lord Leftenant (?) fr Bernardyrie de Pasto (?) for parting off caravan in the Gallies in the presence of Sir John Babyngton Turcop..... 4 knights ..... Sir George Aylmer, Commander of Salford (?) who it is thought by the hole tong is not stable to make his caravan ..... not a man of courage (?) as other of that noble nacion be, wherefore they will that he shall find a stable knight to go in his room."

On the 7th December, 1530, Sir John paid his fees as turcopilier, and for his commanderies of Dalby and Rothley and Dynmor, and brought in a bill of moneys expended by him for the order at *Saragosa* (?) and Malta.

4th August, 1531, was a meeting held, as it seems, to secure to Sir John a charge upon the commandery of

<sup>1</sup> "Caravan" seems to have been a cruise against the Infidels.

Temple Bruer, promised to him by the Grand Master, Lisle-Adam.

On 13th July, 1531, Sir John Sutton was commander of Beverley and Temple Bruer, and lieutenant turcopilier; but on the 15th August the Chapter granted to Sir John Babington the Commanderies of Temple Bruere and Wylughton.

From his appointment to be turcopilier in 1528 to 30th December, 1531, Sir John presided at the Councils. At the latter date he requested the Balliage of the Eagle, co. Lincoln, vacant by the death of Sir Alban Pole, he resigning the turcopiliership. Sir Wm. Weston had made the same exchange, and Nicholls considers the balliage of the Eagle to have been one of the best preferments in the order. To this the whole tong assented. Sir Alban's death vacated also the Commanderies of Newland, Ossington, *Wynham?* and Stede.<sup>1</sup> Sir Roger Boydell, mentioned above, succeeded to Newland, on the 25th February, 1531. Sir John, then "Bailiff of the Eagle, asked of grace special of the whole tong that he might meliorate him of another Commandery, being in the *Ponent?* in other places, as well out as in the Convent, as well as he might do if he were in the Convent, to which all the whole tong assented."

4th March, 1531, he signed as "Bailly of the Eagle, late Turcopilier."

24th May, 1532, occurs this entry:—Know that I, John Babyngton, Knight, beying Bayley of the Egell hath and rightly enjoy a Mansion House not far distant from the Market Strada within the Borow of Malta, wherein now Sir Henry Pole, Knight of the Honourable Tong of England at that present remaineth. In witness whereoff the said Sir John Babyngton desired this might be registered in the boke of the tong in the yere of ower Lord 1532 the 24th day of May, Brother Philip de Vyllers being Lord Great Master."

4th November, 1532, Sir John signs as Bayley of the Eagle, but in the private instruments at Rothley Temple he seems always to have retained the title of Prior of Kilmainham, or of Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> Wynham may be South Wytham. Stede was camera S<sup>ti</sup> Salvatoris, vocata le Stede, in Lancashire.



His last signature upon the minute books of the order appears to be dated 21st December, 1534?

Sir John Babington's titles and preferments, so far as they have been recovered, would run as follows:—

The Right Worshipful Brother, John Babington, Knight Commander of the Tongue of England, in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, or the Hospital, Bailiff of the Eagle, Commander of Dalby and Rothley, Bailiff of Buckminster and of Ashby parva, Commander of Dinmore, Garlies, Upleddyn, Temple Bruer and Wylughton, Treasurer of the order in England, sometime Lord Prior of Ireland, Commander of Yeaveley and Barrow, and Turcopilier.

His armorial bearings, Argent 10 torteaux 4, 3, 2, 1; a label of three files azure; Babington: and over all on a chief Arg. a cross gules for St. John, remain upon the exterior of the tower at Dethick, and in the ancient pedigree roll at the Temple. His effigy in alabaster, attired as a Knight of St. John, forms one of the ornamental figures around his father's altar tomb at Ashover.

The Grand Masters alone quartered their paternal arms 2 and 3, with those of the order. The shield of every knight was represented upon a cross of eight points.

The date and place of Sir John's death are not known. He probably survived and profited by the Dissolution, and as his leases to his brother Humphrey held good, and he himself does not seem to have been altogether inattentive to his pecuniary interests, he may have lived in peace with the Protestant Government, to which his family conformed, and therefore probably he died in England.

A slab in Ashover Church long bore the partially defaced inscription, "John Babington 15...." but whether over this John, or another of the same name, is uncertain. His brothers having built the present tomb house at Kingston, the elder and Rampton branches of the family ceased to erect individual monuments over the dead.

The Preceptory of Rothley was granted 35 Henry VIII. to Henry Cartwright, and by him conveyed, through Sir Ambrose Cave, to Humphrey Babington, who seems finally to have purchased the lands of the Order in Rothley, and their rights and privileges, temporal and ecclesiastical, over the whole soke.

## SIR JOHN BABINGTON, THE YOUNGER.

27th June, 1528, it was agreed that "John, nephew to the Right Worshipful Sir John Babington, Turcopilier, should lief passage of the Gentlemen that were accepted at London in the Chapter General in the year of Grace 1528. The said John coming to the Convent within 16 months after the arrival of the first of the fore said gentlemen to be as of [the] same passage."

It is difficult to make out how this John could be Sir John's nephew. His elder brother Anthony had a son John, but he was a layman, and founded the House of Rampton. Ralph, his next brother, was an ecclesiastic, as was Thomas, another brother. Robert and George died unmarried. Of Sir Roland's three sons, none bore the name of John. John, the son of Humphrey, was married, and had issue. John, however, was a name borne by seven successive descents in the Devonshire branch, and a John Babington occurs at this period, whose brother Philip was certainly in the Order. It is possible, therefore, that Sir John the elder may have used the term nephew in an extended sense.

It appears by an entry of the 23rd July, 1528, that John was one of the knights who were received of one passage. All except himself were to be in the Convent within six months.

<sup>1</sup> December? 1534. He is one who takes upon himself to make caravan with Sir Nicholas Upton and Sir Nicholas Lambard. He signed the minutes 29th May, 1535, and 12th April, 1537.

8th May, 1537. He, Sir Thomas Thornhill, and Sir Henry Gerard, or any two of them, are appointed to receive the accounts of Sir William Tyrell and Sir Nicholas Upton, who resign the protectorship.

7th September, 1530, of grace special was granted the . . . of Sir Oswald Massingberd to be of the same passage of Sir John Babington on this condition, that is, that the "said Sir Oswald is content not to demand no . . . of . . . that is past, but as from this day . . . to enjoy all manner of things that shall touch

<sup>1</sup> 4th August, 1531. The two Sir Johns and their kinsman, Sir Philip, sign the minutes.

him by rank as Commanderies etc. belonging to the Nation of England." The Chapter confirm this agreement.

This Sir Oswald was Turcopilier and Grand Prior of Ireland, appointed by Cardinal Pole 2nd of Philip and Mary. Sir Jas. Ware and others call him the last turcopilier. He was son of Sir Thomas Massingberd, himself, after his wife's death, a member of the order, and ancestor, by females, of the Langton-Massingberds of Gunby, co. Linc.

#### SIR JAMES BABINGTON.

Sir James Babington, Sir Ambrose Cave, and 12 others who came forth of England with Sir William Weston, were received 3rd October, 1524.

26th August, 1525, Sir James signs the minutes, and afterwards 3rd June, 1527, 13th January 1527, and 14th February, 1528. He had paid his fees 20th February, 1525.

13th March, 1528. Sir Rowland White and Sir James Babington are appointed to the Commandery of *Swingfield*, co. Kent, vacant by the resignation of Sir Edward *Belynger* (?), who had accepted that of Wylughton. On the 8th of May, 1528, both White and James Babington were dead, and the Commandery of *Swingfield* was conferred upon Sir Edward (?) Browne and Sir Edward Cave.

Who Sir James was, does not appear. His name is not found in the pedigree, but the Ottery branch to which he probably belonged has been but imperfectly recorded.

#### SIR PHILIP BABINGTON.

Philip was the third son of John Babington, of Ottery St. Mary, by Elizabeth Holcombe, of Branscombe, his wife. "13th July 1531 at the tong holden by license etc. Sir John Sutton k<sup>t</sup> Commander of Beverley & Temple Bruer then being Lieutenant Turcoplyer received Nicholas Upton and Philip Babington to be of this noble religion of our passage by the assent and consent of all the Commanders and Knights of the Inglyshe nacion there being resident in the Convent, and that the said Philip shall bring in his proofs in the space of two years."

4th August, 1531, he signs the minutes, as well as on the 15th and 31st May and the 28th January, 1533.

1st April, 1533, he is one who takes upon himself to make caravan in the Gallies. He signs the minutes 8th May, 1536, 12th April, 7th September and 8th of March, 1537.

26th January, 1530, he was appointed to be of the same caravan with Sir Thomas *Sopryndys* (?) and Sir David . . . 9th October, 1539, he parted for the caravan.

### SIR NICHOLAS BABINGTON.

The name of Nicholas was confined to the Ottery line, and this knight may have been a younger son of Nicholas Babington, of Ottery. The pedigree is silent.

Sir Nicholas signed the minutes of the order 8th April, 1532, 6th March, 1533, 13th April, 1539, and 1st February, 1534.

At the Dissolution, the minute-book seems to have been removed to Malta, for after mention, on the 22nd September, 1546, of the election of Sir Nicholas Upton to be "turcopler" by proxy, follows an entry in Italian.

The English "tong" does not seem ever to have flourished in Malta. The present magnificent Auberges were erected after the English dissolution, and the Auberge of England is a mean, poverty-stricken house.

The chapel in the Cathedral appropriated to England was never occupied, and the monument of only one British knight appears in the whole edifice.

M. Miede tells us that at the muster by La Valette, in May, 1565, before the great siege, out of 587 members of the order, one only was English.

Soon after the Dissolution, probably after the death of the last Grand Prior Sir Richard Shelley, the Grand Master thought proper to remove the titles and to retain the office in himself. In 1582 (*Vertot* iv, 123), Gregory XIII. annexed the Turcopoliership to the Grand Mastership. According to the statutes of the order, anno 1643, appended to Baudouin (*Hist. de Malt.*, 105), the order of precedence in the English "Tonge" stood thus :

“ Le Turcopolier,

“ Le Prieure d’Angleterre,

“ Le Prieure d’Hibernie,

“ Le Bailiffe Capitaine d’Aquila or de l’Aigle.”

This order obviously must have been arranged after the Grand Prior ceased to have a seat in Parliament.

The above is to be taken as supplementary to an account of the family of Babington, drawn up by the present writer, and printed in the *Coll. Topog.*, ii, 9, and viii, 264 and 313. *Topog. and Genealog.*, i, 133.