

# 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 19 — Northumberland, Earls and Dukes of



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**NORTHUMBERLAND, EARLS AND DUKES OF.** The earldom, and later the dukedom, of Northumberland, famous in English history by its connexion with the noble house of [Percy](#) (*q.v.*) is to be traced, from an origin anterior to a strictly regulated system of peerage. The Saxon kingdom of Northumbria embraced a far more extensive territory than the modern county of Northumberland; and for at least a century after the Norman Conquest Northumberland, as the name imports, comprised a great portion of the country north of the Humber, including the cities of Durham and of York. The geographical position of this territory, contiguous with the kingdom of Scotland, conferred vast responsibility as well as power on the earl or governor to whom its administration was entrusted; and it appears to have been the policy of William the Conqueror and his immediate successors to acknowledge the rights of the men who, though sometimes spoken of as earls, were in no strict sense members of the feudal nobility created by the Norman monarchy. William the Conqueror found Northumberland in the possession of Morcar, a younger son of Algar, the Saxon earl of Mercia, who on giving in his submission was confirmed in the government of the district, but was soon afterwards imprisoned for rebellion, and was replaced by Copsi, an uncle of Morcar's predecessor, Tostig. Copsi was murdered a few weeks after receiving the dignity, and the same fate befell several of his successors; those who escaped it being not infrequently deprived of the post for rebellion or incapacity. Henry, earl of Huntingdon,

only son of David I., king of Scotland, was made governor of Northumberland in 1139, and was styled “earl of Northumberland” by the contemporary chronicler Roger of Hoveden. It was not for a long period, however, that the earldom of Northumberland came into existence as a title of honour heritable according to peerage law. Ever since the Conquest the house of [Percy](#) (*q.v.*) had been growing in power and importance, and at the coronation of Richard II. in 1377 Henry de Percy, 4th Baron Percy, who had distinguished himself in the French wars, officiated as marshal of England, and was then created earl of Northumberland. With his son Sir Henry Percy, the celebrated “Hotspur,” the earl played a leading part in the turbulent history of the period, especially in bringing about the deposition of Richard II. and the accession of Henry IV. The quarrel of Northumberland and his son with King Henry over the ransom of their Scottish prisoners taken at Homildon Hill on the 14th of September 1402 has been immortalized by Shakespeare; and in consequence of their rebellion all the earl’s honours were forfeited in 1406. He was not himself present at the battle of Shrewsbury in July 1403, when Hotspur was killed, but he was slain, heading a fresh rebellion, at Bramham Moor on the 19th of February 1408.

The 1st earl of Northumberland was succeeded by his grandson, Hotspur’s son, Henry (c. 1394–1455), who was restored to the earldom and the estates of the Percies in 1414 and was killed at the battle of St Albans in May 1455.

The title then descended in the male line till the death of the 6th earl in 1537. During the Wars of the Roses the Percies took the Lancastrian side, which led to the attainder of Henry the 3rd earl (1421–1461) during the time of the Yorkist triumph, his forfeited title being conferred in 1464 by Edward IV. on [John Neville, Lord Montagu](#) (q.v.), by a patent which was cancelled a few years later. The earldom, together with the barony of Poynings which his father had obtained by marriage, was restored in 1473 to Henry Percy, son of the 3rd earl, who attached himself to Edward IV., acquiesced in the accession of Richard III., and submitted to Henry VII., by whom he was received into favour. His grandson Henry, the 6th earl (c. 1502–1537), left no direct heir, and the latter's nephew, Thomas Percy, was debarred from the succession by an attainder passed on his father for his participation in the Pilgrimage of Grace. In 1549, however, Thomas was restored in blood, and in 1557 he became by a new creation earl of Northumberland, 7th of his line. Meantime, in 1551, [John Dudley, earl of Warwick](#), was created duke of Northumberland (q.v.), his title being, however, forfeited by attainder in 1553.

The earldom restored to the house of Percy by the creation of 1557 continued without interruption in the male line till 1670. The 7th earl was beheaded in 1572 for sharing in a conspiracy in which he was joined by the earl of Westmorland with the object of securing the release of Mary Queen of Scots and the free exercise of the Catholic religion. By the earl's attainder the baronies of Percy and of

Poynings and the earldom of Northumberland of the older creation were forfeited, but owing to a clause in the patent the newer earldom of Northumberland and the other honours conferred in 1557 passed to his brother Henry (c. 1532–1585), who, however, is usually known as the 8th and not the 2nd earl.

Henry's grandson, ALGERNON PERCY, 10th earl of Northumberland (1602–1668), son of Henry the 9th earl (1564–1632), became a peer in his father's lifetime as Baron Percy in 1626. During the years immediately preceding the Civil War he served as an admiral, making earnest but unsuccessful efforts to reform the navy, and in 1637 he was made lord high admiral of England. In 1639 Charles I. appointed him general of the forces north of the Trent, and a member of the council of regency. Northumberland played a distinguished and honourable part in the troubled times of the Civil War. He was a friend of Strafford, and gave evidence at his trial which, though favourable on the important point of bringing the Irish army to England, was on the whole damaging; and he afterwards leaned more and more towards the popular party, of which he soon became leader in the House of Lords. He was a member of the committee of safety, and later of the committee of both kingdoms; and he took an active part in the attempts to come to terms with the king, whom he visited at Oxford for that purpose in 1643 and at Uxbridge two years later. Northumberland helped to organize the new model army; and in 1646 he was entrusted by parliament

with the charge of the king's younger children. He led the opposition in the House of Lords to the proposal to bring Charles I. to trial, and during the Commonwealth he took no part in public affairs. At the Restoration he was called to the privy council by Charles II., and with his habitual moderation he deprecated harsh proceedings against the regicides. His second wife, Elizabeth (d. 1705), daughter of Theophilus Howard, 2nd earl of Suffolk, brought him Northumberland House in the Strand, London, which was demolished in 1874 to make room for Northumberland Avenue. On the death of his son Joceline, the 11th earl, in 1670, the male line became extinct.

George Fitzroy (1665–1716), third son of Barbara, duchess of Cleveland, the wife of Roger Palmer, earl of Castlemaine, by King Charles II., was created by his father earl of Northumberland in 1674, and duke in 1683. This second dukedom of Northumberland became extinct on his death at Epsom on the 3rd of July 1716.

Meanwhile Elizabeth Percy, daughter of Joceline, the 11th earl, had married Charles Seymour, 6th duke of Somerset; and her son Algernon, the 7th duke, was in 1749 created Baron Warkworth and earl of Northumberland, with remainder to his son-in-law, Sir Hugh Smithson, Bart., son of Langdale Smithson of Langdale, Yorkshire. Sir Hugh Smithson (c. 1714–1786) took the name and arms of Percy on inheriting the earldom in 1750; in 1766 he was created Earl Percy and duke of Northumberland, and in 1784 he

was further created Baron Lovaine of Alnwick, with special remainder to his second son, Lord Algernon Percy. He took a somewhat prominent part in politics as a follower of Lord Bute, and was one of George III.'s confidential advisers, holding the office of lord-lieutenant of Ireland from 1763 to 1765, and that of master of the horse from 1778 to 1780. He was a man of cultivated tastes, and spent large sums of money in repairing and improving Alnwick Castle and his other residences. His wife, Elizabeth (1716–1776), who was a prominent figure in society, inherited in her own right her father's barony of Percy. The duke was succeeded by his eldest son Hugh; and his second son Algernon, Lord Lovaine, was created earl of Beverley in 1790.

Hugh, 2nd duke of this line (1742–1817), first inherited his mother's barony of Percy. He was present at the battle of Minden, and although in parliament, where he was member for Westminster from 1763 to 1776, he had opposed the policy that led to the American war, he proceeded to Boston in 1774 as colonel commanding the 5th Fusiliers, a regiment that has since then been known as the Northumberland Fusiliers. His generosity to his men made him exceedingly popular in the army; he became a general in 1793, and after succeeding to the dukedom in 1786 he exercised considerable influence in politics, though he never obtained office. His son Hugh, 3rd duke (1785–1847), was lord-lieutenant of Ireland in 1829–1830, when the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed, and was pronounced by Sir Robert Peel "the best chief governor that

ever presided over the affairs of Ireland.” Both he and his brother Algernon, 4th duke (1792–1865), who was created Baron Prudhoe in 1816, died without issue; the barony of Percy devolved on their great-nephew, the duke of Atholl, and the dukedom passed to George (1778–1867), eldest son of Algernon, 1st earl of Beverley, and so to his son, the 6th duke (1810–1899), and grandson, the 7th duke (b. 1846), who married the daughter of the 8th duke of Argyll. The 7th duke’s eldest son, Earl Percy (1871–1910), seemed destined to take a great place in public life when he was prematurely cut off; he had a distinguished career at Oxford and from 1895 in the House of Commons, being under-secretary for India in 1902–1903 and under-secretary for foreign affairs in 1903–1905.

See Edward Barrington de Fonblanque, *The House of Percy* (2 vols., London, 1887); G. E. C(okayne), *Complete Peerage*, vol. vi. (London, 1895).





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