

# THE DAGWORTHS

SIR THOMAS DAGWORTH

of Gissing

one of Edward III's most courageous and brilliant  
commanders

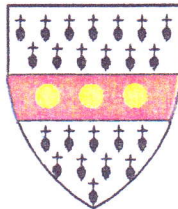
and

SIR NICHOLAS DAGWORTH

Soldier, Ambassador, Lord of Blickling

Dagworth:

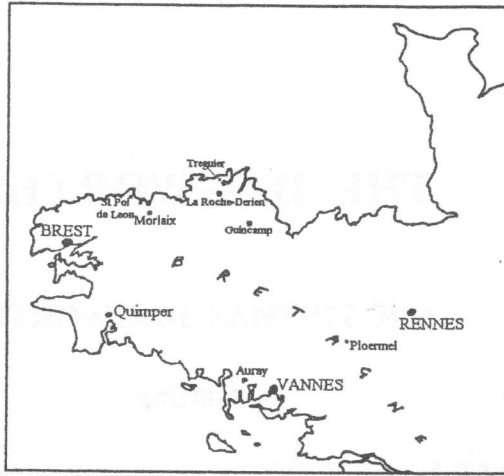
*Ermine on a Fess Gules  
three Bezants*



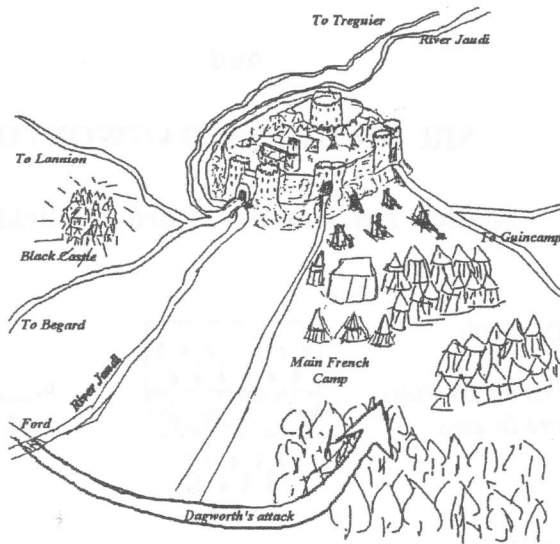
or:

*Brittany a path of  
blood set with gold*

# THE DAGWORTHS



Map of Brittany showing battle sites



Imaginary Sketch of La Roche-Derien

## THE DAGWORTHS

The Dagworth family took their name from Dagworth in Stow Hundred in Suffolk, where Walter de Aggeworth or Dagworth and Aveline his wife held lands in King John's time. The estates passed in 1216 to his son Robert, then to Hervy de Dagworth; and via his grandson Osbert in 1253. The king, Henry III, granted him a manor at Bradwell in Essex with free warren and the right to hold a fair there.

[In 1218 an Osbert de Dagworth obtained Abbot's Manor at Tibenham, Norfolk, with a messuage and 140 acres. Part of this manor, called Dagworth's manor, was retrieved by another Osbert who proved that his father Osbert and his grandfather Hervy before him had a grant of the Abbot's manor. This Dagworth's manor was given to St. Olave's monastery at Herringfleet. Either this was another branch of the family or the dates given are inaccurate, for they do not quite accord with the first paragraph.]

Osbert's son John died in 1290, leaving *his* son John a minor in the king's wardship. Osbert's wife Maud had the office of *usher of the Exchequer* and left it to Sir John Dagworth when she died in 1308. In 1325 he was admitted to a third part of this office; no details of his activities can be found.

### **Sir John Dagworth, 1276-1332.**

Sir John married Alice FitzWarin in 1292. Their son and heir Nicholas held the same office in the Exchequer, and was also *marshal to the itinerant justices*; he held a part of Elmdon manor in Essex, and the Dagworth's manor at Bradwell, for which he paid a relief of three arrows feathered with eagle's feathers to the King. Sir Nicholas was unable because of infirmity to fight in France with the king; his brother Thomas was already there, and so was his son, also John (d. 1360), so Nicholas was excused. This Sir Nicholas was buried in 1378, according to Blomefield, at Blickling; his wife Joan, and his two daughters survived him.

**Sir John Dagworth** held Dagworth's manor at Gissing in 1315, and probably lived there. His son **Sir Thomas, Lord Dagworth** inherited it from him, and it passed to **Sir Nicholas Dagworth** of Blickling, who died in 1401. Both were great men and famous warriors in their day.

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### **Sir Thomas Dagworth, Lord Dagworth; died 1350.**

Edward III was well served by his illustrious commanders : Henry of Lancaster; Northampton; Warwick; Oxford; Salisbury; Stafford; Lord Bartholomew Burghersh, Sir Thomas Dagworth; Sir William Bentley, Sir James Audley, Sir Robert Knollys, Sir John Chandos, and the Black Prince - famous, masterful leaders and warriors, now mostly forgotten<sup>1</sup>.

Though we have little information about his early life and knightly prowess, there can be no doubt that Sir Thomas Dagworth won a great reputation and the king's favour. He married in 1343, Alianore, Countess of Ormond, the widow of James Butler, first Earl of Ormond, and herself the younger daughter of the earl of Hereford, Humphrey de Bohun, who had married a princess, Elizabeth Plantagenet, daughter of Edward I. As such she had the king's protection for all her estates and her servants in the dukedom of Brittany. She lived at Cranley in Surrey, and it was in the chapel of her manor of Vachery that they became man and wife.

In 1343 the northern part of Brittany was in the hands of Count Charles de Blois, who called himself duke of Brittany, while the southern part was in English hands after Edward had relieved John de Montford. Edward sent Northampton across Brittany towards Rennes, and advanced himself to invest Vannes; from there he sent another force forward to take Nantes. Charles de Blois fell back from Nantes to Angers and called upon his uncle, Philip VI, to help. The two French armies joined and marched towards Rennes, and only then turned south-west to face the English king at Vannes. But though Edward was caught between the Franco-Breton army and the garrison at Vannes, for some unaccountable reason Philip delayed. Two cardinals arrived from Pope Clement VI and arranged a truce; the French departed, and after a short time, Edward too returned home to England.

The king took a prominent part in the great tournaments that occurred during the two years of the truce. The Knights of the Round Table were revived, and the Round Tower at Windsor Castle was built for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Burne, 11

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But in 1345, Philip VI repeatedly broke the truce. When he took captive some of the Breton nobility who supported Edward and put them to death, Edward took personal charge of the conduct of the renewed war. Edward occupied Vannes. He sent the earl of Derby with one army to Gascony, and himself crossed to Flanders to confer with an ally (who was murdered the day before their meeting). A third army under the earl of Northampton (William de Bohun, brother of Sir Thomas' wife), who had Sir Thomas Dagworth as his lieutenant, went to battle against Charles de Blois and his armies in the north of Brittany.

Edward III was at this time converting his army to a paid force, rather than one depending on obligations such as knight's fees. Sir Thomas, a professional soldier, had been commissioned in 1345 to raise a small force of knights at Gissing. As well as himself, they numbered 14 knights, 65 esquires (John de Dagworth, presumably his nephew, headed the list of esquires) and 120 archers, with 40 "bideuweres", possibly valets, and as many servants). The indenture is still extant. He sailed with them for Brittany in the summer of 1345, landing at Brest about 10th June.

The earl of Northampton placed him in charge of a mobile force, probably numbering only 800-900 mounted men, including knights, men-at-arms and a small group of archers, which immediately set out through the centre of Brittany. Their objective was to relieve the pressure on the Montford region in the south where the count de Blois had captured Quimper. John de Montford had escaped to England and did homage to Edward as king of France; Montford attempted to retake it but his siege lasted too long and de Blois had time to relieve it. John de Montford died shortly afterwards.

On 17th June 1345, at the village of Cadoret near Ploërmel, Dagworth met with, and put to flight, a large French army. Many other towns and castles fell to him; he covered nearly a hundred miles in seven days, and almost reached Rennes, 125 miles to the east.

Northampton himself took the northern part of Brittany. His mounted force had marched overnight some twenty-five miles to Guincamp, but when the town closed its gates to him and refused to surrender, Northampton had to leave it as he had no siege engines with him - such rapid progress precluded their transport. By nightfall he reached La Roche-Derrien, completing a

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march of 45 miles in under 24 hours. The castle surrendered after a three-day siege, and the port of Treguier five miles away then fell immediately.

Charles de Blois gathered his forces, but it was a year later before he felt strong enough to strike back. He finally met with Dagworth at St. Pol de Léon, which is north-west of Morlaix, on June 9, 1346, with an army greatly superior in numbers to Dagworth. Attacked on all sides, Dagworth drew his men into a square, just as the army did many times in later centuries, and from this defensive situation their longbows poured arrows into the French waves of onslaught, massacring them till they fled the field. Doubtless this formidable fighter helped to establish the reputation of the English archers which was to frighten the French army even more at Crécy, while boosting English morale.

A Frenchman wrote of Dagworth 100 years later: "The English Achilles who covered himself with glory in resisting with a handful of men the whole army of Charles de Blois."

Crécy, in August 1346, occurred much further to the south as the king moved towards the coast after threatening Paris but failing to bring the French king to battle. Dagworth's success had drawn some of the king's forces to the north away, from his main army. Crécy had also saved La Roche-Derrien from re-capture by the French. But by spring 1347, Charles de Blois was able to move. He had massive siege engines built, and all the panoply of a major French army ready. In May 1347 he aimed for La Roche-Derrien and invested it for three weeks, with a force estimated at over 10,000 men. His army had at least 1800 men-at-arms, 600 archers, 2000 crossbow men, and a large number of "infantry" - i.e., probably of the order of 10,000 men all told; though one source gives a total of 25,000. He prepared for a full-scale siege.

Charles placed his main force about 300 yards to the south of the walled town and castle, which stood on a rock on the east side of the river Jaudi commanding the bridge over the river. He had the ground cleared of trees and scrub to allow his engines of war full play. His camp was laid out with streets and "houses", presumably of large tents and pavilions, and even a market, where countrymen brought their goods for sale to the besiegers. Contra-vallations (barricades) and palisades were constructed to protect the

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inhabitants from the arrows of an attacking English army. Charles felt secure.

The Count de Blois had nine siege engines, one able to throw stones up to 300lbs in weight. The governor, Richard Totsham, and his wife were on the receiving end of one of these - it demolished half their house! But the garrison held on bravely for three weeks.

At the Black Castle (an old earthworks some 18 feet high), to the west of the town, and north of the river, Charles placed a detachment (possibly as much as one third of his army) guarding the road from the south-west, from whence a relieving force would be likely to arrive; they were given strict instructions not to leave that post without explicit orders from Charles himself.

Dagworth collected his small force at Carhaix, 45 miles to the south-west. One military historian<sup>2</sup> wonders why he took so long to attack! He had 300 men-at-arms and 400 archers (though they did not use their bows), all mounted. Dagworth himself gives these figures in a letter to the king written shortly after the battle, which is also still extant.

Doubtless he was getting intelligence reports from spies, patrols, and the local peasants who were supplying the market at La Roche, and laying his plans most carefully. He must have been relieved - and surprised - to hear that no guards were posted at night.

Dagworth's plan was to take the enemy by surprise; no frontal daylight attack could hope to succeed against such odds. Charles' division of his army, while sound tactically, was to Dagworth's advantage, since it reduced the strength of the main army that he had to take on; the detachment could not cross the river without going some miles north or south of the town, when the bridge was closed.

Dagworth approached via Bégard, nine miles away. They rested in the monastery in the evening, feeding well and taking mass in their chapel - most of the monks had fled. Dagworth now outlined his plans to his men.

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<sup>2</sup> Burne, A. H. *The Crécy War*. First published 1955; Wordsworth Edition, 1999

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They were to ford the river to the south behind Charles de Blois' camp, approach the last few miles through the woods as silently as possible to arrive just before dawn. Since this was to be an attack at night, a password was necessary, so that friend could be told from foe. When giving the correct response to a challenge, Dagworth's men were to give the password in a whisper, or at least a low voice. If anyone responded in a loud voice, he was to be regarded as an enemy who had heard the password - and despatched forthwith!

Guided successfully across the river and to the rise overlooking the French camp, Dagworth found no sentries to give the alarm. They rode down the open space and began cutting the tent guy-ropes (a very confusing tactic, as any boy scout or army cadet will know!). The enemy struggled out, without armour, and were hacked down. Slowly the battle progressed towards the front-most lines; but aroused by the noise of conflict, the French threw back several counter-attacks. The first was repelled, the second barely so. A third, more organised attempt came desperately near to succeeding, until in the first light of dawn, the garrison of the castle saw and understood what was happening below the walls, and came out in force to attack the rear of the French. Leaving sufficient garrison to secure the castle meant that only a few hundred men were able to join battle on the plateau below the walls, but that was enough. Eventually, the French fled leaving above 600 knights, esquires and men-at-arms dead or captured.

The besiegers on the other side of the river were unsure whether this was a real attack or a feint to draw them away, leaving Dagworth's main force to relieve the castle, so they did nothing. To help at dawn, they would have had to go upstream, ford the river and then climb a steep incline; it was too late.

Dagworth himself was injured and captured in one mêlée, until he was rescued by a determined thrust from his men. Charles de Blois, without armour, fought heroically and received many wounds, but was eventually taken prisoner, covered in blood. He was taken to various castles in Brittany until he recovered sufficiently to be taken to England and the Tower. He was allowed to have his wife visit, and to have his friends with him during his convalescence in France. On his voyage, he was serenaded by eight guitar players; he joined the recently captured king of Scotland in the Tower of London.



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Dagworth too returned to England. He sold the Count of Blois to the king for a ransom of 25,000 gold *écus* - about £5,000 in those days. His accounts for the Brittany campaign survive, and show that he charged the king for every man and horse for the duration of the tour of duty, even though some men and horses must have fallen by the wayside from battle or disease. Such was Dagworth's reputation that his bills were paid without question.

The earl of Northampton granted to Sir Thomas Dagworth and his wife all the castles and estates in Brittany of Hervé VII, Sire de Noyon and Lord of Léon.

During the interval in England, Sir Thomas was summoned twice (in November 1347 and February 1347/8) to parliament by writ, and thus became Lord Dagworth.

French sources tell of a horrible sequel to the battle at La Roche-Derrien<sup>3</sup>. In Dagworth's absence, the French appealed to the king for help. Philip sent an army to retake La Roche. After three days siege, the walls were breached and all the inhabitants of the town, children and women as well as men, were slaughtered. The castle garrison, some 250, surrendered with the promise of safe conduct to friendly territory. Two unarmed French knights escorted them from the castle, but at Chateauneuf the English were set upon and massacred by the butchers and carpenters of the town.

Sir Thomas Dagworth was himself killed in July or August, 1350, with almost all his men, in an ambush near Auray by a Breton named Raoul de Cahours, viceroy of Poitou, who had quarrelled with Dagworth and was about to desert to the French - helped by a bribe from the French king<sup>4</sup>. Dagworth lies in an unknown grave; indeed, there appears to be no memorial to him anywhere.

He was described as "strong and elegant", "a most courageous knight... worthy of everlasting honour to his name." He was remembered then too for his humanity to the Breton peasants and especially to the wounded.

**It is time to remember him.**

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<sup>3</sup> Burne, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Burne, *ibid.* 230.

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### Sir Nicholas Dagworth, d. 1401.

Although Cokayne could find no direct evidence, it is very probable that Sir Nicholas was the son of Sir Thomas Dagworth. His wife, who was Alianore, daughter of Walter and sister and co-heir of Sir John Rosale (or Rossale) of Shropshire, had been married previously to John Inglefeld, by whom she had a son, John, who was her heir. It seems that she and Sir Nicholas had no son, for his estate was left partly to Walter, Lord FitzWalter, the son of Sir Nicholas's sister Lady Alianore Dagworth's marriage to Sir Walter FitzWalter of Essex, and partly to Margaret, the daughter of John Dagworth and his wife Thomasine.

Thomasine later married William, Lord Furnival of Worksop; their daughter and heiress married Thomas Neville, who thus became Lord Furnival.

Sir Nicholas died in 1401; his widow released her third part of the manor of Blickling to Sir Thomas Erpingham and Sir Robert Berney in 1407. Erpingham sold Blickling manor to Sir John Fastolf, and from him it went to Sir Geoffrey Boleyn, lord mayor of London. Lady Dagworth died in 1432, having married for a third time to Sir John Mortimer of Hatfield, Herts., who was executed at Tyburn for treason in 1423/4.

Sir Nicholas had a distinguished career as a soldier in France, and as an envoy and ambassador, negotiating with kings, princes, and the Pope. He became a Knight of the King's Chamber.

Quite early on, as befitted one of such illustrious descent, he was one of the king's commanders, in Aquitaine. He was captain of Flavigny in Burgundy in 1359, and afterwards led one of the bands of semi-brigands, the 'free companies' of mercenaries, into Spain in 1365. He was entrusted, along with Sir John Fastolf and others, with secret negotiations in 1373 with the French; so secret were they that we know no more about the purpose or outcome. To undertake these he resigned his post as Constable of Norham Castle, which he held for the Bishop of Durham.

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He examined the revenues in Ireland in June 1375, and the next year, the King and Council intended to send him to Ireland to examine Sir William de Windsor's work there; but Dame Alice Perers pointed out that he and Sir William were enemies, and petitioned to stop him. The king agreed. But in 1377, because King Richard II held him in as great esteem as King Edward III, who had just died, he *was* sent to Ireland by him with a full commission to reform the revenues in that country.

His ambassadorial skills were evidently well thought of, for in 1380 he went on a mission to France with Sir John Hawkewood and Walter Skirlawe, Dean of St Martin's le Grand in London, to negotiate with the lords and dukes of Italy.

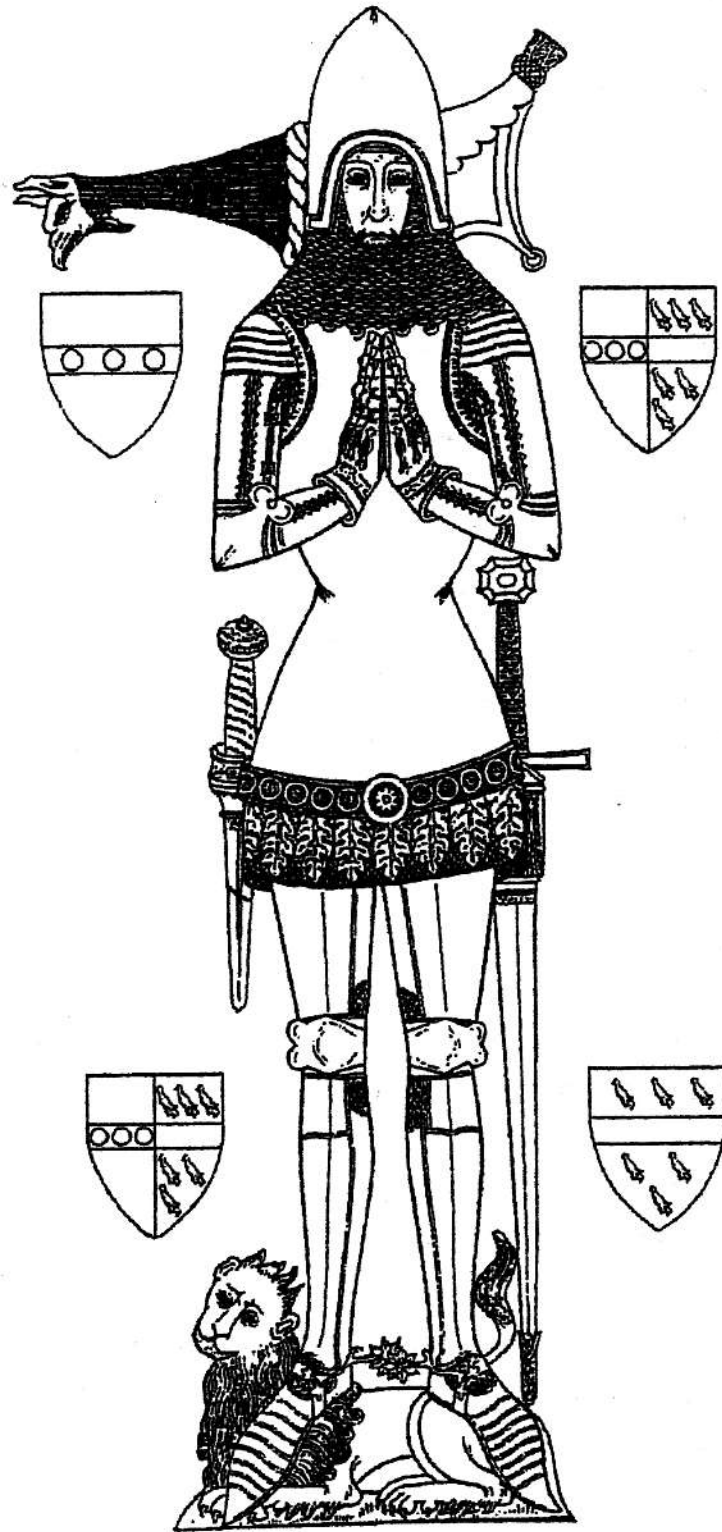
Skirlawe and Dagworth made up another team in 1381, with Bernard Vansedles, Simon de Burley the chamberlain, and Robert Braybrook, to negotiate with the princes of Germany. The following year he and Skirlawe went as ambassadors to Pope Urban VI, with powers to treat with the king of Naples. In 1384 he went again to the Pope as ambassador, and also to negotiate with Charles king of Jerusalem and Sicily; on this occasion he was accompanied by John Baam, dean of St Martin's, the King's secretary, and Sir John Hawkewood.

Despite all this honourable service and the king's favour, he was impeached in parliament as one of the Court party, and imprisoned in Rochester castle, but was released with his honour restored. Indeed, the next year he was appointed as a commissioner to negotiate with the French King, and with the earl of Flanders.

In 1390 he was made one of the commissioners to take the oath of the King of Scotland to the treaty that had just been concluded; and when the king infringed that treaty, to demanded satisfaction. When the money for the redemption of David Bruce, the king of Scotland, fell in arrears, they sought its payment.

He retired to Blickling where he built the first manor house and lived there till he died in 1401. Sir Nicholas also held Corbet's manor at Billingford, near Earsham. He was a Knight of the Shire for Norfolk in 1397-98.

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**Sir Nicholas Dagworth**  
from the brass at Blickling Church

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He is buried in Blickling church under a marble slab on which is his figure, about 53 inches tall, in brass, armed head to foot, his head supported by his helmet with its crest of a griffin's head coupé at the neck<sup>5</sup> arising from a wreath, with a lion couchant at his feet, its head turned up towards the onlooker, and the arms of Dagworth and Rosale, and their impaled arms twice repeated -

*Ermine on a Fess Gules three Bezants* - Dagworth  
*Gules a Fess between six Martlets Or* - Rosale.

The Dagworth field lacks Ermine spots in all shields, probably an engraver's error.

The armour is characteristic of the "Camail and Jupon Period"<sup>6</sup>, and shows the sleeveless *jupon*, usually made of silk, velvet or leather, covering the body and reaching to mid-thigh; no coat of arms is present though the lower border is decorated with oak leaves. Under the jupon was the globular *breast-plate* which gave such a pigeon-chested appearance to the knights of that time. A *hauberk* or sleeved shirt of linked mail was worn beneath the breast-plate and can be seen at the arm-pits.

The *camail* of chain mail protected the neck and shoulders and was attached to the tall pointed *bascinet* covering the head by a cord. The limbs are protected by plate armour: on the arms, *brassarts* and *vambraces* covered the upper and lower arms respectively, each pair of plates secured by straps; and hinged *elbow-cops* allowed flexion and movement. Laminated plates or *pauldrons* do the same at the shoulder. Leather gauntlets have steel plates called *gadlings* on the knuckles.

The legs are completely encased in plates and the knees are protected by steel bosses on leather or *cuir-boulli*<sup>7</sup>, while the feet are encased in *sabatons* or *sollerets*, laminated plates ending in a toe-cap. He wears rowel spurs, and from a decorative sword belt hung low on his hips are a sword and, to the right, a *misericord* or dagger, used for despatching enemies. Part of the dagger has been broken away.

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<sup>5</sup> Not as Blomefield has it, "An eagles head erased"; John Dent has pointed out that this eagle has ears and is therefore a griffin. It is coupé, i.e., cut off, at the neck.

<sup>6</sup> Clayton, M. 1915. *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*. 2nd. Edn 1929.

<sup>7</sup> Leather boiled in wax, then shaped over a former.

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There was this inscription around the tomb (only part remains):

*Hic jacet Nicholaus de Dagworth Miles, quondam Dominus de Blikling,  
qui obit - die Mensis Januarii Anno Domini Milesimo cccc primo,  
cuius anime proprietur Deus Amen.*

*Here lies Nicholas de Dagworth Knight, onetime Lord of Blickling,  
who died - day of January in the year of Our Lord 1401  
whose soul we commend to God Amen*

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### References and Sources

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## THE NORFOLK HERALDRY SOCIETY

The Norfolk Heraldry Society was founded in 1975, and is open to all who are interested in heraldry and related subjects. We hold meetings, with presentations about heraldry and related subjects, at 7.45 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month from March until December at the United Reform Church, Princes Street, Norwich. There are also occasional social events, usually near Christmas and mid-summer, together with an informal summer visit to churches and places of historic and heraldic interest. Contact the Secretary (Mrs. P Sims, 26c Shotessam Rd, Poringland, Norwich NR14 7JG) or any officer for membership details.

We hold exhibitions of heraldic material to encourage further research and interest in the subject. In the 900th anniversary of Norwich Cathedral, the Norfolk Heraldry Society mounted a major Symposium, with exhibitions, in the Nave of the Cathedral, to honour one of Norfolk's own great men, Sir Thomas Erpingham, and presented a banner bearing his arms, now raised near his tomb. Most of the proceedings of that symposium were published in *Agincourt 1415*, ed. Anne Curry (Tempus, in 2000). Recently, an exhibition showing Erpingham's great window, a memorial to 84 fighting men who died without male issue, and a parallel exhibition of Norfolk Garter Knights, have been mounted.

The Society's Journal, *Norfolk Heraldry*, is published occasionally and the newsletter *The Norfolk Standard* is issued three times a year. A series of *Heraldry in Norfolk Churches* by deanery, has begun; as has another series, of *Norfolk Heraldic Monographs*, the latest of which was *The Hastings Brass at Elsing, Norfolk*. Publications are available at reduced rates to members.

Thanks to an anonymous benefactor, we have our own coat of arms, seen above, and our badge is reproduced below.





**The badge of  
The Norfolk Hedrahdry Society**