**The Buxton Family**

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the Buxton family adopted a fictitious pedigree tracing their ancestry back to Peter de Bukton, seneschal and steward in the household of the Earl of Derby, afterwards King Henry IV, but for heraldic as well as genealogical reasons it is more likely that the family originates from Oulton or Irmingland near Buxton in Norfolk, from which the family name almost certainly derives. The earliest records of this family begin with **John Buxton junior (d. 1522)** in 1464. Through careful land management and fortuitous marriages the family grew to be one of the major landowning families in the region. **Robert Buxton (d. 1528)** acquired the manor of Channons near Tibenham by marriage to Christiana Glemham, and his son **John (1488-1572)** built Channons Hall during the 1560s, home to the Buxton family for the next 200 years.

It was under **Robert Buxton (c. 1533-1607)** that the family rose to prominence. Robert entered the service of Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, as surveyor and solicitor in 1559, serving him faithfully until the duke's death in 1572, although he seems to have been instrumental in putting down a rising in the duke's favour at Kenninghall in December 1569. After the duke's attainder and death Robert Buxton looked after the interests of his son Philip, Earl of Arundel, and later was one of the very few men licenced to visit the earl in the Tower. Not surprisingly, Robert was appointed one of the government's surveyor generals of the Howard lands in Norfolk and Suffolk, a task that must have caused him some conflict of conscience. At the same time he benefited to some extent from the demise of his masters. For his services to the crown he was rewarded, first with a lease of Rushford College (1580), and in 1599 with a licence to purchase this escheated property. Between December 1597 and April 1599, however, he spent more than a year in the Fleet. The reasons for his imprisonment are not clear, but may be connected with disputes over Rushford College and other Howard lands following the Earl of Arundel's attainder. Buxton's political influence in Norfolk and Suffolk is demonstrated by the offices he held: MP for Bramber (1559), Horsham (1563) and Arundel (1584), mayor of Thetford in 1588 and 1597, and Justice of the Peace in Norfolk in 1590-7 and 1604-7.

Robert Buxton's estate passed to his grandson **Robert (1588-1611)**, his eldest son **John (c. 1560-96)** having died during his own lifetime. Robert's son, **John Buxton (1608-60)**, followed the family tradition by entering the legal profession (admitted to Gray's Inn in 1626), and by 1635 was a Justice of the Peace. Although John seems to have been a somewhat retiring character - he liked the theatre and his books - it was inevitable that, as an important member of the county's gentry, he should be drawn into the political turmoil of the mid-seventeenth century. As a lieutenant-colonel in the Norfolk militia he was obliged to take part in the military exercises of the neighbourhood and to muster troops. There is no evidence, though, that he was involved in any military campaigns during the Civil War. On the death of Sir Francis Astley in May 1638 he became High Sheriff of Norfolk. John Buxton's papers include detailed accounts of the expenses and organisation which the office entailed at the Norfolk assizes or the mayor's feast in Norwich, but also of the support he received from his friends and neighbours. At the same time, the collection of ship money was a great burden. Having fulfilled this odious task as conscientiously as he could, the Long Parliament of 1640 declared the collection of ship money illegal, and men like Buxton were suddenly faced with the prospect of being called before a committee to account for 'their rigorous levying of ship money and possibly forced to good sore damages'. Fortunately for Buxton, no such legal action ensued. For the following two decades he seems to have maintained as low a profile as possible, keeping himself informed of current events by correspondence with men such as Thomas Knyvett, Robert Rawlins, William Le Neve and George Humphreys. Even so, Buxton was too prominent to escape attention. In 1645 he was included with several men of royalist or neutral sympathies in a committee charged with the raising of the tax for Lord Fairfax's New Army in Norfolk. In 1649 he seems to have suffered some harassment at the hands of the Army, necessitating a letter of protection from Fairfax. A few years later, in 1656, John Buxton was elected MP for Norfolk, but, like other royalists, was barred from taking up his seat in the Commons. He died on 29 April 1660, just a month before Charles II made his entry into London.

The following two generations were only short-lived. **Robert Buxton (1633-62)** survived his father by only two years. Shortly afterwards the family moved to Topcroft Hall, the family estate of Robert's widow, Hannah Wilton. Their eldest son **John (1659-82)** died at Orléans at the age of twenty-three, so his brother **Robert (1659-91)** continued the family line, having married into the Gooch family of Earsham. It was under his son, **John Buxton (1685-1731)** that this family began to adopt Shadwell as their principal home. In his lifetime John established a reputation as an amateur architect of some talent. Having inherited the Earsham estate from his mother, he completely rebuilt the manor house for his own use and designed Bixley Hall for his cousin, Sir Edward Ward. In 1721, shortly after its completion, he sold his house at Earsham to Col. James Windham and moved to Channons, subjecting the old house to extensive alterations and adding a new stables complex. Between 1727 and 1729 he built a new house at Shadwell on his Rushford estate. Initially Shadwell Lodge was intended as a secondary residence to escape the harsh climate and bleak surroundings of Channons during the winter months, but eventually the move to Shadwell became permanent. This transition was completed in 1786, when two of the three wings of Channons Hall were pulled down. John Buxton held few public offices - he was a major in the Norfolk militia, treasurer of Norwich Castle prison and Deputy Lieutenant in 1731 - and does not appear to have had a great deal of interest in the political affairs of his county.

John Buxton was succeeded first by his eldest son **Robert (1710-51)**, who died unmarried, and then by Robert's brother **John (1717-82)**. John seems to have taken care of the family estates long before the death of his ailing brother. After several years at Cambridge (Clare Hall) he put much energy into creating a park at Shadwell, planting huge numbers of trees and creating an artificial lake in 1754, thus changing completely the landscape surrounding Shadwell Lodge. Politically, John took a more active interest in county affairs. In the county elections of 1754 he and his friend William Fellowes unsuccessfully contested the nominations of George Townshend and Sir Armine Wodehouse, and in the 1768 election he campaigned on behalf of Sir Edward Astley and Wenman Coke in opposition to the government, the general warrants then being a major issue. In doing so, John Buxton unexpectedly found himself on the same side as the opposition's chief propagandist, the infamous Richard Gardiner (1723-81), who had previously vilified him and several other contemporaries in his autobiographical novel *Pudica* (1754), which caused something of a scandal in Norfolk, but, as usual, damaged Gardiner's own reputation rather than that of his victims.

Having served as Deputy Lieutenant in 1740 and 1761, and as Justice of the Peace in 1767, John Buxton was succeeded in 1782 by his son **Robert John (1753-1839)**. The existing correspondence indicates that John Buxton was an ill-tempered character during his last years, rendering the relationship between father and son increasingly difficult. In May 1777, Robert John married, without his father's consent, Juliana Mary Beevor. For this and other reasons, which are not entirely clear, John seems to have temporarily disinherited his son, or at least severely cut his income; he certainly expelled him from Shadwell. Although they were reconciled by 1779, Robert John remained with his wife on an estate of his mother's family near Chippenham in Wiltshire until his father's death in 1782. Robert John's political career is well documented by his papers and by official documents. He may have regarded himself as an independent country gentleman, but he was a loyal supporter of William Pitt, whose government he represented in several elections and through active attendance in parliament. He sat as MP for Thetford, 1790-6, and Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire, 1797-1806. Throughout his political career he campaigned openly for the abolition of slavery and on several occasions advocated prison reform. Likewise, the welfare of the poor was a frequently expressed concern - in 1802, for example, he supported Sir Robert Peel's proposals to regulate child labour. On the other hand he opposed, on behalf of the landed interest, several measures from which the poor would have benefited, such as the regulation of labourers' wages or the sale of corn in the public market. He certainly was a fervent patriot, supporting the government's war effort where he could: he backed the militia augmentation and the Additional Force Act of 1804. For his efforts Robert John Buxton received a baronetcy in November 1800. On a county level, he served as a magistrate, Deputy Lieutenant (1780 and 1792) as well as lieutenant-colonel in the Norfolk Provisional Cavalry.

The last two generations of the Buxtons of Shadwell were much less ambitious politically. They, too, served as MPs, but were content to lead the lives of well-to-do Victorian country gentlemen, devoting their energies to the management of their estates, to administrative offices and charitable work in the county and, not least, to the cultivation of an agreeable social life with entertainments at home or at holiday resorts. Sir **John Jacob Buxton (1788-1842)**, educated at Harrow School and Christ Church, Oxford, was MP for Great Bedwyn (1818-32), Deputy Lieutenant and High Sheriff for Norfolk in 1841. His main contribution to the history of his family is perhaps the enlargement of Shadwell Lodge to the designs of Edward Blore, one of the leading country house architects of the time. Between 1840 and 1842 the house was considerably enlarged and remodelled in the Jacobean style. Having waited to the mature age of fifty to come into his inheritance, John Jacob died three years later, and it was left to his widow Elizabeth (née Cholmeley) to supervise the completion of the building project. Lady Buxton, who must have been a formidable character, also managed Shadwell and its estates during the minority of her son, Sir **Robert Jacob Buxton (1829-88)**, who was educated at Norwich and, like his father, at Christ Church, Oxford. He later became captain in the Norfolk Rifle Volunteer Corps (1860), High Sheriff of Norfolk (1870) and MP for South Norfolk (1871-85). In 1852, Sir Robert Jacob and his mother rebuilt the nearby parish church of Brettenham; three years later the remains of the old College of Rushford were restored and a bridge built across the adjoining ford. The architect for these building projects was Samuel Sanders Teulon, who also was responsible for the sensational additions to Shadwell House between 1856 and 1860. They turned the Buxtons' home into a monument of Victorian neo-Gothicism and have been described as one of Teulon's most important surviving works. The family history, as far as the Buxton Papers are concerned, ends with Sir Robert Jacob's heir, **Maud Isabel Buxton (1866-1949)**, who sold the estate in 1898 and, in 1901, presented the Buxton family archive to the University Library.