

Richard Rich, 1st Baron Rich

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Richard Rich, 1st Baron Rich (1496/7 – 12 June 1567), was Lord Chancellor during the reign of King Edward VI of England from 1547 until January 1552. The founder of Felsted School with its associated alms houses in Essex in 1564, he was also a persecutor and torturer of Protestants.

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Family

According to Sergeaunt:^[1]

The origin of the family of Lord Rich has been matter of some discussion...The first of the family of whom there is definite information was Richard Rich, a wealthy mercer of London and Sheriff of the City in 1441. The date of his death is given by Burke as 1469, but it would seem that he has been confounded with his son John, who was buried in the Mercer's chapel in that year. The family remained in the city, and the son of John Rich was probably also a mercer. To him was born sometime between 1480 and 1490 a son whom he named Richard.

According to some sources, Rich was born in the London parish of St Lawrence Jewry, the second son of Richard Rich by Joan Dingley;^{[2][3]} according to Carter, he was born at Basingstoke, Hampshire, the son of John Rich (d. 1509?), of Penton Mewsey, Hampshire, and a wife named Agnes whose surname is unknown.^[4] Early in 1551 he was described in an official document as 'fifty-four years of age and more', and was therefore born about 1496.^[2] He had a brother, Robert, who was granted a messuage in Bucklersbury by Henry VIII on 24 February 1539,^[5] and who died in 1557.^[2]

Career

The Lord Rich



Lord Rich.

Died	June 12, 1567 (aged 70–71) Rochford, Essex
Occupation	Lord Chancellor of England

Little is known of his early life. He may have studied at Cambridge before 1516.^[2] In 1516 he entered the Middle Temple as a lawyer and at some point between 1520 and 1525 he was a reader at the New Inn. By 1528 we know that Rich was in search of a patron and wrote to Cardinal Wolsey; in 1529, Thomas Audley succeeded in helping him get elected as an MP. As Audley's career advanced in the early 1530s so did Rich's through a variety of legal posts, before he became truly prominent in the mid-1530s.^[2]

Other preferments followed, and in 1533 he was knighted and became Solicitor General, in which capacity he was to act under Thomas Cromwell as a "lesser hammer" for the demolition of the monasteries, and to secure the operation of Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy. He had a share in the trials of Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher. In both cases his evidence against the prisoner included admissions made in friendly conversation, and in More's case the words were given a misconstruction that could hardly be other than wilful.^[6] While on trial, More said that Rich was "always reputed light of his tongue, a great dicer and gamester, and not of any commendable fame."^[7] Rich would also play a major part in the fall of Cromwell.

As King's Solicitor, Rich travelled to Kimbolton Castle in January 1536 to take the inventory of the goods of Catherine of Aragon, and wrote to Henry advising how he might properly obtain her possessions.^[8]

Chancellor

On the 19th of April 1536 Rich became the chancellor of the Court of Augmentations established for the disposal of the monastic revenues. His own share of the spoil, acquired either by grant or purchase, included Leez (Leighs) Priory and about a hundred manors in Essex. Rich also acquired—and destroyed—the real estate and holdings of the Priory of St Bartholomew-the-Great in Smithfield. He built the Tudor-style gatehouse still surviving in London as the upper portion of the Smithfield Gate.^[9] He was Speaker of the House of Commons in the same year, and advocated the king's policy. In spite of the share he had taken in the suppression of the monasteries, the prosecution of Thomas More and Bishop Fisher and of the part he was to play under Edward VI and Elizabeth, his religious beliefs remained nominally Roman Catholic.

Rich was also a participant in the torture of Anne Askew, the only woman to be tortured at the Tower of London. Both he and Chancellor Wriothesley turned the wheels of the rack to torture her with their own hands.^[10]

Baron Rich

Rich was an assistant executor of the will of King Henry VIII, and received a grant of lands.^[11] He became Baron Rich of Leez on 26 February 1547. In the next month he succeeded Wriothesley as chancellor. He supported Protector Somerset in his reforms in church matters, in the prosecution of his brother Thomas Seymour, and in the rest of his policy until the crisis of October 1549, when he deserted to Warwick. He presided over Somerset's trial on 1 December 1551, and resigned his office in January 1552.

Prosecution of bishops



Leez Priory tower



Elizabeth, Lady Rich, by Hans Holbein the Younger.

Rich took part in the prosecution of bishops Stephen Gardiner and Edmund Bonner, and had a role in the harsh treatment accorded to the future Mary I of England. However, Mary on her accession showed no ill-will to Rich. Lord Rich took an active part in the restoration of the old religion in Essex under the new reign, and was one of the most active of persecutors. His reappearances in the privy council were rare during Mary's reign; but under Elizabeth he served on a commission to inquire into the grants of land made under Mary, and in 1566 was sent for to advise on the question of the queen's marriage. He died at Rochford in Essex, on 12 June 1567, and was buried in Felsted church.

In Mary's reign he had founded a chaplaincy with provision for the singing of masses and dirges, and the ringing of bells in Felsted church. To this was added a Lenten allowance of herrings to the inhabitants of three parishes. These donations were transferred in 1564 to the foundation of Felsted School for instruction, primarily for children born on the founder's manors, in Latin, Greek and divinity. The patronage of the school remained in the family of the founder until 1851.

Descendants

Rich's descendants were to form the powerful Rich family, lasting for three centuries, acquiring several titles in the Peerage of England and intermarrying with numerous other noble families.

By his wife Elizabeth Jenks, or Gynkes, he had fifteen children. The eldest son Robert (1537?–1581), second Baron Rich, supported the Reformation. One grandson, Richard Rich, was the first husband of Catherine Knyvet and another grandson Robert, third lord, was created Earl of Warwick in 1618. Rich had an illegitimate son, also named Richard (d. 1598^[12]), who was provided for in his will on the condition that he was to be brought up in the study of the common law.^[13] Richard's grandson via this illegitimate son was the merchant adventurer Sir Nathaniel Rich, and his great-grandson was Nathaniel Rich (nephew of the older Nathaniel), a colonel in the New Model Army during the English Civil War.

In popular culture

Rich is the supporting villain in the play by Robert Bolt and the Oscar-winning film *A Man for All Seasons*. In the 1966 film he was played by John Hurt.

Rich is a supporting character in the Shardlake crime novels by C. J. Sansom, which are set in the reign of Henry VIII. Rich is portrayed as a cruel villain who is prepared to subvert justice in order to enhance his property and position. He has a significant role in the plot of *Sovereign*, the third of the series and in *Heartstone*, the fifth.

He is also represented on seasons two, three and four of the Showtime series *The Tudors* by actor Rod Hallett.

Since the mid-sixteenth century Rich has had a highly negative reputation for immorality, financial dishonesty, double dealing, perjury and treachery that is seldom matched in all of English history.^[4] The historian Hugh Trevor-Roper dismissed Rich as a man "of whom nobody has ever spoken a good word".^[14]

Rich (spelled Riche in the novel) is a supporting character in Hilary Mantel's Booker Prize-winning "Wolf Hall" and "Bring up the Bodies".

Notes

1. ^ Sergeant 1889, p. 80.
2. ^ *a b c d e* Pollard 1896, p. 123.
3. ^ Cokayne 1945, p. 774.
4. ^ *a b* Carter 2004.
5. ^ Simpson 1870, pp. 161-3.
6. ^ Pendrill, Colin (2000). *The English Reformation: crown power and religious change, 1485-1558*. p. 144.
7. ^ More, Cresacre (1828). Rev. Joseph Hunter F.S.A., ed. *The Life of Sir Thomas More* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=eGqYcgB7d5IC>). London: William Pickering. p. 263. Retrieved 14 September 2012.
8. ^ Strype, John (1822). "Rich to Henry, 19 January 1535/6". *Ecclesiastical Memorials* **1**. Oxford. pp. 252–255.
9. ^ Webb, E.A. (1921). *Records of St. Bartholomew's Smithfield* (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue.aspx?gid=97>). 2 vols. Retrieved 2009-03-29.
10. ^ Weir 1991, p. 517.
11. ^ Carter, P. R. N. "Rich, Richard". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.). Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/23491 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093%2Fref%3Aodnb%2F23491>). (Subscription or UK public library membership (<http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/infofreeodnb/libraries/>) required.)
12. ^ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.). Oxford University Press. (Subscription or UK public library membership (<http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/infofreeodnb/libraries/>) required.)
13. ^ Rich, Richard (1496/97-1567), of West Smithfield, Middlesex, Rochford and Leighs, Essex, History of Parliament (<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/rich-richard-149697-1567>) Retrieved 30 June 2013.
14. ^ Muriel St Clare Byrne, ed. (1983). *The Lisle Letters; an abridgment*. University of Chicago Press.

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External links

- Will of Sir Richard Rich, Lord Rich, proved 3 June 1568, PROB 11/50/176, National Archives (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/Details?uri=D957582>) Retrieved 1 July 2013
- *Luminarium Encyclopedia; England under the Tudors: Richard Rich, 1st Baron Rich* (<http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/richardrich.htm>)

Political offices		
Preceded by Sir Humphrey Wingfield	Speaker of the House of Commons 1536	Succeeded by Sir Nicholas Hare
Preceded by The Lord St John (Keeper of the Great Seal)	Lord Chancellor 1547–1552	Succeeded by Thomas Goodrich (Keeper of the Great Seal)
Peerage of England		
Preceded by New Creation	Baron Rich 1548–1567	Succeeded by Robert Rich

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