

# IDENTIFYING THE MOTHER OF SIR JOHN HAWKWOOD

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## ABSTRACT

This brief paper looks at suggested identifications of the mother of Sir John Hawkwood, the 14th century English knight who made his name and fortune as a mercenary in Italy, and proposes that one of them is supported by other contemporaneous documentation.

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In his recent biography of Sir John Hawkwood, Caferro<sup>2</sup> speculates that Hawkwood's mother, the unnamed wife of Gilbert Hawkwood of Essex, could have been a member of the Munne or Longwood families.

Gilbert clearly had links to both (hence Caferro's suggestions). In the first case, several Munnes are named in Gilbert's will – although no relationships to them are stated – while in the latter case, it is apparent that Gilbert succeeded to some of the Longwood family property.

It seems likely that the second of these two propositions – that Gilbert Hawkwood married a Longwood – is correct, given the contents of two contemporary documents amongst the collection of the National Archives:

*“John de Haukwode, son and heir of Gilbert de Haukwode, to John le Somenour of Wethersfield: release of his right in the land etc of which John de Longwode died seised in Langham and Stratford, and which the grantor, the grantee and Hugh le Clerk of Sible Hedingham inherited from John de Longwode. Essex and Suffolk, 15 Edward III”*<sup>3</sup>

*“Letter of attornment from John le Somenour of Wethersfield to his tenants in Langham, Essex, for his land etc there which he has granted to Sir John de Nevill, knight, lord of Langham, and which he inherited from John de Longwode, his uncle. Essex [nd]”*<sup>4</sup>

The John Hawkwood named in the first document was Sir John's elder brother and namesake, who was their father's heir. As the document makes clear, the lands in question were inherited on the death of John de Longwood (he held them on the day of his death) and we can therefore conclude that they apparently do not represent a purchase by the Hawkwoods. John Hawkwood, John le Somenour and Hugh le Clerk are said to have been the three coheirs of Longwood in 15 Edward III [1341-1342].

It has been suggested that the reference to John Hawkwood as “*son and heir of Gilbert*” indicates that the inheritance came through his father. As Caferro shows, Gilbert Hawkwood and John le Somenour both witnessed a document in 1336 that related to a bequest by Longwood.<sup>5</sup> Gilbert's wife seems to have predeceased him – she is not mentioned in his will – so perhaps in 1336 he held an interest in Longwood's estate by virtue of the curtesy of England, having had children by Longwood's sister, or

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<sup>2</sup> William Caferro, *John Hawkwood: An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (2006), 34.

<sup>3</sup> PRO, DL 25/1736.

<sup>4</sup> PRO, DL 25/1737.

<sup>5</sup> Caferro, *op.cit.*, cites PRO, DL 15/1999.

perhaps he was acting as an executor – or perhaps he simply witnessed the document because it was convenient for him to do so, and the act should not be read as equating him in status with John le Somenour. It is just as likely that the reference to John as Gilbert’s son and heir in the document of 15 Edward III is intended to distinguish him from his younger brother John.

## Chronology

Looking at the chronology of the families, Caferro suggests a birth date of 1323 for Sir John Hawkwood.<sup>6</sup> John the heir must therefore have been older, while a sister Joan was probably married (or at least betrothed) by as early as 1315.<sup>7</sup> Gilbert and his wife (assuming he only married once) must have been born sometime during the late 13th century: the 1280s seems like a reasonable estimate. As it happens, the earliest record relating to Gilbert is the 1315 fine cited by Caferro, and we know that he died in 1340.<sup>8</sup>

John de Longwood, as we shall shortly see, appears to have been in the early stages of his career in 1305, and was dead by 1336. This is compatible with his being of the same generation as Gilbert Hawkwood.

## Further clues about the nature of the relationship

The second PRO document states the relationship between Longwood and one of his coheirs, John le Somenour: they were uncle and nephew. Based on the doctrine of coheirship,<sup>9</sup> we must therefore also conclude that each of the three men living in 15 Edward III represented a deceased sister of Longwood, very likely either a son or other remoter issue.

It is unsurprising that Longwood should have been succeeded by collateral relations, since he was a clergyman; he seems to have served Sir Hugh Nevill,<sup>10</sup> as the following document makes clear:

*“Agreement, indented, by Sir Hugh Nevile to pay two marks yearly to John de Langwode until he is presented to a living in Sir Hugh’s gift. 34 Edward I” [1305-1306].<sup>11</sup>*

We can probably add a bit more flesh to the bones of the Longwood stemma. John le Somenour, one of the coheirs, was in turn the son and heir of Roger le Somenour, who died in about 1321 leaving a widow Isabel<sup>12</sup> - who was possibly John de Longwood’s sister (if so, she was dead by 15 Edward III).

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<sup>6</sup> Caferro, *op.cit.*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Caferro, *op.cit.*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Caferro, *op.cit.*, 35.

<sup>9</sup> *ie* female relations who stood in the same genealogical position to the deceased, or their respective representatives.

<sup>10</sup> Sir Hugh was the father of John de Nevill – see PRO, DL 25/1751.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, DL 25/188.

<sup>12</sup> *CFR, Edward II* vol.3, p.177.

## Suggested Longwood pedigree:

1. – de Longwood; had issue:
  - 2a. John de Longwood, cleric; *fl.* 1306; dead by 1336
  - 2b. (daughter; ?Isabel), married Roger le Somenour (died c.1321); had issue:
    3. John le Somenour, *fl.* 1331-1341
  - 2c. (daughter), married before 1315 Gilbert Hawkwood (died 1340); had issue, among others:<sup>13</sup>
    - 3a. John Hawkwood the elder
    - 3b. Sir John Hawkwood,<sup>14</sup> knight, born c.1323, d.1394
  - 2d. (daughter), married and had issue:
    3. Hugh le Clerk, *fl.* 1341.

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## Bibliography

Caferro, William. *John Hawkwood: An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

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<sup>13</sup> Caferro, *op.cit.*, provides details of Sir John's siblings at pp.34-5 & 38.

<sup>14</sup> See *ODNB*, biography by Kenneth Fowler.