

Knights and Merchants

English Cities and the Aristocracy, 1377-1509

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Abstract

This thesis examines how English towns and townsmen interacted with the aristocracy in the late middle ages. To do so, it compares the experiences and behaviour of four towns and their inhabitants across a 'long' fifteenth century running from 1377 until 1509. These four examples – Exeter, Norwich, Salisbury and Southampton – represent a cross-section of important provincial towns, with each providing a different picture because of their differing contexts and circumstances, particularly the contrasting political societies of the counties which surrounded them. The first half of the study considers links between individual townsmen and aristocrats. In particular, it discusses the patterns displayed by both groups' property ownership as well as their involvement in royal government, before investigating direct connections which existed between them. It concludes that although links did emerge between these groups, most were short-lived and had few political or social implications. The exception was a group on the boundary of gentility, including lawyers, administrators, royal servants and a small number of prosperous townsmen. These men moved relatively easily between town and country and often had interests in both spheres, but their activities rarely combined the 'aristocratic' and the 'urban'. In addition, their low status in landed society meant that they rarely drew wider urban and aristocratic society into contact. The second part of the thesis examines the relationship between aristocrats and town governments. It argues that aristocrats could provide significant benefits to towns, but only if they possessed national influence and local authority. This combination was originally exclusive to regional magnates, but the 'new monarchy' empowered progressively minor figures, and towns ultimately preferred to seek the aid of these junior men. It also argues that aristocrats received some benefit to their prestige and worship from helping towns, and that magnates were perhaps even expected to do so by both towns and the king.

Long Abstract

This thesis identifies and interrogates a division in the socio-political historiography of late medieval England, in which towns and townsmen are separated from the landed societies of the counties which surrounded them and from the aristocracy more generally. It seeks to assess whether this division is justified by means of a comparative study of four English towns and their inhabitants in the period between the accession of Richard II and the death of Henry VII. These four towns provide contrasting examples on account of the varying challenges they faced and their differing circumstances. Exeter, for instance, faced a near-constant struggle to defend its interests against competitors, particularly religious institutions and the earls of Devon. It was also a central point in the politics of Devon, a county with a landed society firmly structured around magnate affinities, and which experienced significant discord when these affinities competed for hegemony. Norwich, meanwhile, endured similar challenges from religious institutions, but also undertook a lengthy campaign to expand its liberties and governmental structure. Norfolk was also a different setting compared to Devon. In particular, rather than independent magnate affinities, the county's politics was dominated by the network which surrounded the duchy of Lancaster's estates in the county. In addition, Norfolk's landed society was more fluid than Devon's, with more men (especially lawyers) attaining gentry status by investing in rural land and lordship. Unlike both Exeter and Norwich, Salisbury was not a royal chartered borough: instead, it was the private possession of the bishop of Salisbury, who retained significant rights and powers throughout the city. This was resented by the citizens, who made repeated attempts to strengthen their position at the bishop's expense. Wiltshire was also very different from Devon and Norfolk, as so much of the county was held by the church and absentee nobility that little land was left to support an active aristocratic political society in the county. As such, Wiltshire was something of a vacuum, with few resident aristocrats and little in the way of county politics. Our final town, Southampton, was much smaller than Exeter, Norwich and Salisbury, but

was nonetheless one of the most important military and commercial ports in the country. Hampshire also differed significantly from the previous examples, as the county's political society was structured around a network of substantial 'independent gentry', with few if any resident magnates.

The first half of this study examines personal links which crossed urban boundaries, including those established by individual townsmen in the countryside and by individual aristocrats in towns. To do this, it introduces the concept of 'theatres', that is those areas of public and private life in which members of these groups might have encountered one another, and perhaps established relationships with political consequences. The most obvious theatre was the ownership of property on the other side of a city's walls, and thus the first chapter examines the rural land held by townsmen and the urban residences owned by aristocrats. It concludes that although our evidence suggests that very few townsmen bought rural land, this may reflect the poor survival of certain documents (particularly private deeds) and therefore that more townsmen might have had rural interests than we might first expect. The possession of rural property was, however, almost exclusively the preserve of the enfranchised elite, and particularly of those men who served in the highest offices of the civic hierarchy. Land ownership was also far more common among citizens of Norwich than it was for the inhabitants of our other towns, probably on account of the greater availability of land in Norfolk. Most of these townsmen bought parcels of sub-manorial land: although we cannot be certain what they were used for, it seems likely that they were either rented out or perhaps used for direct production. A few townsmen instead invested in manorial lordship, but this did not necessarily mean that they sought to become gentlemen, as some used their manors for other purposes, including endowing chantries and providing an income for their widows. However, it is difficult to argue that the rural land owned by these townsmen (whether manors or sub-manorial parcels) truly represented a connection between

townsmen and the aristocracy. In most cases, the land was an extension of its owners' urban lives and careers, and thus probably did not draw them into contact with the aristocracy. The exceptions were those few townsmen who sought to join the gentry by acquiring manors, but it is not clear that even these men truly connected their home boroughs with landed society: in their rural activities, these men were acting as aspiring gentlemen, rather than as townsmen, and there is little sign that one affected the other. Similar conclusions apply to aristocrats' possessions in towns. Townhouses, for instance, were valued by local aristocrats as a convenience for the numerous county events held in towns, rather than because they could act as a conduit into towns or urban society.

The second chapter addresses the theatre of royal government, but again finds few meaningful connections between townsmen and aristocrats. Few townsmen discharged responsibilities outside their home boroughs, and most of those who did held offices with responsibilities directly connected to their urban careers, such as customer or aulnager. A handful of townsmen were appointed to positions in the county administration, but these were the men who sought gentry status, and here they were again acting as aspiring gentlemen, rather than as townsmen. By contrast, many aristocrats held offices which gave them authority over towns, including the familiar county positions such as sheriff, escheator, JP and commissioner. However, the connections which these men established with towns were entirely reliant on their offices: when their terms expired, so too did any relationship with the townsmen. A number of very minor aristocrats (notably lawyers and royal servants) did become directly and personally involved in urban affairs by taking up positions in town governments. However, most of these men similarly did not represent a bridge between the town and wider aristocratic society, as their low status meant that they lacked connections with landed society. The exception here were the substantial county lawyers, whose profession brought them into contact with both towns and the rural aristocracy.

The third chapter shifts its focus slightly: rather than examining a theatre in which both groups had interests and thus might have come into contact, it instead considers areas in which individual townsmen and aristocrats might have directly and deliberately formed connections with each other. It begins by investigating those townsmen who were retained by the nobility, and discusses examples of townsmen who were valued for their influence within their home boroughs and those who were probably retained for their administrative expertise. It also suggests that a greater number of townsmen may have been retained than the surviving evidence suggests, as many of the most important documents (such as livery rolls) have been lost. The chapter then considers marriages contracted between townsmen and the gentry, concluding that such alliances were only made by urban families who held manors, who were therefore again acting as minor gentlemen rather than as townsmen. In addition, it suggests that these matches were made for similar reasons to those contracted between the greater gentry, notably to acquire rural land and strengthen friendships and alliances with neighbours. Acting as a feoffee or witness was a third form of 'direct connection' between townsmen and the landed aristocracy: this chapter concludes that most townsmen who acted as feoffees for aristocrats were again those men with rural land who were acting as rural rather than urban figures. However, some other land transactions involving townsmen and aristocrats suggest that the towns themselves possessed a sphere of influence in which their government and instruments had weight. The chapter closes by considering two forms of direct connection which were more connected with urban affairs: guild membership and money-lending. It concludes that guild membership may have been an important point of contact between townsmen and the local aristocracy, as there are several examples of urban guilds which included a significant cross-section of local landed society.

The first section of this study therefore concludes that there was only a very limited amount of meaningful personal and social contact between individual townsmen and aristocrats. Furthermore, the contact which did take place generally involved those townsmen who held rural manors and who sought gentry status for themselves and their families: when they connected with landed society, these men did so as aspiring aristocrats themselves, rather than as townsmen. The rarity of personal connections between townsmen and aristocrats informs the second half of this study, which considers links between town governments and the aristocracy. Had personal links been common, then we might have expected them to have influenced connections between aristocrats and urban institutions but their rarity suggests that their impact was probably very limited.

The fourth chapter investigates how aristocrats could become actors in urban affairs and particularly how they could help town governments as the citizens sought to navigate the challenges they faced. It argues that to assist towns, aristocrats needed to possess both influence in national government and authority in local society, a combination which was almost exclusively enjoyed by regional magnates. National influence allowed aristocrats to support towns when they sought grants and other benefits from the crown, probably by securing access to important officers, placing their own weight behind a request, and even requiring it to be granted at their own instance. Local authority, meanwhile, reinforced aristocrats' national influence (as it made the crown more likely to listen to them on a local issue) and also allowed them to control the local structures of royal government, which was often crucial in ensuring that royal instruments were discharged as a town desired. The chapter also argues that local magnates were more likely to be willing to provide assistance to towns, as it appears that they gained some benefit to their worship by being recognised as the 'good lord' of towns in their country. Other examples suggest that this benefit was

sufficient to persuade magnates who were vying for local hegemony to contest which of them would provide lordship to towns.

The fifth chapter considers how county and national politics could affect relationships between the aristocracy and town governments. In particular, it assesses whether the structure of local landed society was an important factor in determining the frequency and nature of these relationships, concluding that connections only developed when county society was organised around magnate lordship. In more 'horizontally' organised societies, there were no aristocrats present who could offer the essential combination of national influence and local authority. As well as its structure, the disposition of county society was also important. In general, for instance, towns were more likely to forge links with the local aristocracy if local society was united behind a single magnate. If landed society was divided between competing affinities, then town governments might still seek the assistance which local magnates could provide, but they would do so in a way which minimised the risks which aristocratic feuding could pose to the town. How they achieved this was dependent on the balance of power in the county and the pre-existing relationship between the town and the magnates concerned: in some circumstances, this led to the town seeking the assistance of only one faction, while in others they sought to work with both sides simultaneously. This chapter also examines how the governmental innovations of the Yorkist and early-Tudor regimes affected relationships between towns and magnates. It concludes that the growing power and reach of the royal affinity gave courtiers and, later, royal administrators the same combination of local authority and national influence which had previously been the preserve of the magnate elite, and that towns increasingly preferred to deal with these new men rather than the landed aristocracy.

The second half of the thesis concludes by discussing a new framework for understanding relationships between town governments and the landed aristocracy. It identifies three particularly significant roles which aristocrats could play. 'Failed lords' were aristocrats (generally noblemen) who were unable to help towns or who refused to do so, generally because they lacked the local authority needed to offer effective lordship, even if they were very significant national figures. 'Enemies', by contrast, were magnates who enjoyed too much local authority, and who sought to either dominate towns in their country or to expand their own interests at a town's expense. Between these two were the 'good lords', who wielded sufficient local power to help towns but did not seek to control or damage them. The power these amenable magnates enjoyed was limited in some way, often because their local position rested on royal favour or grants. The question of why these aristocrats agreed to help towns is also considered. In particular, it seems likely that magnates derived prestige from being recognised as a town's 'good lord', and that it served to reinforce the perception that they enjoyed hegemony in the region. It is even possible that magnates were *expected* to assist towns, particularly by connecting them with central government, as part of the public responsibilities of their station.

In memory of my grandmother.

Acknowledgements

As was perhaps inevitable with a project of this scale, I have incurred a number of debts which I would like to acknowledge here. Firstly, my gratitude goes to the staff of the various archive offices which have often been my home over the past few years, and especially to those who relished the challenges posed by material from outside their normal diet of family and local history. I must also thank my friends, family and colleagues, who have cheerfully put up with both me and medieval towns for far too long, and who have been a constant source of support, advice, information and perspective. Finally, and most importantly, I must thank John Watts for his advice, encouragement and thoughtful criticism: I could not have asked for a better supervisor, especially during the times when I proved a less than ideal supervisee.

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Abbreviations

Blomefield	F. Blomefield, <i>An Essay towards a Topographical History of Norfolk</i> (11 vols., London, 1805-10).
CAB	NRO, NCR, Case 18a, Chamberlains' Account Book.
CAD	<i>A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office</i> (6 vols., London, 1890-1915).
CChR	<i>Calendar of Charter Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (6 vols., London, 1903-1927).
CCR	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (47 vols., London, 1933-1947).
CFR	<i>Calendar of Fine Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (22 vols., London, 1911-1962).
CIM	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery) preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (8 vols., London, 1916-2003).
CIPM	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other Analogous Documents preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (26 vols., London, 1904-ongoing).
CIPM (Hen VII)	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other Analogous Documents preserved in the Public Record Office, Henry VII</i> (3 vols., London, 1898-1955).
CIPM (Old)	<i>Calendarium Inquisitionum Post Mortem sive Escaetarum</i> (4 vols., London, 1806-8).
CPR	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (48 vols., London, 1901-1910).
DHC	Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter.
– ECA	Devon Heritage Centre – Exeter City Archives.
– CRA	Devon Heritage Centre – Exeter City Archives, City Receivers' Accounts.
EcHR	<i>Economic History Review</i> .
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i> .
Feudal Aids	<i>Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids</i> (6 vols., London, 1899-1920).
HoP 1386-1421	J.S. Roskell et al. eds., <i>The House of Commons, 1386-1421</i> (4 vols., Stroud, 1992).
HoP 1439-1509	J.C. Wedgwood, <i>History of Parliament: Biographies of the Members of the Commons House, 1439-1509</i> (London, 1936).
LB1	D.R. Carr ed., <i>The First General Entry Book of the City of Salisbury, 1387-1452</i> (Trowbridge, 2001).
LB2	WSHC, G23/1/2 (Second ledger book of Salisbury).
NFF	W. Rye ed., <i>A Short Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Norfolk Part II</i> (Norwich, 1886).
NRO	Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.
– DCN	Norfolk Record Office – Dean and Chapter of Norwich.
– NCR	Norfolk Record Office – Norwich City Records.
ODNB	Matthew, H.C.G. et al. eds., <i>The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Internet version, Oxford, 2004-ongoing) at http://www.oxforddnb.com . Accessed 2016.
RCN	W. Hudson and J.C. Tingey eds., <i>The Records of the City of Norwich</i> (2 vols., Norwich, 1906-10).
RP	J. Strachey ed., <i>Rotuli Parliamentorum</i> (6 vols., London, 1783).

SA	Southampton Archives, Southampton.
<i>Shillingford Letters</i>	S.A. Moore ed., <i>Letters and Papers of John Shillingford, Mayor of Exeter, 1447-50</i> (London, 1871).
<i>TDA</i>	<i>Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art</i> (Exeter, 1862-ongoing).
TNA	The National Archives, London.
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i> .
<i>Valor Ecclesiasticus</i>	<i>Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Hen. VIII auctoritate Regia institutus</i> (4 vols., London, 1810-34).
<i>VCH Wilts</i>	<i>The Victoria County History of Wiltshire</i> (18 vols., 1953-ongoing).
<i>WAM</i>	<i>Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine</i> (Devizes, 1854-ongoing).
<i>WFF</i>	J.L. Kirby ed., <i>Abstracts of Feet of Fines Relating to Wiltshire, 1377-1509</i> (Devizes, 1986).
WSHC	Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham.

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Introduction

I – Cities and Contexts

‘...the city precincts were the limits of a world, and the greater universe of England and Englishmen loomed hazily over its parapets.’ – W.T. MacCaffrey¹

The idea of late-medieval English towns as islands within a feudal sea, separated from their surroundings by boundaries both legal and physical, is a common concept within the historiography of this period. Generally, this understanding remains unspoken, but we can find a number of examples to match Wallace MacCaffrey’s rather romantic version. Alice Stopford Green, for instance, saw the medieval town as ‘a little principality’ which led a ‘free and vigorous life’ because of its independence and self-determination.² Maryanne Kowaleski argues that ‘towns differed physically, economically, socially and legally from rural and feudal worlds’, while Susan Reynolds goes perhaps further, suggesting that the defining characteristic of a town was ‘that it forms a social unit more or less distinct from the surrounding countryside’.³ In these examples, towns are seen as being qualitatively different from their environs, and the arguments put forward by Kowaleski and Reynolds are ultimately incontestable. Towns were (and still are) recognisably distinct from their surroundings in terms of their physical fabric, geography and demography: a simple point, perhaps, but a powerful one that historians must acknowledge. In medieval towns, the urban-rural division was reinforced by the institution of the borough, by which many urban communities were legally severed from their surroundings through charters, which also granted them a separate political and administrative structure. The undeniable difference between a rural economy based on agriculture and an urban equivalent dominated by trade

¹ W.T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540-1640: the Growth of an English County Town*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA, 1975), pp. 1-2. Although this relates to a slightly later period, the quotation refers to the author’s belief that early-modern townsmen retained this ‘medieval’ attitude.

² A.S. (alias Mrs. J.R.) Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century* (2 vols., London, 1894), i, pp. 1-5.

³ M. Kowaleski, ‘The History of Urban Families in Medieval England’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 14 (1988), p. 58. S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977), p. 66.

(even if much of that trade was in the products of rural agriculture) further underlines the fact that there were real and meaningful differences between towns and the countryside. However, the views of MacCaffrey and Green go beyond recognising a difference between urban and rural, and instead suggest that urban boundaries acted as a barrier or even a seal, which isolated towns from their environs and from the rest of England. Indeed, in Green's work, a town's isolation is portrayed as being a positive feature, which underpinned its status as 'a free self-governing community, a state within a state'.⁴ This argument is more difficult to sustain than the idea that towns and the countryside were qualitatively dissimilar, and yet it is the Green-MacCaffrey thesis which is more readily identifiable in the wider historiography, which frequently treats towns and the countryside as separate, rather than simply different. What are the origins of this trope, and what are its historiographical consequences?

We must first acknowledge some important exceptions, particularly in economic history, where the links between urban and rural have been widely acknowledged. Although the economic activities of towns and the countryside were very different, they were necessarily connected, something which historians have demonstrated in several ways. Studies of hierarchies of markets, for instance, have explored how the economies of entire regions were tied together through patterns of towns and markets: Kowaleski's investigation of south-western England and its most important town, Exeter, is a classic example.⁵ Other historians have considered the concept of urban hinterlands, notably Margaret Yates's study of rural Berkshire and its connections with Newbury, and Richard Britnell's history of Colchester within its rural context.⁶ As well as larger boroughs, the economic functions of smaller towns,

⁴ Green, *Town Life*, p. 1.

⁵ M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁶ M. Yates, *Town and Countryside in Western Berkshire c.1327-c.1600* (Woodbridge, 2007). R.H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525* (Cambridge, 1986).

necessarily connected to the countryside, have received attention: this is a subject particularly associated with the work of Rodney Hilton, Christopher Dyer and, more recently, Richard Goddard.⁷ A further urban-rural connection addressed by economic historians has been the supply of vital resources to townsmen (notably Derek Keene's investigations into the acquisition of the firewood and grain needed by Londoners) and the reverse relationship whereby the peasantry used towns as a source of supplies.⁸ Even the landed aristocracy have found a place here: a handful of historians have considered their involvement in apparently-urban activities such as trade, and their financial dealings with townsmen.⁹ All of these different strands are ultimately acknowledgements of the fact that towns and the countryside were part of the same economic system and were mutually dependent on one another, even if they were different from one another in form and function.

In social and political history, however, links between rural and urban are far less frequently investigated, even if most historians do not follow Green and MacCaffrey in explicitly questioning their existence. Instead, the two spheres have almost always been considered separately, and often by different historians. This division is apparent as early as the antiquaries who predated the professionalisation of historical study. Many of their studies

⁷ E.g. R.H. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (Cambridge, 1992); idem, 'The Small Town and Urbanisation: Evesham in the Middle Ages', *Midland History*, 7 (1982), pp. 1-8; idem, 'Small Town Society in England before the Black Death', *Past and Present*, 105 (1984), pp. 53-78; C.D. Dyer, 'Small Towns 1270-1540', in D.M. Palliser ed., *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume 1: 600-1540* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 505-40; idem, 'Small Places with Large Consequences: The Importance of Small Towns in England, 1000-1540', *Historical Research*, 75:1 (2002), pp. 1-24; R. Goddard, 'Small Boroughs and the Manorial Economy: Enterprise Zones or Urban Failures?', *Past and Present*, 210 (2011), pp. 3-31; M. Bailey, 'A Tale of Two Towns: Buntingford and Standon in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19:4 (1993), pp. 351-71; idem, 'Self-Government in the Small Towns of Late Medieval England', in B. Dodds and C.D. Liddy eds., *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 107-28.

⁸ E.g. D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its Region', *London Journal*, 14:2 (1989), pp. 99-111; idem, 'Crisis Management in London's Food Supply, 1250-1500', in Dodds and Liddy eds., *Commercial Activity*, pp. 45-62; idem, 'Medieval London and its Supply Hinterlands', *Regional Environmental Change*, 12:2 (2012), pp. 263-81; Dyer, 'Small Towns', pp. 512-15, 517-26.

⁹ E.g. W.I. Haward, 'Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia', *EHR*, 41:162 (1926), pp. 170-89; P. Nightingale, 'Knights and Merchants: Trade, Politics and the Gentry in Late Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 169 (2000), pp. 36-62; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 260-1, 291.

and collections of documents are concerned solely with individual towns, narrating their stories through events which either occurred within the town or else on the national stage. In addition to this parochial focus, many of these works were written as a demonstration of civic pride, funded with contributions from citizens and the town government. The *Records of the City of Norwich*, for instance, were published at the express order of the corporation, while Rev. J.S. Davies's *History of Southampton* is dedicated to the city's government.¹⁰ It is unsurprising that their attentions are mostly circumscribed by the city walls. However, even those antiquarian studies which address an area greater than a single city do so in a way which treats urban areas as essentially separate. Francis Blomefield's *History of Norfolk*, for instance, considers Norwich in a separate volume from the rest of the county, and says little about any links between the two.¹¹ These same patterns can be discerned in the work of more modern antiquarians and local historians, who also tend to produce histories of individual towns or else studies of wider areas in which towns are treated separately: in the *Victoria County History* for Wiltshire, for instance, the county's towns have a volume to themselves.¹² As Christian Liddy notes, this was in part a consequence of the philosophy of the Leicester school of local history, which, in Alan Everitt's phrase, encouraged the study of communities each as a unit 'with a more or less distinct and continuous life of its own'.¹³ Ultimately, this dislocation is an inevitable consequence of the essential difference between towns and the countryside, but these studies rarely attempt to identify how towns fitted into their local environments on a socio-political basis.

¹⁰ RCN, i, preface. J.S. Davies, *A History of Southampton* (London, 1883), p. v.

¹¹ Blomefield, iv.

¹² E.g. J.H. Chandler, *Endless Street: A History of Salisbury and its People* (Salisbury, 1983); C. Platt, *Medieval Southampton: the Port and Trading Community, A.D. 1000-1600* (London, 1973); *VCH Wilts*, vi.

¹³ C.D. Liddy, *War, Politics and Finance in Late Medieval English Towns* (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 6, quoting A. Everitt, *Ways and Means in Local History* (London, 1971), p. 6.

The advent of professional historians went some way towards integrating towns within the wider historiographical framework of the late-medieval English polity. In the case of the constitutional historians of the late nineteenth century (notably Bishop Stubbs), this took the form of placing urban developments within the wider evolution of the English system of government.¹⁴ The legal and administrative historians (such as James Tait and Mary Bateson) were more concerned with exploring the detail of urban institutions, but this included an appreciation of how they were connected to the crown and how their origins were to be found in royal grants.¹⁵ In addition, historians from both of these traditions made contributions in other areas of scholarship and, moreover, their work on, for instance, rural local administration or the national constitution was in a very similar vein to their work on towns, characterised by an interest in the nature and development of institutions.¹⁶ The idea of ‘urban history’ as something separate, to be studied by specialist historians with a different focus from their colleagues working on local or national political history, would have seemed alien to these men and women.¹⁷ However, their interest in connecting towns with national institutions was not accompanied by a corresponding desire to investigate links between town and countryside. Ultimately this was unsurprising. Towns were, after all, legally separated from the counties which surrounded them, and possessed their own political, administrative and tenurial structures: focusing on precisely these matters was always likely

¹⁴ W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England: in its Origin and Development*, 6th ed. (3 vols., Oxford, 1903-6), ii, pp. 228-31; iii, pp. 577-611.

¹⁵ E.g. M. Bateson, *Borough Customs* (2 vols., London, 1904-6); F. Pollock and F.W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the time of Edward I*, 2nd ed. (2 vols., Cambridge, 1911), i, pp. 671-88; A. Ballard ed., *British Borough Charters, 1042-1216* (Cambridge, 1913); M.d.W. Hemmeon, *Burgage Tenure in Mediaeval England* (Cambridge MA, 1914); A. Ballard and J. Tait eds., *British Borough Charters, 1216-1307* (Cambridge, 1923); J. Tait, *The Medieval English Borough: Studies on its Origins and Constitutional History* (Manchester, 1936); M. Weinbaum ed., *British Borough Charters 1307-1660* (Cambridge, 1943); H.M. Jewell, *English Local Administration in the Middle Ages* (Newton Abbot, 1972), pp. 51-60.

¹⁶ E.g. Bertie Wilkinson, who wrote *The Mediaeval Council of Exeter* (Manchester, 1931) but also *The Constitutional History of England in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1964). Other examples of historians who contributed to urban and non-urban history include James Tait, Mary Bateson and Adolphus Ballard, as well as T.F. Tout, whose *Medieval Town Planning: A Lecture Delivered at the John Rylands Library* (Manchester, 1917) complements his better-known work on national administrative history.

¹⁷ There are a few exceptions to this, such as Green, *Town Life* and J.E. Winston, *English Towns in the Wars of the Roses* (Princeton NJ, 1921), but the vast majority of urban history in this period was produced by people with wider interests in a similar thematic vein.

to produce an image of towns as separate from the countryside. Analysis of urban charters, for instance, necessarily stresses the way that they transformed the town into a separate, circumscribed entity, while examinations of urban customs, institutions such as burgage tenure, or the structure of urban governments only increase this sense of exceptionalism, as these focus on how towns differed from the remainder of the country.

The shift in thinking precipitated by K.B. McFarlane brought an end to even this limited integration of towns into the wider historiographical skein. In McFarlane's view, historians had concentrated too much on institutions rather than individuals, and on the crown rather than the nobility: 'an excessive addiction to constitutional issues' had made them 'much too royalist'.¹⁸ The main consequence of his injunction was to shift political historians' attention onto landed society, particularly in the form of the 'county study'. McFarlane himself said little about towns, and this was generally true of his successors. The county study, for instance, has little place for towns: they are sometimes discussed while detailing the geographic and economic context, but then play little part in the discussions of county society and politics.¹⁹ Superficially, this is unsurprising, since, as we shall see, towns have little obvious place within the framework of noble affinities, gentry marriages and dynastic conflicts which underpins these studies. However, this very framework for investigating landed society contains the assumption that towns were separate from counties and the aristocracy, an assumption perhaps partially imported from the same constitutional history these historians sought to replace: if towns were legally, administratively and constitutionally

¹⁸ McFarlane's philosophy was set out in his Ford Lectures in 1953, published in K.B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), esp. pp. 2-4; quotations from p. 2.

¹⁹ E.g. E. Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), chapter 1, esp. pp. 7-13; M.J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 7-20; I.D. Rowney, 'The Staffordshire Political Community, 1440-1500' (Keele Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1981), pp. 5-9; C.J. Tyldesley, 'The Crown and the Local Communities in Devon and Cornwall from 1377-1422' (Exeter Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1978), pp. 9-10. Even Christine Carpenter, who in many other respects criticises the 'county study' model, followed a similar pattern: C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992), chapter 1, esp. pp. 17-18.

separate, were they not likely to be politically and socially separate as well? In addition, the shift away from royal institutions and towards the aristocracy meant that towns were no longer even approached in the context of their relationship with the crown.

With the post-McFarlane school uninterested in towns, urban history during the 1960s, 70s and 80s was instead undertaken by historians from a variety of backgrounds, including those who might be fairly termed urban specialists. In general, the scholarship produced in this period can be grouped into three subjects, perhaps reflecting a division between economic, social, and cultural history: urban decline,²⁰ urban oligarchy²¹ and urban rituals and identities.²² Although there are obvious differences between these, one uniting feature is that they demonstrate little interest in extramural politics or landed society. Despite the post-McFarlane consensus on the importance of the nobility, for instance, these historians showed no interest in how towns and the aristocracy interacted. Only those debating ‘urban decline’ engaged with factors external to the town, but these were national (and even international) in scope rather than local, notably the question of whether changes in trading patterns were responsible for difficulties in towns. The debate surrounding urban ‘oligarchy’ was almost entirely limited to towns: its only connection beyond the city walls was an interest in

²⁰ Notable contributions include C.V. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979); A.R. Bridbury ‘English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages’, *ECHR*, 2nd series, 34 (1981), pp. 1-24; R.B. Dobson, ‘Urban Decline in Late Medieval England’, *TRHS*, 5th series, 27 (1977), pp. 1-22; S.H. Rigby, ‘Urban Decline in the Later Middle Ages: Some Problems in Interpreting the Statistical Data’, *Urban History Yearbook*, 11 (1984), pp. 45-59; D.M. Palliser, ‘Urban Decay Revisited’, in J.A.F. Thomson ed., *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 1-21.

²¹ Perhaps the most important contributors to the debate over ‘oligarchy’ have been Stephen Rigby and Susan Reynolds, e.g. S.H. Rigby ‘Urban “Oligarchy” in Late Medieval England’, in Thomson ed., *Towns and Townspeople*, pp. 62-87; S. Reynolds, ‘Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought’, *Urban History Yearbook*, 9 (1982), pp. 14-23; eadem, *Introduction*; eadem, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1997), esp. p. 72 & chapter 6.

²² E.g. C.V. Phythian-Adams, ‘Ceremony and the Citizen: the Communal Year at Coventry, 1450-1550’, in P. Clark and P. Slack eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (London, 1972), pp. 57-85; M. James, ‘Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval Town’, *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), pp. 3-29; M. E. Rubin, ‘Small Groups: Identity and Solidarity in the Late Middle Ages’, in J.I. Kermodie ed., *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England* (Stroud, 1991), pp. 132-50; A.G. Rosser ‘Myth, Image and Social Process in the English Medieval Town’, *Urban History*, 23:1 (1996), pp. 6-25; D. Mills, ‘Chester Ceremonial: Re-creation and Recreation in the English “Medieval” Town’, *Urban History Yearbook*, 18 (1991) pp. 1-19.

comparing urban conceptions of ‘community’ with those held by other elements of medieval society. The subject of urban ritual, meanwhile, is particularly isolationist, as it stresses the role of processions and other events as a means through which a town’s corporate, self-contained identity was displayed.

Two strands have subsequently emerged in the historiography which might have been expected to remedy this defect. The first was the rejection of the county as a legitimate unit for historical enquiry, an argument made particularly by Christine Carpenter.²³ On this reading, the administrative boundary of the county did not always approximate to socio-political divisions on the ground, and thus while the county is a helpful unit for the historian, it is an unjustified one. This has led to a number of ‘regional’ studies, which attempt to trace social and political linkages in the localities without reference to county boundaries.²⁴ However, while these studies question the significance of boundaries between counties, they do not extend their scepticism to the boundaries between counties and towns: towns are still viewed as essentially separate and receive little attention in these works. The second historiographical development took the form of an increased (or, indeed, renewed) interest in the institutions of national politics and the constitution.²⁵ However, although this ‘turn’ sought to reconnect local politics and landed society with a number of other elements of the

²³ E.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 340-1; eadem, ‘Gentry and Community in Medieval England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 33:4 (1994), pp. 340-80. This development was tied to scepticism over the concept of a ‘county community’, for which see also S. Walker, ‘Communities of the County in later Medieval England’, in his *Political Culture in later Medieval England* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 68-80.

²⁴ E.g. A.J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England during the Wars of the Roses: Lay Society, War and Politics 1450-1500* (Oxford, 1990); D.A.S. Lockett, ‘Crown Patronage and Local Administration in Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset and Wiltshire, 1485-1509’ (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1992); R.E. Stansfield, *Political Elites in South-West England, 1450-1500* (Lampeter, 2009).

²⁵ Edward Powell’s paper ‘After “After McFarlane”: The Poverty of Patronage and the Case for Constitutional History’ (in D.J. Clayton *et al.* eds., *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Later Medieval History* (Gloucester, 1994), pp. 1-16) could perhaps be considered the ‘manifesto’ of this movement, but the driving force behind its development was undoubtedly Christine Carpenter’s criticism of existing historiography in the 1980s, e.g. her ‘Fifteenth-Century Biographies’, *Historical Journal*, 25:3 (1982), pp. 729-34, esp. p. 734, and ‘Fifteenth-Century English Politics’, *Historical Journal*, 26:4 (1983), pp. 963-7. Her later comment that her predecessors focused too much ‘on the personal politics of kings and noblemen’ but with ‘too little examination of enforcement’ also encapsulates much of her aim to consider the formal and structural alongside the personal. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 4.

English polity (notably the structures of royal government, the law and political culture), it has not investigated whether there were also links with towns.²⁶

This more recent research has, however, inspired a revival in interest in the links between towns and the monarchy. Christian Liddy, for instance, has considered the relationship between town governments and the crown in the late fourteenth century, particularly in terms of towns' contributions towards royal finances and the rewards and privileges they received in exchange.²⁷ Lorraine Attreed has made a similar case for towns in the 'long' fifteenth century, stressing their position as the *king's* towns.²⁸ In addition, urban historians have taken inspiration from another theme in recent historiography: the appreciation that political involvement extended further down the social hierarchy than had previously been recognised.²⁹ Here again, however, towns are considered separately, with investigations into how the lower orders in urban society acted within urban politics, rather than how townsmen might have taken part in the political society of their wider locality.³⁰ As with the work of the constitutional and administrative historians, towns are considered either in relation to the crown or altogether separately.

There are, of course, some exceptions to this theme of the isolation of towns from their local socio-political contexts, and each illustrates how an investigation into the urban-rural

²⁶ E.g. E. Powell, *Kingship, Law and Justice: Criminal Justice in the Reign of Henry V* (Oxford, 1989); P.C. Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia 1422-1442* (Oxford, 1992); J.L. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996); H.R. Castor, *The King, the Crown and the Duchy of Lancaster: Public Authority and Private Power, 1399-1461* (Oxford, 2000); C. Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth and Politics 1377-99* (Oxford, 2008).

Carpenter's *Locality and Polity* is something of an exception, as it does consider the question of the composition and workings of local society in great detail, while also stressing the importance of the interaction of local society with the wider polity.

²⁷ Liddy, *War, Politics and Finance*.

²⁸ L. Attreed, *The King's Towns: Identity and Survival in late Medieval English Boroughs* (New York, 2001).

²⁹ See, for instance, L. Clark and M.C. Carpenter eds., *The Fifteenth Century IV: Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain* (Woodbridge, 2004), especially the three papers by Caroline Barron, Christopher Dyer and John Watts (pp. 111-80).

³⁰ E.g. C.D. Liddy, 'Urban Conflict in Late Fourteenth-Century England: The Case of York in 1380-1', *EHR*, 118:475 (2003), pp. 1-32; idem & J. Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City: York and Bruges', *EHR*, 128:533 (2013), pp. 771-815.

boundary can produce illuminating results. Sometimes this took the form of an overspill from wider political history, when there was some connection between events in a town and those on the local or national stage. The involvement of the earl of Suffolk in Norwich's affairs in the 1430s and 1440s, for instance, was responsible for R.L. Storey's interest in the city, while the Percy-Neville feud drew Ralph Griffiths' attention to the interaction between York and Yorkshire's political elite.³¹ These events were exceptional, but they nonetheless demonstrate that towns and townsmen were not isolated from the socio-political affairs of the countryside surrounding them. A particularly developed example of this form of investigation is Hannes Kleineke's study of Exeter during the Wars of the Roses, which traces how developments in local and national politics affected the city, and how its leading citizens sought to navigate the problems caused by civil war.³²

Another form of historiographical connection between towns and the aristocracy has developed as an extension of historians' interest in how towns sought grants from the crown. In the views of Lorraine Attreed and Rosemary Horrox, towns often needed the assistance (or 'patronage') of aristocrats to secure royal favour, and also to navigate the dangers posed by national instability and civil war.³³ As part of her wider study into the relationship between four English towns and the crown, Attreed dedicates a chapter to exploring how aristocrats acted as urban patrons, identifying the individuals who provided assistance and the issues for which the towns sought their support. However, her investigation is ultimately unsatisfying. Most importantly, her approach is mostly narrative and descriptive (with the exception of a statistical analysis of urban expenditure on gifts to aristocrats), with little attention given to

³¹ R.L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, new ed. (Gloucester, 1986), pp. 217-25. R.A. Griffiths, 'Local Rivalries and National Politics: The Percies, the Nevilles, and the Duke of Exeter, 1452-55', *Speculum*, 43:4 (1968), pp. 589-632.

³² H. Kleineke, "'The Kynges Cite': Exeter in the Wars of the Roses', in L. Clark ed., *The Fifteenth Century VII: Conflicts, Consequences and the Crown in the Late Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 136-56.

³³ Attreed, *King's Towns*, chapter 4. R.E. Horrox, 'Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century', in R.A. Griffiths ed., *Patronage, the Crown and the Provinces in later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1981), pp. 145-67. The same idea had earlier been raised (but not expanded upon) in Dobson, 'Urban Decline', p. 15.

uncovering any underlying patterns. Similarly, although she presents numerous examples of how urban-aristocratic relationships were affected by significant shifts in local and national politics, she does not offer an analysis of any similarities or contrasts. In addition, despite her decision to construct her study as an investigation of four towns, she does not consider whether structural differences between her examples (such as variations in their governmental systems, or contrasts in the composition of local aristocratic societies) might have affected their interactions with the nobility and gentry.

Although more restricted chronologically (concentrating on the second half of the fifteenth century), Horrox's account has a wider thematic range. In particular, Horrox is more alive to the possibility that aristocrats could present problems for towns, notably by threatening their independence and self-government.³⁴ Furthermore, she gives more thought to the involvement of lower status outsiders (particularly the possibility that some men could simultaneously take part in urban and rural affairs) and also attempts to connect the question of urban 'patrons' with the related subject of gentlemen and county lawyers serving as members of parliament for boroughs. Horrox also shows a greater interest in the common characteristics displayed by the examples she cites, in contrast to Attreed's narrative approach. She notes, for example, that aristocrats with connections to the royal household were a common target for townsmen seeking assistance, and also that many towns attempted to gain aristocrats' favour by approaching their prospective patron's family, affinity and servants.

In another article, Horrox makes a rare but important attempt to investigate whether some rural conceptions of status were shared by townsmen, in this case by considering the possible

³⁴ Horrox, 'Urban Patronage', pp. 156-8.

existence of an 'urban gentry'.³⁵ After noting that '[t]he tacit belief in the separateness of town and country is closely bound up with the view that gentility is somehow alien to towns', she then identifies a significant number of townsmen who were afforded gentry status in contemporary records. Significantly, most of the men in question were not townsmen who had bought their way into the gentry by purchasing rural manors. Instead, they were more complex figures whose interests spanned the boundary between town and countryside, and who based their claims to gentility on a combination of land, office and service, as well as their status within their home boroughs.

Perhaps the most striking point to be taken from this survey of the historiography is that (these exceptions aside) the division between towns and the aristocracy is generally accepted, but also generally unacknowledged: it implicitly justifies the boundaries set on urban and aristocratic political history, but the divide is rarely recognised, let alone considered critically. It is entirely possible that this historiographical division is valid and reflects a real fracture in past reality, but it must still be investigated and, ultimately, proven or disproven. This is particularly important when, above and beyond the challenge presented by the work of Horrox, Attreed, Kleineke and others, there are a number of reasons to expect that towns may have been of socio-political interest to landed society and other aristocrats. Most of these are based on the position of towns as central places within their regions, including in ways that were meaningful to aristocrats. Major towns were, for instance, the nodal points in the medieval road network, meaning that they were inevitably visited by any travellers, including the nobility and gentry.³⁶ Their position as markets (particularly for the imported luxury goods which were mainly purchased by men of rank) would also have attracted high-

³⁵ R.E. Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century', in Thomson ed., *Towns and Townspeople*, pp. 22-44.

³⁶ See e.g. J.F. Edwards and B.P. Hindle, 'The Transportation System of Medieval England and Wales', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17:2 (1991), pp. 123-34, esp. fig. 3.

status figures, or at least their servants.³⁷ Large towns were also the sites of religious institutions (particularly cathedrals, abbeys and friaries) which attracted significant aristocratic attention both during life and in their wills. A number of public activities also took place in towns, notably the reading of royal proclamations (and indeed those issued by other authorities, such as the church) and the public punishment of malefactors.³⁸ While these were aimed at Englishmen of every rank, members of landed society were undoubtedly among the targets, particularly for events like the executions of traitors. The alleged Lancastrians Sir Thomas Hungerford and Henry Courtenay, for instance, were executed at Salisbury in 1469, as was the duke of Buckingham fourteen years later.³⁹

Towns were also practically and conceptually at the heart of the system of local government and local justice, two areas of particular concern for the aristocracy. Towns were, for instance, where the sheriff's office was situated, where the county court and peace sessions were held, and where peripatetic justices often heard higher pleas.⁴⁰ Indeed, if we accept Simon Walker's argument that occasions like the assizes, peace sessions and county elections were the times when a 'county community' was most evident, then towns were, perhaps ironically, often the theatre in which the county was invoked and displayed.⁴¹ This was reflected by the behaviour of the aristocracy, many of whom owned residences in towns in their 'country', or else used them to host meetings of their councils.⁴² The role played by towns in some important events amplifies the sense that they were central points in counties

³⁷ E.g. Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 260-1, 269-70.

³⁸ J. Masschaele, 'The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England', *Speculum*, 77:2 (2002), pp. 390-418. J.R. Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England', *TRHS*, 28 (1978), pp. 33-6, 39-41.

³⁹ C. Ross, *Edward IV* (London, 1974), pp. 122-3. L. Gill, *Richard III and Buckingham's Rebellion* (Stroud, 1999), p. 7.

⁴⁰ J. Masschaele, 'Town, Country and Law: Royal Courts and Regional Mobility in Medieval England', in R. Goddard *et al.* eds., *Survival and Discord in Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of Christopher Dyer* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 127-44. Jewell, *English Local Administration*, pp. 131, 143-7, 197-9.

⁴¹ Walker, 'Communities of the County', pp. 72, 74-5.

⁴² E.g. the Nevilles and Percies in York: Griffiths, 'Local Rivalries and National Politics', p. 590; and see below, pp. 86-90.

and regions. Buckingham's rebellion of 1483, for instance, was organised around towns, both in terms of the arrangements made by its leaders, and the system of investigation initiated by Richard III's government.⁴³ There are also suggestions that townsmen and landed society may have interacted on a more personal level, both through commonly accepted tropes (the idea, for instance, of townsmen aiming to purchase their way into gentility, or that of the marriage of an impecunious gentleman to the daughter of a wealthy merchant) and through well-known examples such as Sir John Fastolf's use of Londoners to manage his finances.⁴⁴

In summary, there are many reasons to think it worthwhile to investigate whether this historiographical division between urban and rural is justified. This observation is reinforced by the conclusions of historians of other periods. Robin Fleming, for instance, diagnoses a very similar historiographical gulf in late-Saxon England: '...the towns of Anglo-Saxon England and the kingdom's thegns and earls have had strangely separate histories' and '[i]n general...the conceptualisation of late-Saxon history is marked by a stark separation of urban communities and thegns'.⁴⁵ However, over a few dozen pages of inquiry she sets out a comprehensive challenge to this division by means of a compelling list of tenurial, legal, religious, financial, political and miscellaneous links between towns and the Saxon aristocracy, concluding that '[Saxon] England...was a place where town and country were closely bound by a single elite, an elite intent on controlling them both'.⁴⁶ Catherine Patterson has addressed the same divide in the period between 1580 and 1640, using a system of 'concentric rings' to examine the interactions between townsmen and their aristocratic 'patrons' at various distances from the town.⁴⁷ Both of these studies have concluded that the

⁴³ Gill, *Richard III*, pp. 73-8, 176-7.

⁴⁴ For Fastolf, K.B. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1981) pp. 178-83.

⁴⁵ R. Fleming, 'Rural Elites and Urban Communities in Late-Saxon England', *Past and Present*, 141 (1993), pp. 3-37, quotations from pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, quotation from p. 37.

⁴⁷ C.F. Patterson, *Urban Patronage in Early Modern England* (Stanford, 1999).

severance of towns from the aristocracy is a historiographical artefact, rather than being a reflection of past reality. The question is: does this hold true for the late middle ages?

II – Structure and Sources

This study is a concerted attempt to answer that question, and to build on the work of Horrox, Attreed, Kleineke and others to produce a more comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between towns and the aristocracy in this period. It takes the form of a comparative investigation into the history of four English towns – Exeter, Norwich, Salisbury and Southampton – across a ‘long’ fifteenth century from the beginning of the reign of Richard II in 1377 until the death of Henry VII in 1509. Ideally, of course, such a study would range more widely, and take into account a greater number of towns. However, a balance has to be struck between breadth and depth, with sufficient range to encompass a variety of examples, while maintaining enough focus and detail to understand the local factors behind each town’s behaviour. A long timeframe, meanwhile, allows us to consider whether there were any changes in aristocratic-urban interactions across the late middle ages, while also identifying the impacts caused by individual events, especially the various episodes of instability which marked this period. For the purposes of this investigation we will also adopt a reasonably wide-ranging definition of the aristocracy: alongside the nobility and gentry we will also examine men like royal servants who enjoyed elevated status and political weight on account of their profession or employment.

Ultimately, the choice of our four towns is dictated by the surviving source material, and in particular what has survived in town government archives. Of course, a certain amount of detail about most towns and their inhabitants can be recovered from the records of central government. Here, however, evidence is scattered through a wide range of document classes, and it is difficult to assemble such disparate gleanings into a coherent picture. As such, the

survival of a substantial urban archive is a prerequisite for understanding a town's history, and thus the history of its interactions with the aristocracy. In addition, to analyse any personal connections between individual townsmen and landed society, we need to be able to identify townsmen and to establish their status within the town: without urban records, this is almost impossible. This requirement narrows the range of possible case studies substantially, as sufficient evidence has only survived from a small number of towns. However, a certain amount of selection is still needed to bring this number down to four, and so the following criteria were also applied.

Firstly, we will concentrate on important provincial towns and, moreover, on those which were important throughout the period, rather than those which rose to prominence or faded into insignificance during these years. 'Important' is, of course, a subjective category, but for the purposes of this study it includes towns of a significant size (with at least one thousand inhabitants) which were the sort of local centres described above. Although the concept of a 'county town' is anachronistic, it is on settlements of this sort that this study will focus: if we are to find evidence of a broad range of connections between urban and landed society, it is more likely to be here than in small market towns. This category also, however, excludes London: the capital's sheer size and unique position (which made it both geographically and structurally closer to the crown than provincial towns) makes it a difficult fit in any comparative investigation.⁴⁸ Secondly, only those towns in geographical areas which have received at least some attention from historians have been considered. This study is, naturally, mostly concerned with landed society in the regions surrounding each town: without understanding these societies, an analysis of their links with towns would be deeply flawed. It would be impractical, however, to investigate fully the political societies of four

⁴⁸ For medieval London, see e.g. S.L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (London, 1949); C.M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2004); and dozens of contributions from Derek Keene.

regions and then to consider their links with towns, so we shall only consider towns from regions which have already been assessed by historians, generally in the form of county studies. This also allows us to choose towns in regions with landed societies which differed from one another, enabling a comparative analysis of whether this affected urban-rural connections.

This study is divided into two sections. The first investigates links between individual townsmen and landed society, and also the personal involvement of individual aristocrats in urban life and politics. The second section investigates relationships between the aristocracy and town governments, particularly the ways in which aristocrats could provide assistance to towns, but also hinder or even actively damage them. These two sections are not, however, intended as separate investigations, as the first is a prerequisite to the second: we must investigate the involvement of individual townsmen in landed society and that of individual aristocrats in urban society (even if, in fact, there was none) to truly understand any links between aristocrats and town governments. If, for instance, citizens of our four towns were closely connected to the local nobility or gentry, it seems likely that this would have had a significant impact on how the town government interacted with its landed neighbours. Without identifying such personal links, or else proving that they were non-existent or inconsequential, any analysis of the relationship between the aristocracy and cities themselves would be incomplete.

To identify personal links between townsmen and aristocratic society, the first section of this study concentrates on several parts of public and private life in which members of these groups may have interacted. Each of these ‘theatres’ will be examined in turn to identify any urban-aristocratic contact and gauge its frequency and significance. The first chapter addresses the question of ‘transmural’ landholding, that is the possession of rural land

(including manors) by townsmen, and the ownership of urban property by the aristocracy. The possible importance of this theatre is derived from the simple fact that owning property in another 'sphere' indicates an interest of some sort in it, which may in turn suggest that the men in question became involved in that sphere in other ways. The second chapter examines this very possibility, as it seems likely that royal government was a theatre in which townsmen and aristocrats might have interacted. As in the first chapter, this includes an investigation into both the involvement of townsmen in the countryside and that of aristocrats in towns: when (if ever) did townsmen exercise power over the aristocracy, and when did the reverse occur? The third chapter considers a group of theatres in which townsmen and members of landed society may have connected more directly, including retaining, marriage, land transactions, guild membership and the provision of credit. Although a somewhat miscellaneous list, this includes a selection of the areas in which townsmen and aristocrats might have had personal links, rather than the more structural connections discussed in the previous chapters. The first section closes with an interim conclusion which evaluates the findings of the first three chapters, and considers their implications for the second half of the study.

The second section discusses the relationships between the aristocracy and town governments. Towns were, of course, a collection of thousands of individuals rather than a monolithic whole, but for the most part the officers of the town government were recognised as the representatives of the borough. It seems likely, therefore, that any interaction between landed society and the town as a whole would actually have taken the form of a connection between landed society and the town government. It is also, of course, plausible that some links may have emerged between aristocrats and other groups within towns, perhaps including factions within the urban elite or even groups of lesser citizens: this section will, where possible, consider such links as well. The first chapter in this section (the fourth

overall) considers how aristocrats became involved in city politics and urban affairs: unlike chapter two, which discusses how such men engaged with towns as officers of royal or urban government, this chapter examines how they could assist (and also frustrate, damage or undermine) the city-corporate while acting on their own account. The fifth chapter moves our focus to the local and national surroundings of our four towns. How did the differing structures of landed society in our four counties affect urban-aristocratic relations, and how did towns respond to shifts within those societies? What impacts did the various incidents of local and national instability have on the behaviour of both aristocrats and cities, and did the late fifteenth-century changes in national government (the 'New Monarchy') have any effects? The second section closes with another interim conclusion which draws out and discusses the implications of the preceding chapters, and proposes a new framework for understanding the relationship between towns and aristocrats to replace the 'patronage' paradigm. Finally, the study itself concludes by re-evaluating the question posed here: is the historiographical division between 'urban' and 'aristocratic' justified?

As already discussed, the major body of primary source material used to approach these questions will be the records of urban governments: the form these took in each of our towns will be described later, but it is worth considering some general points. Among the most useful urban records for our purposes are accounts, the records drawn up by the civic officials responsible for a city's finances.⁴⁹ For the most part, these record information which has little relevance here: most contain a complete record of the city's income and expenditure across a year and, while useful for other purposes, items such as receipts from fairs or expenses on the maintenance of the guildhall are not of real interest when investigating urban-aristocratic relationships. However, a city's accounts also record expenditure of far

⁴⁹ E.g. DHC, ECA, CRA; NRO, NCR, Case 7; WSHC, G23/1/44; SA, Stewards' Books. For more on these, see the discussions of each town's surviving archives, below.

greater relevance, particularly hospitality and gifts offered to aristocrats: although we cannot infer much from individual gifts, the patterns they form offer important insights. In addition, accounts record other expenses which shed light on the town government's relations with the aristocracy, such as payments for citizens to travel outside the city in search of named noblemen and gentlemen. Accounts also reveal the plans of the city government, and the problems with which they were confronted at that time: without these, we cannot properly understand the purpose of cities' approaches to the aristocracy.

The second major body of urban evidence which will be used contains more verbose documents which record the decisions made by the city government.⁵⁰ These were often contained in dedicated books or rolls, but some were instead included in volumes which also served other purposes, such as court records or cartularies. For the most part, decisions are recorded in the form of memoranda rather than containing any details of deliberations or debates: this does reduce their value as sources for city politics, but they are nonetheless invaluable records of the policies adopted by the government. Of course, most of the decisions do not touch on the borough's relationship with the aristocracy. Instead, many relate to regulations concerning construction or the conduct of certain trades, as well as prohibitions of the sale of unsuitable produce and other acts of anti-social behaviour. However, city governments also discussed matters of critical importance to this study, including both explicit decisions concerning interactions with aristocrats and more general memoranda related to the various 'causes' for which they sought aristocratic assistance.

Alongside these two broad classes, we can make use of a collection of more miscellaneous urban documents. There is, for instance, a small amount of surviving correspondence sent

⁵⁰ E.g. DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Rolls; NRO, NCR Case 8d; LB1; LB2.

and received by townsmen and urban governments (the best example being the Shillingford Letters from Exeter) which can provide insights into the decisions made by the citizens and their relationship with aristocrats.⁵¹ Urban archives also often preserve copies of the articles and replications which they submitted to arbitrations and legal cases, many of which involved aristocrats as arbitrators or antagonists. Some urban archives also contain documents produced by bodies which were connected to but not part of the city government, notably fraternities and craft guilds. In addition, a certain amount of information can be tentatively recovered from the work of later chroniclers and antiquarians. On some occasions (such as John Hooker's sixteenth-century history of Exeter) their information appears to have been based in part on civic myth, while others (such as Francis Blomefield's history of Norwich) claim to have had access to documents which have not survived.⁵² In both cases, such evidence needs to be used carefully, but it can provide possible insights which are otherwise unrecoverable.

Of course, urban records are not alone sufficient, and this study also draws on the archives of national government as well as a variety of other material. Some sources have been used throughout the following chapters. Wills, for instance, have been drawn from local and national collections (including diocesan registers and the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury) and have been used to demonstrate a number of forms of urban-aristocratic connections, including land holding, marriages and, of course, testamentary bequests.⁵³ The Chancery Rolls have similarly been deployed in a range of contexts, notably to identify the involvement of townsmen and aristocrats in various parts of the royal administration, but also as a means of finding personal connections between members of these two groups (such

⁵¹ *Shillingford Letters*.

⁵² W.J. Harte *et al.* eds., *The Description of the Citie of Excester by John Vowell alias Hoker* (3 vols., Exeter, 1919-47). Blomefield.

⁵³ E.g. TNA, PROB 11; NRO, NCC Will Registers; WSHC, G23/1/212-215 ('Domesday' Books); G.R. Dunstan ed., *The Register of Edmund Lacy, bishop of Exeter 1420-1455* (5 vols., Torquay, 1963-72), iv, pp. 1-65.

as through their presence as trustees in the deeds enrolled in the close rolls, or their being mainpernors for the grant of royal farms recorded in the fine rolls).⁵⁴ The various petitions submitted to the chancellor have also been systematically consulted: the sheer range of subjects addressed in these petitions is matched by the breadth of insights they offer.⁵⁵ As well as these sources which have been employed throughout, each chapter has also used a range of other material: these, and any particular difficulties with their interpretation, will be discussed later where necessary.

One potentially-useful collection of material, the records of the various royal courts, has not, however, been consulted fully, with the exception of the surviving rolls of cases heard by the itinerant assize justices, and, as already mentioned, the petitions submitted to the Lord Chancellor: these have both been systematically examined.⁵⁶ The plea rolls produced by the courts of Common Pleas and King's Bench, however, are notoriously large, and to conduct a search through them for relevant cases from across four counties would be a substantial undertaking.⁵⁷ However, the importance of the law to the aristocracy (and thus the importance of legal records to the historian of the aristocracy) is well known, and so a preliminary investigation was conducted by examining the rolls for twenty randomly-selected law terms. These produced a solitary example of a case which was of possible interest here (in which a gentleman had procured the seal of the mayor of Salisbury for one of his documents, in a case which we know from other sources) and so it would be difficult to

⁵⁴ CCR. CFR. CPR.

⁵⁵ TNA, C 1. Also TNA, SC 8, which contains similar material, albeit not all are addressed to the chancellor.

⁵⁶ TNA, C 1; JUST 1.

⁵⁷ TNA, CP 40; KB 27. For the difficulty of using these records, including their sheer size, see e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, appendix 4; R.F. Hunnisett and J.B. Post eds., *Medieval Legal Records Edited in Memory of C.A.F. Meekings* (London, 1978), pp. 268-70. For the business of these courts and the material they recorded, see e.g. M. Hastings, *The Court of Common Pleas in Fifteenth-Century England: A Study of Legal Administration and Procedure* (Ithaca NY, 1947), esp. chapter 2; M. Blatcher, *The Court of King's Bench, 1450-1550: A Study in Self-Help* (London, 1978).

justify the investment of time necessary to examine the remaining five hundred terms for each court.⁵⁸

One significant caveat about this body of evidence must, however, be recognised at this point: many of these sources only record formal contact between the aristocracy and towns, particularly those interactions which drew the attention of national or urban government, such as land transactions, royal commissions or urban pensions. They do not, however, record informal interactions which may be just as pertinent for this study (such as meetings, conversations or even chance encounters), and are also silent on some broader relationships, such as friendship. Ultimately, this is an insurmountable problem, as the types of evidence which would shed light on these areas (such as letters, diaries or appointment books) do not survive, or were never produced. In some cases, these informal connections can be inferred from other evidence: a meeting between an aristocrat and urban officials might, for instance, be indirectly recorded if hospitality or travelling expenses were paid from the communal purse. Similarly, a friendship between a townsman and an aristocrat may be recoverable if, for example, the bond was demonstrated by one party acting as a witness or feoffee for the other. It cannot, however, be guaranteed that we can recover informal links in this way, and we must therefore bear in mind that the discussion presented in the following chapters may significantly underestimate the frequency of contact between townsmen and the aristocracy.

⁵⁸ TNA, CP 40/794, m. 368d. For this, see below, p. 168.

III – Four Towns

III (a) – Exeter and Devon

With a population of almost 3,000 in 1377, Exeter was not amongst the first rank of English towns.⁵⁹ It was, however, easily the largest settlement in the far south-west: beyond Salisbury and Bristol, no other town was similarly populous. Furthermore, this period saw Exeter grow swiftly, and its population of c.8,000 in 1524 made it one of the largest towns in the country.⁶⁰ Exeter was also the ‘gateway’ to the region to the west. As is the case today, almost all the roads leading into the far south-west (such as those to Dartmouth, Plymouth, Okehampton and into Cornwall) originate in Exeter.⁶¹ This logistical centrality was matched by Exeter’s position as a commercial hub for the region (including as the centre of the royal customs administration) and also by its status as the seat of the diocese of Exeter, which encompassed the whole of Devon and Cornwall.⁶² The city’s castle was, meanwhile, a central point in the government of Devon, as it was the location for the county court and for many local judicial sessions, as well as being where the sheriff’s administration was situated.⁶³

Like all port cities, Exeter’s prosperity was based on trade. In particular, the city’s merchants were heavily involved in importing wine from the Bay of Biscay, especially Gascony.⁶⁴ This was matched by their engagement in domestic commerce, which focused on coastal trading within the south-west and particularly along the south coast to London.⁶⁵ In addition, Exeter was an important centre for cloth, both in its production (especially fulling and finishing) and its sale.⁶⁶ Exeter’s government, meanwhile, followed the standard contemporary pattern,

⁵⁹ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 371-5.

⁶⁰ MacCaffrey, *Exeter*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Edwards and Hindle, ‘Transportation System’, fig. 3.

⁶² Exeter’s importance in the region is the overall subject of Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, but see esp. chapters 5 and 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 325. T.R. Slater, ‘The South West of England’, in Palliser ed., *Cambridge Urban History*, pp. 591, 593.

⁶⁴ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 254-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-22, 147-56, 233.

as a chartered royal borough with a mayor, a second tier of officers (in this instance called stewards) and a council.⁶⁷ Apart from changes to the number of councillors, this structure remained unchanged throughout the period, and the citizens did not seek out any major new liberties.⁶⁸ Exeter does not appear to have suffered from internal factionalism, or at least not from the sort of high-profile incidents which marked the history of York and Norwich in this period. The only definite evidence of civic discord was the city government's confrontation with the tailors' guild in the 1470s, although there are suggestions of a split within the ruling elite during the reign of Richard II.⁶⁹ Rather than internal conflict, the city's main concern in this period was the friction caused by the poorly-defined boundaries of several ecclesiastical liberties within the city, including the dispute with the bishop recorded in the famous Shillingford Letters.⁷⁰

In terms of its landed society, Devon is an example of what was once thought to be the archetypal county structure: the main organising factor in county politics was the noble affinity, especially that of the earls of Devon. Since the early fourteenth century, the earldom had been held by the Courtenay family, and the county's political history revolved around them and the challenges to their position.⁷¹ The Courtenays' landed estate was modest when compared to other earls, but it was sufficient to make them the wealthiest family in Devon and the wider region. Their dominance was challenged twice across the 'long' fifteenth century (in c.1388-1400 and c.1430-61), in both instances leading to a prolonged struggle for

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-2.

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, *Mediaeval Council*, pp. 6-8. Exeter was not, for instance, granted county status until 1537. DHC, ECA, Charter of 1537.

⁶⁹ For these, see below, pp. 143-7, 223-5, 249.

⁷⁰ For these, see below, pp. 232-8, and also M. Curtis, *Some Disputes between the City and Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* (Manchester, 1930), pp. 20-42; and *Shillingford Letters*.

⁷¹ For the origins of the Courtenay earls, see R.J. Burls, 'The Courtenays and the Re-establishment of the Earldom of Devon in the Fourteenth Century', *TDA*, 137 (2005), pp. 139-70. For their history in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, M. Cherry, 'The Courtenay Earls of Devon: The Formation and Disintegration of a late Medieval Aristocratic Affinity', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), pp. 71-98, and J.A.F. Thomson, 'The Courtenay Family in the Yorkist Period', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 45 (1972), pp. 230-46.



Map 1 – Notable aristocratic residences in Devon

power.⁷² In general, both the wealth and the political affairs of Devon were concentrated in the east of the county, especially in the fertile strip between Exeter and the Dorset border (see Map 1). One of the main residences of the earls of Devon, for instance, was at

⁷² See below, pp. 221-32; Cherry 'Courtenay Earls'; and idem, 'The Struggle for Power in mid-Fifteenth-Century Devonshire' in Griffiths ed., *Patronage*, pp. 123-44.

Colcombe, while the *capites* of some other important Devon families were also within this area: Mohun's Ottery (the Carews), Shute (the Bonvilles) and Nutwell (the Dinhams). Other significant residences were outside this strip, but were nonetheless close to Exeter: Tiverton (the earldom of Devon), Bovey Tracey (earldom of Huntingdon), Berry Pomeroy (the Pomeroyes) and Powderham (the Powderham cadet branch of the Courtenays), all of which are no more than twenty-five miles from Exeter. The bishop, meanwhile, maintained four residences within about fifteen miles of the city (Crediton, Chudleigh, Bishopsteignton and Clyst St. Mary). Exeter was, therefore, very much a central point in Devon's political geography.

Exeter was thus located in a county which possessed a populous political society structured around active magnate lordship, which was itself sometimes subject to competition. Moreover, the city was in the very part of the county where much of this competition took place, something exacerbated by the city's position as the location for many county events. Meanwhile, the city itself was engaged in repeated disputes with local ecclesiastical bodies over the extent of its liberties. As such, Exeter provides an interesting example for this study, in terms of how both individual citizens and the city government interacted with a landed society so firmly structured around affinities and magnate lordship. In terms of its surviving muniments, Exeter possesses a particularly fine series of accounts (the Receiver's Rolls) which run for the entire period with only minimal gaps.⁷³ Unfortunately, however, we lack anything akin to the assembly rolls or minute books produced by many cities, and instead must rely on the occasional enrolment of decisions and memoranda within the rolls of the mayor's court, where they are intermixed with the records of petty justice.⁷⁴ As well as these two major bodies of material, Exeter's archive has also preserved a substantial quantity of

⁷³ DHC, ECA, CRA. For an overview of Exeter's surviving archive, see Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on the Records of the City of Exeter* (London, 1916).

⁷⁴ DHC, ECA, Mayors' Court Rolls.

miscellaneous documents, particularly relating to the various legal challenges the city faced across this period.⁷⁵ There is also the remarkable survival of the famous Shillingford Letters, a unique body of correspondence exchanged between the mayor (John Shillingford) and his colleagues when the former was in London waiting upon the Lord Chancellor, who was acting as arbitrator in a dispute between the city and bishop.⁷⁶

III (b) – Norwich and Norfolk

Norwich was substantially larger than Exeter, with a population of around 8,000 in 1377, rising to about 10,000 by the sixteenth century.⁷⁷ However, its role within its region was similar, as Norwich's size and centrality made it the focal point in the economic, political and religious life of Norfolk. This was enhanced by its position as the region's major market, the diocesan seat, and the location for the county court and itinerant justices.⁷⁸ In particular, Norwich was the lynchpin for the burgeoning cloth industry in the county, and the revenues from weaving and marketing were responsible for the city's notable prosperity across the period.⁷⁹ Constitutionally, however, Norwich was curiously backward: until 1404, the city possessed only four bailiffs and a loosely-defined common council. A charter of Henry IV replaced this antiquated simplicity by constituting the city as a county in its own right, with a mayor, two sheriffs, aldermen and a council, an almost revolutionary shift in the city's government.⁸⁰ This was not, however, the only important incident in the city's later-medieval history, as the period between c.1429 and c.1450 was to prove even more momentous.⁸¹ Like many cities in this period, Norwich found itself disputing the extent of ecclesiastical liberties within the city, in this case that which was claimed by the cathedral priory. Unlike examples

⁷⁵ E.g. DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Rolls.

⁷⁶ Published as *Shillingford Letters*.

⁷⁷ C. Rawcliffe and R. Wilson eds., *Medieval Norwich* (London, 2004), pp. xxxiv, 214.

⁷⁸ For Norwich's economic centrality, see *ibid.*, chapter 9. For the diocese, see pp. 74-82.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-20.

⁸⁰ This charter is printed in RCN i, pp. 31-6.

⁸¹ For this period see Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 175-205; Storey, *House of Lancaster*, pp. 217-25; and below, pp. 238-47, 254-60, 283-9.

of this phenomenon elsewhere, however, the Norwich dispute created a rift in the ruling elite, with one faction refusing to accept the concessions made to the priory in 1429. This led to almost two decades of discord among the ruling elite, culminating in the crown seizing the city's liberties on two occasions on account of disorder, riotous conduct (including threatening to bombard the cathedral with cannon) and poor governance.

Norfolk's political society was quite different from Devon's. The county's land market was substantially more fluid, which allowed the emergence of a large group of minor gentlemen (notably successful lawyers) who, in combination with the more substantial gentry, formed a structure which was less driven by magnate affinities than was the case in Devon.⁸² Although there were magnates with substantial estates in the county (notably the dukes of Norfolk and, prior to 1399, the duke of Lancaster), they were generally either unable to establish a meaningful affinity or else chose not to do so.⁸³ As a consequence, Norfolk's landed society was organised for long periods (such as during the reign of Richard II) along the lines of the 'independent gentry' structure identified by Nigel Saul in Gloucestershire and Sussex.⁸⁴ However, as extensively investigated by Helen Castor, this situation was complicated after 1399, when the duchy of Lancaster became joined to the crown.⁸⁵ In brief, the duchy was

⁸² For general comments on the land market in Norfolk and East Anglia, see J. Whittle, *Development of Agrarian Capitalism: Land and Labour in Norfolk, 1440-1580* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 31-7; B.M.S. Campbell, 'The Complexity of Manorial Structure in Medieval Norfolk: A Case Study', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 39 (1986), pp. 225-61; Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 55-6; A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Norfolk, 1558-1603* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 3-8. For specific examples of men who rose through the purchase of land in Norfolk in this period, see e.g. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 175-98; A. Smith, "'The Greatest Man of that Age": The Acquisition of Sir John Fastolf's East Anglian Estates', in R.E. Horrox & S. Walker eds., *Rulers and Ruled in late Medieval England* (London, 1995), pp. 137-55; R. Virgoe, 'The Earlier Knyvetts: The Rise of a Norfolk Gentry Family', in his *East Anglian Society and the Political Community of Late Medieval England* (Norwich, 1997), pp. 159-218. The obvious example of the Pastons requires little comment here.

⁸³ John of Gaunt, for instance, used his Norfolk lands as a source of income rather than as the basis of an affinity, while the position of the Mowbray dukes of Norfolk was weakened by, *inter alia*, minorities, long-lived widows and personal inadequacy. For Gaunt, see S. Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361-1399* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 182-96. For the Mowbrays, see e.g. R.E. Archer, 'Mowbray, John (V), second duke of Norfolk (1392-1432)', in *ODNB*; eadem, 'Mowbray, John (VI), third duke of Norfolk (1415-1461)', in *ODNB*; eadem, 'Rich Old Ladies: the Problem of late Medieval Dowagers', in A.J. Pollard ed., *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 21-2, 28-31; Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 101-17.

⁸⁴ N. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 98, 102-5, 258-62. Idem, *Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280-1400* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 56-7.

⁸⁵ Castor, *Duchy*, chapters 3-5.

used as a means of extending royal patronage into the county, particularly through the elevation of a succession of men with close royal ties to lead a duchy network which bore some resemblance to the 'normal' magnate affinities elsewhere. At times, this resulted in the county conforming much more closely to the magnate lordship model presented by Devon's society, but in which the power of the magnate was supplemented by (or even based upon) the support provided by the duchy. In many respects, this means that Norfolk offers us an example of a 'halfway house', a county which moved between an 'independent gentry' structure and one which was arranged around an aristocratic affinity.

Norwich and Norfolk thus provide us with a case study with both similarities to and differences from Exeter and Devon. The governments of both cities were forced to respond to challenges, but in Norwich these challenges included the expansion of the city's liberties and also the management of factionalism, as well as the type of competition with ecclesiastical bodies which troubled Exeter. Norfolk, meanwhile, was quite different when compared to Devon. Were the relationships between individual citizens and the local gentry affected by the more fluid nature of Norfolk's society and land market? Similarly, did the unusual arrangement of Norfolk's political organisation result in any noticeable differences in the way that Norwich's government interacted with the local aristocracy? Norwich's archives, meanwhile, are perhaps richer than Exeter's, but are more restricted in the period they cover. Accounts, for instance, survive for almost all years between 1384 and 1458, but become far less common thereafter.⁸⁶ We also have access to a number of rolls and books documenting the business of the city assembly during this period: these provide less comprehensive coverage than the accounts, but still offer important insights into the business undertaken by the city government.⁸⁷ As with Exeter, Norwich's archive also

⁸⁶ CAB, NRO, NCR, Case 7a-f; Case 17d, Chamberlains' Account Book 1448-58.

⁸⁷ NRO, NCR, Case 8d, Assembly Rolls; Case 16a, Mayor's Court Book 1424-49.

contains a large collection of miscellanea, particularly documents concerned with the various challenges the city faced in this period, such as correspondence, petitions, articles and replications.⁸⁸

III (c) – Salisbury and Wiltshire

At the beginning of this period, Salisbury's population was between those of Exeter and Norwich, at around 5,000.⁸⁹ By the 1520s this had grown to c.7,500 inhabitants: although it still ranked amongst the greatest towns in the country, Salisbury had probably been overtaken by Exeter.⁹⁰ As the alternative name 'New Sarum' suggests, Salisbury had a relatively short history, having been founded by the bishop of Salisbury in 1227, when Old Sarum proved unsuitable for the construction of a new cathedral.⁹¹ This recent, private foundation meant that, unlike the overwhelming majority of significant towns, Salisbury remained a private borough which enjoyed its liberties at the sufferance of its lord, the bishop, rather than through the grant of a royal charter. As a result, the citizens' government was constitutionally weak: there was, for instance, no mayor's court, and the mayor himself was technically junior to the bishop's bailiff.⁹² Furthermore, some of the city's elected officers (the reeves and aldermen) seem to have been responsible to the bishop, rather than to the citizens.⁹³ This in turn led to financial weakness, as several of the sources of income held by the governments of royal boroughs (such as the proceeds of petty justice) were instead enjoyed by the bishop and his officers. Unsurprisingly, the citizens resented their lack of independence, and the city's history is dotted with their (generally futile) attempts to throw off the bishop's rule.⁹⁴ Differing estimations of their ability to actually achieve such liberation also led to

⁸⁸ These are mostly catalogued under NRO, NCR, Case 9.

⁸⁹ Chandler, *Endless Street*, p. 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹¹ For this episode, see *ibid.*, pp. 11-30.

⁹² Indeed, the mayor was sworn in in front of the bishop or an episcopal officer. See below, pp. 213-14.

⁹³ See below, pp. 213-14.

⁹⁴ For the history of this troubled relationship, see F. Street, 'The Relations of the Bishops and Citizens of Salisbury (New Sarum) between 1225 and 1612', *WAM*, 39:124-5 (1916), pp. 185-257, 319-67.

factionalism within the city, just as similar divisions emerged in Norwich in relation to that city's struggles with its cathedral.

As well as having notably weaker internal structures compared to Exeter and Norwich, the position of Salisbury within its hinterland was significantly different. As mentioned above, Exeter and Norwich were central points in county administration and local justice, and their geographical position was at the heart of the political community which staffed those local institutions. Wiltshire's administrative functions, however, were split between Salisbury, Old Sarum and Wilton, a far more ancient town a few miles west of Salisbury: the county court, for instance, was held at Wilton, while the headquarters of the sheriff of Wiltshire was at Old Sarum castle.⁹⁵ As a result, it is more difficult to describe Salisbury as the 'county town' in the same way as Exeter and Norwich, even though the city nonetheless hosted a number of the local judicial sessions and was, moreover, the seat of the diocese (which covered all of Wiltshire and Dorset). Economically, meanwhile, Salisbury exerted a similar pull to Exeter and Norwich, but one which was severely restricted in certain directions due to the local geography. Like Carpenter's Warwickshire, Wiltshire was divided into two very different parts by its geology: the chalklands of Salisbury Plain to the south, and the rolling, heavier soils to the north.⁹⁶ This distinction carried over into the county's economic and social geography. Not only did the different geologies lead to different agricultural systems (and, consequently, social structures), but the dividing line was marked by the steep northern escarpment of Salisbury Plain, which created a formidable obstacle for north-south communications and trade.⁹⁷ This division was so significant and noticeable that it has been argued that it is the origin of the expression 'chalk and cheese', a reference to the chalk in

⁹⁵ *VCH Wilts*, vi, pp. 16, 62-3. *HoP 1386-1421*, i, p. 709.

⁹⁶ J.N. Hare, *A Prospering Society: Wiltshire in the later Middle Ages* (Hatfield, 2011), pp. 7-30.

⁹⁷ The agricultural and social differences between the two regions are the subject of *ibid.*, chapters 2 and 5. As Hare notes, certain goods, notably wool from the Cotswolds, were sufficiently valuable to overcome these boundaries.

the south and the dairy farming in the north. The result was a county which was split into several parts, and in which each component looked outwards, rather than to the rest of Wiltshire. The north and west of the county, for instance, was geographically an extension of Somerset and Gloucestershire which, in commercial terms, looked to Bristol as its major market, rather than Salisbury.⁹⁸ The north-east, meanwhile, was part of the wider Thames Valley region, which extended through Berkshire and Oxfordshire towards the capital.⁹⁹ This left Salisbury as the major settlement in the south and south-east of Wiltshire, which formed the north-western part of a wider region which encompassed most of Hampshire.¹⁰⁰

In addition to this significant rift in the county, the patterns of land tenure limited the overall size and vitality of Wiltshire's political society. The county has received rather less attention from historians than Norfolk or Devon, and so it will be necessary to offer a rather longer evaluation here. In short, however, so little land was held by resident secular aristocrats that there was no meaningful county society in Wiltshire, and thus there was little in the way of aristocratic politics. There was, for instance, no competition or struggle for hegemony in the county in this period (as there was in Devon and Norfolk), because there was never more than one competitor: indeed, most often there were none at all. A remarkable proportion of Wiltshire was in the hands of the church: in Malmesbury hundred, for instance, nearly half the manors and very nearly half the land was held by Malmesbury abbey.¹⁰¹ The situation in Dunworth hundred was similar, with the land held by Shaftesbury abbey.¹⁰² At the time of the Dissolution, the bishop of Salisbury alone was drawing over £700 from his Wiltshire estates, while the abbesses of Wilton and Amesbury together held land worth over £1,100

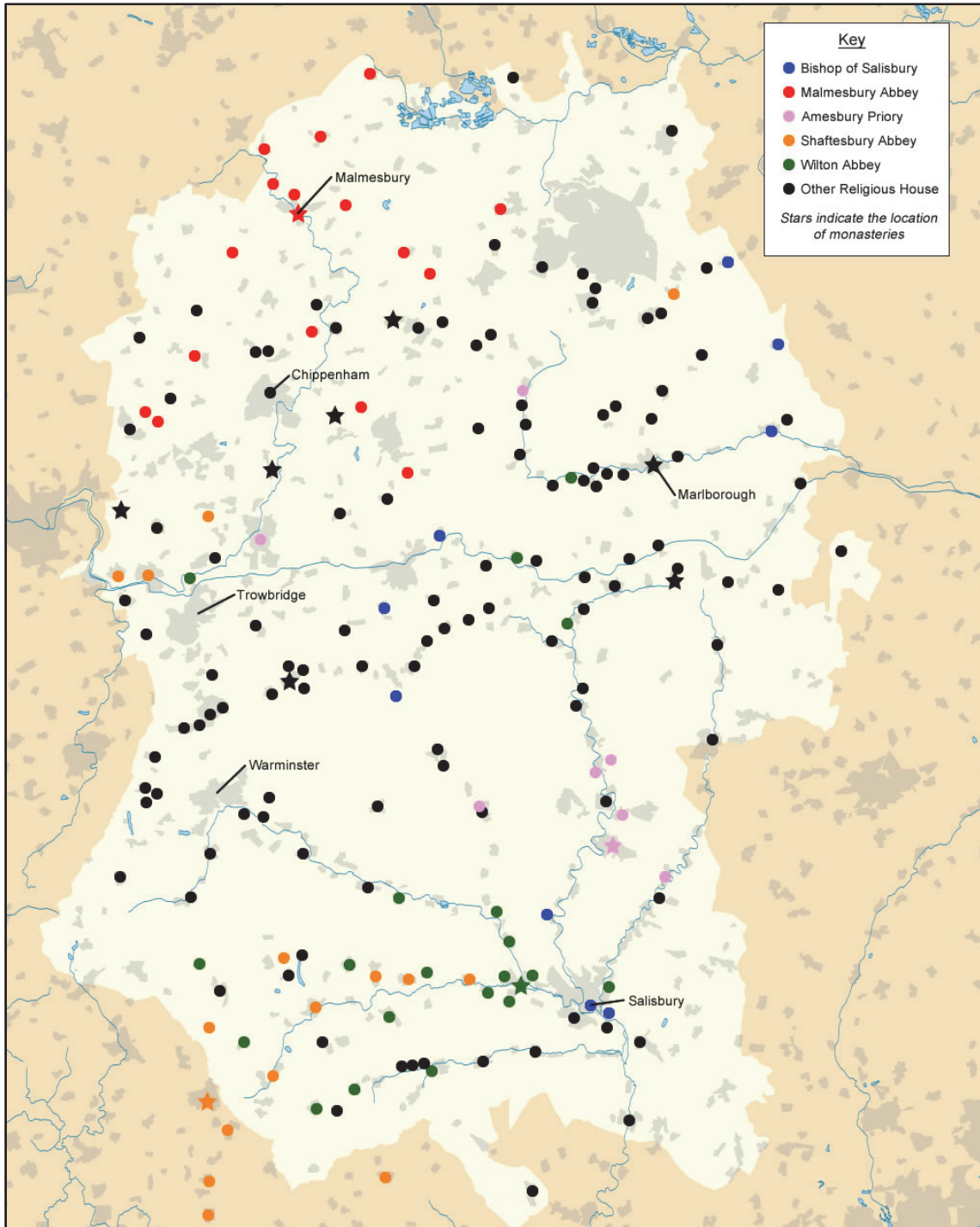
⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

⁹⁹ See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 178-9 for the cloth industry around Marlborough and its links to the east.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. *ibid.*, p. 66 for the sheep farming links between the chalkland in both counties and pp. 152-4 for the commercial links between Salisbury and Southampton.

¹⁰¹ Calculated from the sizes of each parish in the hundred, as recorded by the VCH volume for this hundred. *VCH Wilt.*, xiv.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, xiii.



Map 2 – Ecclesiastical estates in Wiltshire

per annum.¹⁰³ In addition, a significant number of manors were held by the crown, both as part of the crown estate (e.g. Ludgershall, Marlborough, Devizes, Rowde, Corsham and

¹⁰³ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, ii, pp. 69-72, 93-5, 109-11. These are only the largest examples: there were many other religious houses drawing hundreds of pounds each from their Wiltshire estates annually.

Marston Meysey) and as part of the duchy of Lancaster (a large grouping of manors in the upper Salisbury Avon and Bourne valleys, as well as some in the far north and far west of the county).¹⁰⁴ It is impossible to make an accurate calculation, but it seems likely that approximately half the manors in Wiltshire were by one means or another outside the hands of the secular aristocracy. In addition, the officers who administered this land were local lawyers and other professionals: there is no evidence of substantial gentlemen being appointed to manage estates by the church and, as such, no evidence that this land could be deployed to secular political ends.

Even this was not the only limit on the size and activity of Wiltshire's political society, however, as a further significant proportion of the county's manors were held by absentees. Among the higher nobility who held land in the county were the duke of York and the earls of Arundel, Salisbury, Stafford, Hereford, Warwick, Worcester and Shrewsbury, as well as three different creations of the earls of Wiltshire.¹⁰⁵ Strikingly, none of these men played any real role in Wiltshire politics, or attempted to form an affinity in the county: they were little more than absentee landlords. The local baronage and greater gentry were not quite in the same category, but the disposition of their interests still meant that very few were truly Wiltshire-centred figures: rather than being true absentees, they instead possessed spheres of interest of which only one part was in Wiltshire. Examples of this tendency include the Lords Lovell, whose Wiltshire property was at the southern edge of a group of estates which extended north and east into Berkshire and Oxfordshire, and Sir William Sturmy, whose manors in east Wiltshire (on an axis between Marlborough and Ludgershall) were

¹⁰⁴ Unlike in, say, Norfolk, the crown and duchy lands were not used to bolster loyal local aristocrats. Instead, they were often held by members of the royal family, notably Joan of Navarre, Humphrey of Gloucester, Edmund Tudor and Margaret of Anjou. *CPR 1401-5*, p. 269; *1408-13*, p. 415; *1446-52*, p. 559; *1452-61*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁵ *Feudal Aids*, vi, pp. 529, 533, 541. *CIPM (Old)*, iv, pp. 260, 273, 290, 309, 350, 361. *VCH Wilts*, viii, pp. 96-103.

complemented by a string of other estates across north Hampshire, on the road to London.¹⁰⁶ Wiltshire families who rose in significance during this period did so almost exclusively by expanding their interests outside of the county. This is even true of the one family who could be considered to have held significant lordship in the county in this period, the Hungerfords. Although their west Wiltshire property was a valuable part of their estates and allowed them to exercise considerable authority in the county, the family nonetheless had to look outside Wiltshire (and particularly into Somerset and beyond) to assemble sufficient property to underpin their status.¹⁰⁷

Another effect of this distribution of landholding was to produce a county which lacked a group of 'county gentry' or 'buzones', whose primary interests were located in the county and who interacted with one another either through friendship and marriage or through competition and rivalry.¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere, these men were the backbone of both royal administration and aristocratic affinities. The lack of such figures can be particularly well demonstrated by the personnel appointed to commissions of the peace in the county. The commission issued in December 1422, for instance, included two absentee noblemen (the earl of Salisbury and lord Botreaux), two royal justices (John Martin and William Westbury) and a selection of local administrators (John Westbury, Robert Andrew, William Alexander, John Wykes and Robert Long, most of whom were employed by the bishop of Salisbury or by the Hungerfords), but only three gentlemen of significant rank (Sir Walter Hungerford, Sir William Sturmy and Sir William Cheyne), all of whom had significant and even primary interests elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ Its equivalent in May 1443 included the bishop of Salisbury, four

¹⁰⁶ *CIPM*, xix, #404-17. *CIPM (Old)*, iv, pp. 107, 264. Sturmy also had significant interests in Devon. Note that these spheres of influence match the economic divisions of Wiltshire discussed above.

¹⁰⁷ This is discussed in greater detail below, pp. 267-8.

¹⁰⁸ For 'buzones' see e.g. P. Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 58. The concept of a 'county establishment' of such men in the fifteenth century is the subject of S.J. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991), especially pp. 216-19.

¹⁰⁹ *CPR 1422-9*, pp. 571-2. For these men, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 23-4, 35-8, 558-9; iii, pp. 446-53, 616-18; iv, pp. 520-4, 813-14.

absentee noblemen (the duke of York, the earl of Arundel, the earl of Salisbury and lord Botreaux), three justices (Sir Richard Newton, William Westbury and Nicholas Ashton), three members of the Hungerford family (Walter, lord Hungerford, and his sons Sir Robert and Sir Edmund), the local administrator Robert Long and the gentlemen Sir John Stourton, Sir John Seymour, William Darrell and Henry Green.¹¹⁰ It is difficult, however, to argue that any but Darrell considered Wiltshire their primary area of interest: Stourton was at least equally concerned with Dorset, Seymour with Hampshire and Green with Northamptonshire.¹¹¹ Although it was, of course, not rare for significant gentlemen to have estates in more than one county, Wiltshire's greater gentry was almost exclusively made up of such figures and, moreover, for most of them their Wiltshire land was a secondary priority.¹¹² Furthermore, it is difficult to identify gentlemen in Wiltshire who were of a similar rank to these men but who were not appointed to the commission, something perhaps illustrated by the nomination of three members of one family: there was simply no-one else to fill the panel.

To conclude, Salisbury provides us with an example of a populous and prosperous town, but one which was weakened by its constitutional position as the bishop's private borough. Unsurprisingly, the bishop and the citizens had differing views on Salisbury's future, and this led to a difficult relationship between the two which often erupted into open conflict. Meanwhile, Wiltshire was a radically different setting for the town compared to Devon and Norfolk: not only were aristocratic affinities almost entirely missing from the county, but gentry society was extremely thin as well. Of the few resident families, moreover, almost all lived well away from Salisbury, such as the Hungerfords and Stourtons whose property was

¹¹⁰ *CPR 1441-6*, p. 480.

¹¹¹ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 492-6. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 390-1, 756-7.

¹¹² For the concept of gentlemen having interests in more than one county but 'identifying' most strongly with one, see Walker, 'Communities of the county', p. 71.

almost entirely in the far west, or Sir William Sturmy, whose estates were centred around Marlborough. How did a region dominated by ecclesiastical figures, estate administrators and petty gentlemen affect towns' and townsmen's interaction with landed society? Unlike Norwich and Exeter, the main body of source material preserved in the Salisbury archives takes the form of the memoranda produced by the city assembly, variously known as the Ledger or General Entry books.¹¹³ These recorded the names of the citizens who attended each meeting of the city assembly and the matters which they discussed and resolved upon. Accounts, correspondence and other materials were also included alongside these minutes, giving a wide-ranging account of the city's business. Unfortunately, these volumes were damaged (apparently in the process of extinguishing a fire) and there are entries throughout that have faded badly. The first volume (covering 1387-1452) was particularly badly affected, but much has been recovered by the editor of a recently published edition.¹¹⁴ As well as these ledger books, a handful of miscellaneous accounts have survived, along with the 'Domesday Books', which include a large number of enrolled deeds and wills which transferred property in the city.¹¹⁵

III (d) – Southampton and Hampshire

Southampton was the smallest of our four towns, with around 1,600 inhabitants in 1377, growing to almost 2,000 by 1524.¹¹⁶ Indeed, it was not even the largest town in Hampshire (Winchester's population being several hundred greater), and was also overshadowed by Salisbury, which is only about twenty-five miles to the north-west. Economically, Salisbury, Winchester and Southampton were very closely linked, with the latter acting as the outpost for the prosperous cloth industries of its northern neighbours.¹¹⁷ As well as being larger,

¹¹³ WSHC, G23/1/1-2.

¹¹⁴ LB1.

¹¹⁵ WSHC, G23/1/44; G23/1/212-215.

¹¹⁶ Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, pp. 262-3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-63. Hare, *Prospering Society*, pp. 152-4. Chandler, *Endless Street*, pp. 76, 78, 83.

Winchester was also the key administrative centre in the county, acting as the location for the county institutions and also as the seat of the diocese. As such, Southampton was not the same type of local administrative, religious and political centre as Norwich or Exeter. Instead, its significance was based on its internationally-important commercial port and also on its strategic position as both a fortification and military dockyard. From the mid-fourteenth century, Southampton had become a leading player in the trade between England and the Mediterranean, particularly Italy, something which was reflected in the number of naturalised Italians who became prominent citizens.¹¹⁸ The town's military importance, meanwhile, was almost entirely connected to the French wars, both in terms of defending against French raids (through the walls, towers and castle) and in supporting the English presence in France (through the construction of ships and embarkation of armies).¹¹⁹ Constitutionally, Southampton started this period with a government structure which, like Exeter's, followed the typical late medieval pattern of a mayor, bailiffs and council. However, the charter of 1447 saw Southampton follow the example set by Norwich as it gained county status, a royal grant apparently motivated by the problems caused by Hampshire officials interfering in the business of merchants in the town.¹²⁰

Hampshire was in many respects quite similar to Wiltshire: like its north-western neighbour, much of the county's land (perhaps in the region of half) was held by the church or by the crown.¹²¹ The estates of the bishopric of Winchester were particularly extensive, including twenty-nine manors and five boroughs in the county, but there were also the possessions of

¹¹⁸ For a survey of this development, see A.A. Ruddock, *Italian Merchants and Shipping in Southampton, 1270-1600* (Southampton, 1951).

¹¹⁹ Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, pp. 126-9, 142, 147-50. A. Curry, 'Military Organisation in Lancastrian Normandy, 1422-50' (Teesside Polytechnic Ph.D. thesis, 1985), p. 151. S. Rose ed., *The Navy of the Lancastrian Kings* (London, 1982), pp. 28-56.

¹²⁰ This charter is printed in H.W. Giddey ed., *The Charters of the Borough of Southampton* (2 vols., Southampton 1909-10), i, pp. 70-81.

¹²¹ T.S. Purser, 'The County Community in Hampshire c.1300-c.1530' (King Alfred's College, Winchester Ph.D. thesis, 2001), pp. 43-54, esp. p. 47, table 3 and p. 52, figure 1.

the cathedral (St. Swithin's), Hyde Abbey, St. Mary's Abbey (or 'Nunnaminster'), two other Benedictine houses, six Augustine foundations, four Cistercian abbeys and a Premonstratensian house, as well as the outlying property of various distant monasteries.¹²² The royal lands, meanwhile, were particularly concentrated on the Isle of Wight, much of which was held by the crown as part of the honour of Carisbrooke but also included important holdings in the hundreds of Andover, Odiham and Basingstoke in the north of the county.¹²³ As in Wiltshire, this predominance of royal and ecclesiastical land was complemented by absenteeism on the part of the nobility: a number of noble families held scattered estates in the county, but very few took any part in political life in the county.¹²⁴ However, unlike Wiltshire, Hampshire supported a sizeable population of substantial, resident gentry families who formed the meaningful political society which Wiltshire mostly lacked. These families were, moreover, remarkably successful in surviving in the male line, meaning that members of the same few dynasties re-appear throughout the period, such as the Uvedales, the Waytes, the Pophams, the Rogers and the Brocas family.¹²⁵ Unlike in Devon or Norfolk, however, the Hampshire gentry were not organised around a structure of magnate lordship: instead, they provide a good example of a group of what appear to be 'independent gentry'. The relative importance of each family varied across the period, particularly when certain individuals enjoyed a position in the close confidences of the monarch, but Hampshire society as a whole remained remarkably stable.¹²⁶

Southampton provides us with an example of a very different type of 'important' town: a critical strategic and commercial centre, but one which lacked the administrative, religious

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 67-9 and pp. xiv-xv, maps 1 and 2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 56-7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-67, 74-7.

¹²⁵ This is the focus of *ibid.*, chapter 4.

¹²⁶ E.g. Sir Bernard Brocas under Edward III and Richard II, and the Berkeley family under Edward IV. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 359-62. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 67-8, 69-70.

and demographic importance of Norwich, Exeter or Salisbury. Did this difference have any impact on Southampton's engagement with aristocratic society? Hampshire, meanwhile, was also quite different from our other three counties, providing us with a textbook example of an 'independent gentry' society, to contrast with the near-total aristocratic focus of Devon, the 'hybrid' system in Norfolk and the vacuum of Wiltshire. Did the lack of resident noblemen have an effect on the level of interaction between the town and the aristocracy, or were the townsmen equally keen to engage with a loose network of greater gentlemen? The Southampton archives are, unfortunately, much more fragmentary than those of the other towns, and the information useful for this study is scattered through a wider range of classes.¹²⁷ A number of volumes containing memoranda, correspondence, deeds and accounts have survived which between them cover the majority of the period under discussion, but accounts are far fewer.¹²⁸ The main records of the town's income and expenditure (the stewards' books) have survived for only a few years, and these themselves are not necessarily a complete picture of the town's finances.¹²⁹ The surviving port books (which record the income the town derived from various customs dues), for instance, make it clear that Southampton's water bailiff was sometimes instructed to make disbursements directly from the money he collected from traders, rather than first placing this income into the hands of the stewards.¹³⁰

In summary, these four towns and the counties which surrounded them offer a range of contexts in which connections between 'urban' and 'aristocratic' might have taken place.

¹²⁷ For an overview of the Southampton archives, see *Southampton Records* (Southampton, 1964).

¹²⁸ E.g. P. Studer ed., *The Oak Book of Southampton* (3 vols., Southampton 1910-11); A.B. Wallis-Chapman ed., *The Black Book of Southampton* (3 vols., Southampton, 1912-15); H.W. Gidden ed., *The Book of Remembrance of Southampton* (3 vols., Southampton, 1927-30); SA, 'The Second Book of Remembrance'.

¹²⁹ SA, Stewards' Books. Four are printed in H.W. Gidden ed., *The Stewards Books of Southampton, 1428-39* (2 vols., Southampton, 1935-9).

¹³⁰ SA, Port Books. Several of these have been printed, including those for 1427-8 and 1429-30 in P. Studer ed., *The Port Books of Southampton* (Southampton, 1913). See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 116-17 for payments made directly by the water bailiff.

Differences in the challenges which these towns faced and differences in the structure of local landed society may well have produced radical differences in the urban-rural links which formed, allowing us to use these examples comparatively to analyse when, how and why such links emerged. Having discussed these differences and the methodology and sources to be used, it is now time to turn our attention to the subject of the first section of this study: the theatres in which individual townsmen and aristocrats might have interacted.

Part 1 – Theatres

Individuals and Political Society

1 - Transmural Landholding

I – Introduction

The most obvious theatre in which aristocratic and urban society might have come into contact was the simple case of a member of one group owning property in the domain generally associated with the other. This brings to mind the familiar concepts of townsmen purchasing manors to become gentlemen, and of gentlemen purchasing townhouses, but we should consider ‘transmural’ landholding without such preconceptions. This chapter will first investigate the patterns in townsmen’s acquisition of rural land. Which townsmen from our four towns held rural land? What did they possess and where was it situated? Finally, and most importantly, for what reasons did they acquire it? Having answered these questions, we will then consider the urban property which was held by men whose primary interests were to be found elsewhere. This group includes both the aristocracy and an assortment of men of slightly lesser status, such as lawyers and royal servants.

II – Townsmen in the Countryside

Traditionally, discussion of the activities of townsmen in the rural land market has only taken place as an extension of two very different themes in the wider historiography of late-medieval England.¹ The first centres on the idea of townsmen purchasing their way into the ranks of the landed gentry through investment in land and manorial lordship. As such, townsmen often form a component of the cast of figures discussed in studies of local political societies, although as a result of the understandable focus of such work on the composition, activities and estates of the greater or ‘county’ gentry, townsmen only tend to feature if they ‘succeeded’ in entering their ranks.² This was, of course, a rare event: as Christine Carpenter

¹ ‘Rural’ here is also intended for convenience to include property in small boroughs and market towns.

² E.g. Payling, *Political Society*, pp. 19, 47-9, 65; S.M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Chesterfield, 1983), pp. 5-6; Acheson, *Gentry Community*, p. 39; Purser ‘County Community’, pp. 188-90, 193-4; G.G. Astill, ‘The Medieval Gentry: A Study in Leicestershire Society, 1350-1399’ (Birmingham Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1977), pp. 13-14; Tyldesley, ‘Crown and the Local Communities’, pp. 10-11. Acheson explicitly

argues in relation to Warwickshire, although some townsmen did purchase manorial lordship, their small numbers and the frequently transient nature of their possession meant that their presence ‘had no effect on the structure of local society’.³ Moreover, little interest is shown concerning why some townsmen chose to invest in manors and sought to become gentlemen, while others among their peers did not.

The second strand of historiography which touches upon townsmen acquiring rural property is that of urban ‘hinterlands’, a common theme in economic urban history. For the most part, this body of work concentrates on issues such as the intersection of rural and urban commerce through hierarchies of markets,⁴ the engagement of rural populations in urban-driven industry through the provision of raw materials and medieval forebears of the ‘putting-out’ system,⁵ and more generally on how the changing demands of a substantial urban settlement affected agriculture and society in the surrounding area.⁶ Occasionally, these treatments extend into a discussion of townsmen’s involvement in the rural land market of their town’s hinterland. In most examples, this is linked to the wider investment patterns of prosperous citizens, in particular their purchase of urban property to provide rental incomes.⁷ For the most part, these studies focus solely on the economic implications of property

discounts a family with a substantial landed estate in Leicestershire from numbering among his ‘county gentry’ on account of their urban origins: Acheson, *Gentry Community*, p. 39.

³ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 121-2.

⁴ E.g. Kowaleski, *Local Markets*; P.T.H. Unwin, ‘Rural Marketing in Medieval Nottinghamshire’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 7:3 (1981), pp. 231-51; K. Biddick, ‘Medieval English Peasants and Market Involvement’, *Journal of Economic History*, 45 (1985), pp. 823-31.

⁵ E.g. Yates, *Town and Countryside*, chapter 3, especially pp. 95-6; Rawcliffe and Wilson eds., *Medieval Norwich*, pp. 213-34; A.R. Bridbury, *Medieval English Clothmaking* (London, 1982), chapter 6, especially pp. 63-4, 78-81.

⁶ E.g. Hare, *Prospering Society*, pp. 152-6, 193-4; B.M.S Campbell *et al.*, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region, c.1300* (Cheltenham, 1993); J.A. Galloway *et al.*, ‘Fuelling the City: Production and Distribution of Firewood and Fuel in London’s Region, 1290-1400’, *EcHR*, 2nd series, 49 (1996), pp. 447-72.

⁷ E.g. M. Kowaleski, ‘The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Elite: Exeter in the late Fourteenth Century’, in R. Holt and G. Rosser eds., *The English Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540* (London, 1990), p. 206 and R. Holt, ‘Gloucester in the Century after the Black Death’, in the same volume, p. 152. Other historians who have discussed the ownership of property in the countryside by townsmen in a broadly economic context include Yates, *Town and Countryside*, pp. 117-19 and Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, pp. 118-19.

ownership, particularly on the steady income and emergency capital which property could provide, although Richard Holt does note that, even if historians are doubtful of the value of rent to medieval merchants, ‘ownership of land was still clearly of importance to these people’.⁸ The most developed examination of this sort is that of R.H. Britnell, forming part of his wider investigation into late-medieval Colchester.⁹ Britnell argues that townsmen’s acquisition of property in the countryside was a purely economic practice, in which they ‘inserted themselves as intermediaries between manorial lords and the ultimate lessees and drew rents from the acquisitions’, actions which ‘reveal a frankly commercial attitude to land by men whose interests and culture were primarily urban’.¹⁰ Moreover, his analysis indicates that investment in rural property occurred predominantly at times when Colchester’s own economic fortunes were bleak, when ‘capital was starved of exciting opportunities for investment’ and ‘outlets for investment in trade and industry were even less inviting than those in agriculture’.¹¹

There are perhaps only two treatments which do not fall into these categories, both of which are concerned with Londoners. The first forms part of Sylvia Thrupp’s wider investigation into the merchant class of medieval London.¹² Thrupp identifies a multitude of reasons for their acquisition of rural property in addition to ‘purchasing’ gentility and rental income: to provide for widows and children; to endow chantries and other religious or charitable functions; as security for loans; as places for leisure; and for the direct production of goods

⁸ For contrasting views of the importance of such rents, see the work of R.H. Hilton and A.F. Butcher, e.g. R.H. Hilton, ‘Rent and Capital Formation in Feudal Society’, in his *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 174-215; idem, ‘Some Problems of Urban Real Property in the Middle Ages’, in C.H. Feinstein ed., *Socialism, Capitalism and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 326-37; A.F. Butcher, ‘Rent and the Urban Economy: Oxford and Canterbury in the later Middle Ages’, *Southern History*, 1 (1979), pp. 11-44. Quotation from Holt, ‘Gloucester’, p. 152.

⁹ Britnell, *Growth and Decline*, idem, ‘Bailiffs and Burgesses in Colchester, 1400-1525’, *Essex Archaeology and History*, 21 (1990), pp. 103-9.

¹⁰ Britnell, *Growth and Decline*, pp. 101-2, 111-14, 209-12, 259-61; quotations from pp. 260-1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹² Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, pp. 118-30, 236-7, 263-5, 279-87.

for household and industry. Thrupp's view is, in general, much more wide-ranging, and stresses the social aspects of rural landholding, as well as Londoners' personal involvement in their country property (in contrast to Britnell's judgement that the Colchester landowners were 'absentees').¹³ The second exception is Stephen O'Connor's investigation of the contrasting examples of two fourteenth-century London merchants, Adam Fraunceys and John Pyel.¹⁴ Both of these men invested in rural land and lordship, and both left substantial evidence of their activities in the form of cartularies. However, their intentions and motivations seem to have been markedly different. In short, Pyel invested in rural property in his native Northamptonshire to establish an estate to which he could retire as a gentleman, while Fraunceys's land in Middlesex was instead more of an extension of his London activities and identity. O'Connor also charts how each man's investment in rural property was linked to his commercial affairs, his relationship with landed aristocrats and the royal government, and his involvement in London's own administration, concluding that '[w]e can detect in these men subtleties of emphasis, priority and loyalty which were fashioned by a variety of often conflicting cultural, social and political influences'.¹⁵

What follows is an attempt to evaluate and build on the findings of Thrupp, O'Connor and Britnell, and to introduce a comparative element through the use of our four towns. This survey is based on a wide range of source material, which requires description here due to the difficulties of otherwise referencing the discussion below. The most obvious sources of evidence are deeds, simple records of the transfer of property. Unfortunately, deeds are among the most problematic types of medieval material to use, due to the difficulty of efficiently identifying those items which are of relevance to our study. Most surviving deeds

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-30. Britnell, *Growth and Decline*, p. 260.

¹⁴ S.J. O'Connor, 'Adam Fraunceys and John Pyel: Perceptions of Status among Merchants in Fourteenth-Century London', in Clayton *et al.* eds., *Trade, Devotion and Governance*, pp. 17-35. *Idem*, *A Calendar of the Cartularies of John Pyel and Adam Fraunceys* (London, 1993).

¹⁵ O'Connor, 'Adam Fraunceys and John Pyel', p. 32.

are contained in vast collections in local record offices, often gathered together from multiple sources by early-modern antiquarians. Searching these collections quickly is often impossible: most are not only uncatalogued, but lack any sort of organisation, logic or archival description which might give hints about the dates of the deeds they contain and the locations they refer to. Moreover, for the purposes of this study we must be able to identify that one of the parties to a deed was a townsman. In the absence of catalogues or calendars, locating relevant items would involve individually inspecting each deed across all four of our counties, an exercise which would be so time-consuming as to be impractical.

As such, most of the deeds used in this study come from those few collections which have been catalogued or calendared, notably from the archives of ecclesiastical bodies (such as Norwich Cathedral),¹⁶ from aristocratic cartularies (such as those of Thomas Tropenell and the Hungerford family),¹⁷ or from the collection preserved in the National Archives, published as the *Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*.¹⁸ Many deeds concerning townsmen's urban property were preserved by enrolment in various records of the town governments, but these rarely extended to extramural property.¹⁹ As a result of the difficulties of using deeds, the most substantial body of source material used here are the Feet of Fines which, thanks to forming part of the records of the court of Common Pleas, have survived in substantial numbers.²⁰ Debates concerning the reliability of these documents seem to have concluded that the description of the property changing hands is largely accurate, but that the amounts of money recorded are often fictional.²¹ Supplementary evidence has been taken

¹⁶ NRO, DCN 44.

¹⁷ J.S. Davies ed., *The Tropenell Cartulary* (2 vols., Devizes, 1908). J.L. Kirby ed., *The Hungerford Cartulary* (Trowbridge, 1994).

¹⁸ *CAD*.

¹⁹ E.g. DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Rolls; WSHC, G23/1/212-215 ('Domesday' Books); Wallis-Chapman ed., *Black Book*.

²⁰ TNA, CP 25/1. Calendared for Norfolk as *NFF* and for Wiltshire as *WFF*.

²¹ M. Yates, 'The Market in Freehold Land 1300-1509: The Evidence of Feet of Fines', *EcHR*, 66:2 (2013), pp. 579-600, esp. pp. 580-2, 585.

from various records of royal government, including the feudal taxation and parliamentary subsidy assessments published as *Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids*,²² passing references in the Chancery Rolls,²³ and evidence from Chancery petitions and assizes of novel disseisin.²⁴ Wills have also been consulted, although the constraints of primogeniture (that property descended according to strict rules, rather than being transferable by testament) mean that they only occasionally refer to rural property. Finally, a small number of townsmen held land as tenants-in-chief, and thus became the subject of inquisitions *post mortem*.²⁵ As well as the unknown but probably substantial number of deeds which have not been consulted, the main problem with this body of material is that it is disproportionately weighted towards the first half of the period: the *Feudal Aids* cease in 1428 or 1431, while cartularies naturally relate to transfers before the date of their compilation.²⁶ In addition, fines are far more numerous in earlier years. Of the 792 *pedes finium* which survive for Wiltshire from 1377 to 1509, 204 predate 1400 and there are 388 more before the end of 1449. Only 200 survive for the remaining 60 years.²⁷ In Devon, 203 date from the twenty-two year reign of Richard II, compared to 50 from the twenty-four of the three Yorkist kings.²⁸ Margaret Yates sees this as a reflection of a slowing land market, but it is equally likely that this was instead a result of a decline in the popularity of the fine as a means of land transfer.²⁹

A few examples of rural landholding by townsmen have been discounted. In some cases, for instance, townsmen are noted as holding land in the company of others, such as that held by John Grey of Exeter with Guy, lord Bryan, at Broad Clyst: these have been removed from

²² *Feudal Aids*. The unpublished 1436 assessments were examined, but generally fail to record the location of individuals' property within the shire, rendering them unhelpful for this purpose.

²³ CPR, CCR, CFR.

²⁴ TNA, C 1 and JUST 1.

²⁵ TNA, C 136 – C 142. Most are now published as *CIPM*, *CIPM (Hen VII)* and *CIPM (Old)*.

²⁶ The Tropenell cartulary was created in 1464 and added to until 1488, while the Hungerford cartulary almost entirely predates 1470. Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, p. ix. Kirby ed., *Hungerford Cartulary*, pp. xiii-xv.

²⁷ WFF.

²⁸ TNA, CP 25/1/44/60-66, CP 25/1/45/67-69 and CP 25/1/46/91-93.

²⁹ Yates, 'Market in Freehold Land', pp. 597-8. Below, p. 77.

our sample as it is unclear whether such instances were *bona fide* examples of rural land held by townsmen, or whether their involvement was merely as trustees.³⁰ Similarly, this discussion excludes the rural land of urban lawyers, other than those who were sons of established urban families. To include lawyers from elsewhere who happened to settle in a city and take part in its affairs would skew the sample away from ‘proper’ townsmen: this is not, after all, intended as an investigation into the landed affairs of lawyers.³¹

II (a) - Who

The first question to consider is which townsmen acquired land outside the town walls: who they were, what their occupations were and what roles they played in the government of their city. It is important to note that there is an unavoidable bias towards those men who were prominent citizens. To identify land transactions involving townsmen, we generally must either know of the man in question from the records of city government, or the transaction must itself refer to him as citizen: both of these necessarily skew our sample of rural-landowning townsmen towards the enfranchised elite. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the vast majority of townsmen who are known to have held rural land were from the urban elite, and this is equally the case across our four towns. Firstly, an overwhelming percentage were citizens.³² Of the twenty-eight Salisbury inhabitants known to have held rural property, all but one were citizens.³³ Of twenty-three Exeter men, nineteen were certainly citizens and two more are very likely to have been, while in Norwich only two of fifty-six men were not

³⁰ *CPR 1405-8*, p. 267. Townsmen acting as trustees for aristocrats are themselves of interest, but are discussed separately below, pp. 157-70.

³¹ For lawyers in the rural land market, see E.W. Ives, *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 330-67; A. Musson, ‘Legal Culture: Medieval Lawyers’ Aspirations and Pretensions’, in W.M. Ormrod ed., *Fourteenth Century England III* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 17-30.

³² For Norwich and Exeter, records of the entry of freemen have been published: W. Rye ed., *Calendar of the Freemen of Norwich from 1317 to 1603* (London, 1888) and M.M Rowe and A.M. Jackson eds., *Exeter Freemen 1266-1967* (Exeter, 1973). For Salisbury and Southampton, identification as a citizen has been taken from evidence of their involvement in city government. Similar evidence has been used to supplement the published lists for Norwich and Exeter, which are demonstrably imperfect.

³³ The remaining man, William Bryt, who rented the demesne of Homington from King’s College Cambridge, may well also have been a citizen, but has defied identification. Hare, *Prospering Society*, p. 109.

enfranchised. In Southampton, all eight such men were citizens. Whether they reflect contemporary reality or flaws in the evidence, these are certainly striking statistics.

Town	Citizens	Non-Citizens
Exeter	21	2
Norwich	54	2
Salisbury	27	1
Southampton	8	0

Table 1 – Enfranchisement of townsmen who held rural property

The impression that rural landholding was the preserve of the urban elite is reinforced by a breakdown of the political careers of these citizens, as shown in Table 2. Most noticeable is the predominance of those men who at some point served as mayor (or, in pre-1404 Norwich, as bailiff). Only in the case of Salisbury did this fall below 50% while, even taking into account the small sample size, the situation in Southampton is remarkably tilted towards sometime-mayors.

Town	(A) Mayors	(B) Other Officers	(C) Citizens
Exeter	12	4	5
Norwich	32	4	18
Salisbury	13	9	5
Southampton	7	1	0

Table 2 – Political involvement of citizens who held rural property

When we consider group (B) in the table above, those men who held urban office but never served as mayor, we find even more support for the thesis that only the greatest citizens held land outside the city walls.³⁴ Many of these men were the equals of those in group (A) and their failure to hold the mayoralty was the result of their careers or individual choices rather than ineligibility. In some cases, such as Thomas Castleton (who sold a messuage and land in Wootton Bassett in 1378) and John Bottenham of Salisbury (who sold land in Charlton to

³⁴ Evidence of political careers is taken from the various records of each city's government.

a fellow citizen in 1429), they were demonstrably of the same rank as the sometime-mayors: Castleton chose to pay a substantial fine rather than accept the mayoralty, while Bottenham was excused all office on similar grounds, although this did not prevent him being elected to the senior office of constable.³⁵ A further seven of these eighteen were members of city families who trained as lawyers, becoming involved in their cities' governments through their profession. John Alderford, who served as sheriff of Norwich in 1428-9 and four times as MP, was from a family which produced two city bailiffs in the fourteenth century; had he not become a lawyer (in which capacity he served for twenty years as city attorney), it seems very likely that he would have been elected mayor.³⁶ The same could be said of John (III) Shapleigh in Exeter, whose profession as a lawyer made him more suitable to be employed as the city's legal counsel than as mayor.³⁷

Some of those in group (C) were also of a similar rank to the mayors of group (A), such as Thomas Baron of Salisbury who sold land in Bemerton, Laverstock and Stratford-sub-Castle at some point before 1443: he was the son of Henry Baron, who had been mayor of Salisbury in 1432-3, but for unknown reasons Thomas chose not to follow his father into city politics.³⁸ Robert Asger of Norwich is never recorded as being involved in the government of the borough, but his likely kinsman William served two terms as bailiff, while John Asger, who seems to have inherited Robert's substantial landed estate at Morton-on-the-Hill and Weston Longville, was elected mayor in 1426.³⁹ John Brasyer's father, brother and nephew all served as mayors of Norwich.⁴⁰ Other members of this group were lesser figures, who were

³⁵ LB1, #11, 119, 163, 257. *CAD*, i, C.858. *WFF*, #443. Which Charlton (there are three in Wiltshire) is referred to in this transaction is uncertain.

³⁶ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 19-21. NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Rolls for 1405-21; Case 7d, Account Rolls for 1421-3 and 1428-9. CAB, ff. 129d, 135d, 139d, 143, 146d, 167d.

³⁷ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, p. 347. DHC, ECA, CRA for 1421-2 until 1444-5.

³⁸ TNA, C 1/10/78. LB1, #364. This property may, indeed, have been his father's.

³⁹ Blomefield, iii, pp. 101, 117. *NFF*, p. 378. TNA, C 1/14/18. CAB, ff. 151, 154d.

⁴⁰ *NFF*, p. 422. B. Cozens-Hardy and E.A. Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich 1403 to 1835*, (Norwich, 1938), pp. 17, 27, 40. There is a degree of confusion here, as the History of Parliament identifies John Brasyer as a priest, while the fine describes him both as a merchant and as married. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 342.

employed in less prestigious trades and were not members of important city dynasties. However, their involvement in the rural land market also supports the argument that it was the highest echelons of civic society who invested in rural property, as the great majority of these lesser men were *selling* land. What they sold was also often substantially smaller than the property bought by their more prosperous neighbours, such as the single toft in Crediton sold by Henry Skyredon, a saddler of Exeter, in 1379.⁴¹ Of the seventeen men in group (C) who were not members of prominent city families, eleven were selling rural property. A further two rented manorial demesnes, leaving only four who were purchasers, all of whom were citizens of Norwich.⁴² These purchases were themselves small, such as the five and a half acres of land in Bracondale and Lakenham which John Galoun, a butcher of Norwich, purchased in 1382.⁴³ Of the majority who were selling land, some were evidently disposing of property inherited by their wives, such as the four acres of land in Cowick sold by Walter Cobbe of Exeter and Agnes his wife in 1419.⁴⁴ In other cases, the lands in question appear to have been their own possessions. One explanation would be that these were men with rural origins, selling off their inheritances after they had established themselves in towns. The example of John Hooper of Exeter can be seen to fit this scenario, as he sold a messuage and two ferlings of land in Exminster within weeks of his admission to the freedom of the city as a hooper.⁴⁵ In other cases, these sales took place years or even decades after the seller had established himself as a citizen; Bartholomew Brown of Norwich, for instance, sold land in Field Dalling in 1441-2, ten years after his admission to the freedom.⁴⁶ This and other similar examples do not contradict the suggestion that these were first-generation city men selling off the land their parents had farmed – after all, the delay could be the result of moving

⁴¹ TNA, CP 25/1/44/62, #11.

⁴² Thomas Blithe, a baker of Norwich, rented the demesne of Wicklewood from Norwich Cathedral Priory in 1445 (NRO, DCN 44/122/12) and John Welles, butcher of Salisbury, rented Little Durnford from a minor gentleman in 1409 (Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, ii, p. 281).

⁴³ NRO, DCN 44/16/13.

⁴⁴ TNA, CP 25/1/45/78, #77.

⁴⁵ TNA, CP 25/1/45/73, #100. Rowe and Jackson eds., *Exeter Freeman*, p. 40.

⁴⁶ NFF, p. 420. Rye ed., *Freemen of Norwich*, p. 22.

to the city during their parents' lifetimes, or from the death of an heirless brother – but the lack of any clear pattern should make us wary of drawing firm conclusions about what these sales represent.

The timing of the acquisition of rural land by the men identified above also requires consideration. A few were already landholders thanks to inheritances, both from being the son of another townsman who had invested in land (such as William Appleyard inheriting from his father Bartholomew, or John from Robert Asger, both in Norwich) or from being the cadet of a gentle family which failed in the senior line (such as John Shillingford in Exeter).⁴⁷ For others, becoming involved in the rural land market was their own choice, and comparing when they chose to do so with the progress of their city political careers provides some intriguing insights. Most importantly, the majority of purchases took place before the individual's first term as mayor, and sometimes even before they held lesser office. Conversely, sales of property generally occurred after the seller had been mayor, and often in the last years of life. This is not to suggest that rural land was in any way a pre-requisite for holding urban office (indeed, as discussed below, it was very much a minority practice even amongst mayors), but that those who did choose to buy rural land tended to do so early in their careers. A good example is that of John Batyn, four times mayor of Exeter and eventual founder of a minor gentry family.⁴⁸ It is unknown when Batyn became a freeman of the city, but in 1399-1400 and 1406-7 he served as city receiver.⁴⁹ In 1416 he was elected to the mayoralty, and served three further terms before 1424. It was in October 1413, however, that he purchased the manor of Maidencombe in Stokeinteignhead, the reversion

⁴⁷ John Asger's relationship with Robert is not clear, but John seems to have inherited Robert's estate in Morton-on-the-Hill and Weston Longville. It may even have been this estate which drew John to Norwich, as he was originally from Bruges. *NFF*, p. 378. TNA, C 1/14/18. Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 20. For brief biographies of Appleyard and Shillingford, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 43-5; iv, pp. 361-2; Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 15; *Shillingford Letters*, pp. xxii-xxv.

⁴⁸ Batyn's descendant Robert was in possession of the same property bought by John Batyn at the end of the fifteenth century. TNA, E 210/9907.

⁴⁹ DHC, ECA, CRA for these years.

of the manor of Brenton in Exminster and a significant parcel of land in Stokeinteignhead from John Titchbourne, a Hampshire gentleman.⁵⁰ A similar pattern applies in the case of Gregory Draper of Norwich, who bought the manor of Morton Hall from John Asger immediately before Asger's death in 1436.⁵¹ It seems Draper sought to establish himself in this area, as he bought the adjacent manor of Helmingham Hall from the co-heiresses of the Weston family in 1440 as well as the advowson of the church.⁵² However, it was not until 1449 that Draper was elected as mayor of Norwich, although he served as sheriff in 1428-9 and as MP in 1441 and 1446. This is an intriguing pattern which requires comment, but its implications are closely related to the question of *why* these men bought rural land, and so will be discussed later.

Apart from the status of the townsmen who had some interest in rural property, the most striking point about these men is simply how few they were. In cities each with a population totalling in the thousands, only a few dozen are recorded as having possessed land.⁵³ The discussion above has highlighted the predominance of the highest tier of urban society amongst those who did hold rural property, but even here those who did hold rural land were very much in the minority. A dramatic demonstration of this is that the number of Salisbury men who are known to have held rural property across this entire period – twenty-eight – is only four more than the number of citizens who at any one time sat on the highest council in the city government. Nor is there any suggestion that those townsmen who did hold rural land formed a distinct group at the pinnacle of elite civic society, for whom the ownership of property outside the city boundaries was a prerequisite or an important part of their group identity. Instead, these rural landowners were a small subsection of the urban

⁵⁰ TNA, CP 25/1/45/76, #1.

⁵¹ TNA, C 1/14/18. Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 20.

⁵² *NFF*, p. 419.

⁵³ Although we must bear in mind that the figures used here are certainly an underestimate of the true number, given that, as discussed above, the surviving evidence is frustratingly incomplete.

elite: there is little in their behaviour or political careers to distinguish them from the other leading citizens who did not (to our knowledge) invest in rural land. In the case of Salisbury, it is true, there is a distinct prevalence of drapers amongst the men who did invest in rural property. Salisbury's elite was dominated by drapers and grocers, so it is certainly intriguing that it was the drapers rather than grocers who were more involved in rural land, although even for them it was not a universal or even majority practice. In Exeter and Norwich, meanwhile, the major trades are all equally present in our sample. In summary, no real patterns can be identified by examining which townsmen were involved in the rural land market, other than the predominance of the governing elite and this, by itself, is not especially diagnostic of the intentions of these men.

II (b) – What

If the identities of townsmen who acquired rural land does not help answer the question of why they did so, we should also consider what they purchased. As discussed above, one possibility is that townsmen purchased manors to transform themselves into gentlemen. The evidence from our towns suggests that the purchase of manors by townsmen was certainly a reality, but was only one thread in a broader canvas. The Appleyard family of Norwich were the closest fit to this view of urban involvement in the countryside, with a transformation across three generations from burgesses to middling gentry. Bartholomew Appleyard (d.1386) was amongst the most important citizens of Norwich in the reign of Edward III, serving three times as bailiff. He seems to have established the landed fortunes of the family, purchasing at least three manors immediately to the south of the city – in Intwood, Bracon Ash and Hethel – as well as a substantial amount of other land.⁵⁴ His son, William (d.1419), took as his first wife a daughter of the gentry family of Clere and became closely involved in

⁵⁴ Blomefield, iii, pp. 40, 83-4, 104. *NFF*, p. 375.

their affairs.⁵⁵ This William was also connected with William Rees, a substantial local esquire, with each man probably marrying the other's sister, as well as being involved together in various land transactions.⁵⁶ William Appleyard also served as escheator of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1402-3, an office normally held by minor gentlemen.⁵⁷ However, he also played an entirely conventional, if particularly eminent, role in the affairs of Norwich, serving three terms as bailiff and then as the city's first mayor, as well as being elected to parliament on ten occasions. It was only on William's death that the Appleyards made the transition to the countryside, with his son Nicholas frequently being described as 'esquire' but never holding office in the city.⁵⁸

Henry Lomynour, a Norwich contemporary of Bartholomew and William Appleyard, seems to have intended to follow a similar path, but was denied the same success by dynastic mortality. Lomynour acquired at least four manors in the region immediately south of Norwich, but on his death at some point before 1414 this estate disintegrated, as his son William had predeceased him.⁵⁹ What exactly happened to Lomynour's manors is uncertain, but they each passed to other families. A Henry Lomynour, perhaps the Henry junior who acted as an executor of the first Henry's will, was said to hold land by feudal service elsewhere in Norfolk in 1428 (where the same family still held a manor in 1537), but there is nothing to connect the Norwich Henry with this location.⁶⁰ There are a few similar examples of families from our other towns seeking to promote themselves into the gentry through the acquisition of manorial lordships, such as the Wilfords and Batyns of Exeter.⁶¹ Another

⁵⁵ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 43-5. Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 15. For Appleyard's involvement with the Clere family, e.g. *CPR 1416-22*, p. 65, *CAD*, v, A.12367.

⁵⁶ E.g. *CCR 1399-1402*, p. 287; *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 446.

⁵⁷ TNA, E 136/144/1. Below, p. 98.

⁵⁸ E.g. *CCR 1436-41*, p. 469; *1441-6*, p. 36.

⁵⁹ *NFF*, pp. 394, 396.

⁶⁰ *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 605-7. *Feudal Aids*, iii, p. 555. Blomefield, vi, pp. 476-7.

⁶¹ For the Wilfords see *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 866-8, and J.J. Alexander, 'Exeter Members of Parliament Part II: 1377 to 1537', *TDA*, 60 (1928), pp. 202, 204. For Batyn, see TNA, CP 25/1/45/76, #1 and E 210/9907; and *Feudal Aids*, i, p. 485.

group which also purchased manors were the sons of prominent city families who had trained as lawyers. In Norwich, John Alderford and William Ampulford both purchased manors (two in Little Fransham (Norfolk), and one in Tuddenham (Suffolk) respectively), while the Exeter lawyer John (III) Shapleigh bought a manor in Exminster and William Alexander of Salisbury assembled a reputed manor in Winterbourne Cherborough.⁶²

Although only a minority of our sample acquired manors, as opposed to other tracts of land, the differing patterns between our four examples are worthy of comment. In Exeter, only three men are recorded as having acquired manors by means other than personal inheritance: John Batyn and John Shapleigh both bought manors (Shapleigh, incidentally, from Batyn), while Thomas Cook acquired a fourth part of the manor of Exton as his wife's inheritance.⁶³ Four Salisbury men also acquired manors: William Alexander has already been mentioned, while William Bockett purchased a manor in Ringwood, Hampshire, John Levesham obtained 'Cormayles' in Netheravon by unknown means and that of Duller in Dorset by marriage, while John Hall came into possession of Shipton Bellinger and Swaythling, Hampshire, as a result of them being the security for an unpaid loan.⁶⁴ In Southampton, our only possible example is reliant on an uncertain identification of John Emery, mayor in 1433-4 and 1440-1, with the man of the same name who held a manor at Braishfield in 1428.⁶⁵ In Norwich, however, there were many more examples, with eighteen men acquiring manors; not only was this a higher absolute figure, but it represents nearly a third of the total Norwich sample, as opposed to around a ninth in the case of Exeter and Salisbury. In addition,

⁶² The careers of these men are discussed in *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 19-21, 23-4, 31-2; iv, p. 347.

⁶³ TNA, CP 25/1/45/76, #1 and CP 25/1/45/79, #20. *CPR 1429-36*, p. 86. The Wilford family at some point acquired manorial property (and, indeed, reached armigerous rank in the generation after leaving the city) but no record of how or when they acquired this property has survived. TNA, C 140/57/57.

⁶⁴ TNA, PROB 11/9/60, C 1/25/128-131, and CP 25/1/207/34, #28; *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, p. 596; *VCH Wilts*, xi, pp. 165-81; *The Victoria County History of Hampshire* (5 vols., 1900-12), iv, pp. 512-14; *CCR 1454-61*, p. 59. In addition, John Judd held half the manor of Salterton, but this appears to have been by life grant of the true possessor, perhaps as an arrangement for the settling of debts: *CIPM*, xxiii, #43.

⁶⁵ *Feudal Aids*, ii, p. 348.

Norwich men were more likely to acquire more than one manor. In Exeter, the greatest concentration of lordship was that of John Batyn, who purchased one manor and the reversion (never realised) of another, while John Levesham and John Hall (as mentioned above) were the only examples in Salisbury.⁶⁶ In Norwich, eight men held more than one, of whom five held three or more.⁶⁷

This strikingly different pattern in Norwich deserves discussion, and the most likely explanation is that manorial lordship was more readily available in Norfolk than in Devon or Wiltshire. As Carpenter in particular has noted, manors were rarely available for purchase, as they were, in all but a few instances, sold only as a matter of last, desperate resort.⁶⁸ This fits the pattern found in Devon, Wiltshire and Hampshire: although little work has been done directly on the availability of lordship in these counties, the examples of those families who did acquire manors in this period are strongly suggestive. In Devon, new families tended to rise due to either the accidents of inheritance (such as the Bonvilles), by royal patronage (such as the Holland earls of Huntingdon), or, at lower social levels, through aristocratic service (such as the Coplestons).⁶⁹ Social mobility through the acquisition of land has not been the subject of much discussion in Wiltshire, but, as noted above, rising families such as the Hungerfords often had to look outside the county for manors to purchase, suggesting that little was available in Wiltshire.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ TNA, CP 25/1/45/76, #1. The reversion was sold to John Shapleigh in 1424, and he was recorded as in possession by 1428. TNA, CP 25/1/45/79, #20. *Feudal Aids*, i, p. 482.

⁶⁷ Roger Blickling, Thomas Bumpstead, Gregory Draper, William Norwich, Henry Sturmer and Thomas Wetherby.

⁶⁸ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 97-8, 119-34.

⁶⁹ For the Bonvilles, see M. Cherry, 'The Crown and the Political Community in Devonshire, 1377-1461' (University College Swansea Ph.D. thesis, 1981), pp. 81-98. For the earls of Huntingdon see *ibid.*, pp. 154-74 and *idem* 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 90-1. For the Coplestons, *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 651-3.

⁷⁰ Above, pp. 35-6.

However, late-medieval Norfolk is renowned as a county which nurtured the fortunes of many ambitious new families: not only the Pastons, but the Yelvertons, Oldhalls, Knyvetts, Fastolfs and many others. For many of these, purchase was an important component in the acquisition and consolidation of their landed, gentle status.⁷¹ It seems fair, therefore, to suggest that the availability of manors was a very significant factor in determining how many were acquired by townsmen. In addition, most of our townsmen only acquired manors which were either ‘reputed’ (that is those manors of dubious legitimacy and origin which often consisted of a number of small parcels scattered across more than one parish or vill) or else had been subdivided out from a capital manor by subinfeudation centuries earlier, or by the division through multiple heiresses. Of the forty manors which are known to have come into the possession of our townsmen, thirty-two were either explicitly subdivided, or did not correspond to parishes or vills. Henry Lomynour’s four manors, for example, were ‘Lomynours’ in Caistor St. Edmund, ‘Cursons’ and ‘Fulburn Hall’ in Swainsthorpe and ‘Hacuns’ in Great Melton.⁷² No comparative study of the subdivision of manors across the country seems to have been undertaken, but even a brief inspection of surveys such as the *Victoria County History* or Blomefield’s *History of Norfolk*, and of contemporary material such as fines, makes it very clear that such ‘named’ manors, and thus presumably smaller, subdivided manors in general, were much more common in Norfolk than in Devon, Wiltshire or Hampshire.⁷³ Tellingly, of the few manors which were acquired by the men of Salisbury and Exeter, all but two were either portions or small hamlets which lacked, for instance, their own parish church: Maidencombe near Stokeinteignhead, Brenton near

⁷¹ See e.g. Smith, “‘Greatest Man of that Age’”, pp. 137-54 on Sir John Fastolf or *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 870-2 on Edmund Oldhall.

⁷² *NFF*, pp. 394, 396.

⁷³ The complexity and subdivision of manors in Norfolk has been much commented on (e.g. Campbell, ‘Complexity of Manorial Structure’; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, pp. 31-7), but similar studies have not been undertaken in Wiltshire, Hampshire or Devon. However, see J. Whittle and M. Yates, “‘Pays Réel or Pays Légal’: Contrasting Patterns of Land Tenure and Social Structure in Eastern Norfolk and Western Berkshire, 1450-1600”, *Agricultural History Review*, 48:1 (2000), pp. 1-26 for a comparison of manors in ‘East Anglian’ and ‘Midlands’ areas, albeit one that focuses on the impact on tenants rather than lords and the market in manorial lordship.

Exminster, a quarter of the manor of Exton, ‘Cormayles’ in Netheravon and ‘Laybrook’ in Ringwood.⁷⁴

We must also consider the sub-manorial land bought by townsmen. These parcels could range from the tiny, such as the single toft bought by Benedict Wechehals of Exeter in the market town of Chudleigh in 1427, to quite substantial estates, like the four messuages and nearly three hundred acres of land, meadow and alder which Thomas Cook of Exeter received from his trustees in 1448.⁷⁵ The majority of these parcels were of a dwelling or two, and 50-80 acres of land. An entirely typical example would be the purchase by John Noble of Salisbury of a messuage, a toft, a garden, 60 acres of land, 4 acres of meadow and common pasture for 12 oxen and 200 sheep in Upavon and Rushall in 1427.⁷⁶ These lands were held in freehold, variously the result of alienations by manorial lords in preceding centuries or of assarting, and they represent examples of a type of tenure which, it has been suggested, was more common in the east of England.⁷⁷ Only a small minority of townsmen have been identified who held more than one of this sort of estate. In addition to these sub-manorial holdings, there are also four examples of townsmen renting manorial demesnes, three from ecclesiastical institutions and one from a local gentleman. Thomas Blithe rented the demesne of Wicklewood from Norwich Cathedral Priory, while both Nicholas Noble and William Bryt of Salisbury rented that of Homington from King’s College, Cambridge.⁷⁸ John Welles, a butcher of Salisbury, rented the demesne of Little Durnford from Nicholas Woodhull for twenty years in 1409.⁷⁹ A small minority of other transactions were also leases rather than

⁷⁴ TNA, CP 25/1/45/76, #1 and CP 25/1/207/34, #28. *CPR 1429-36*, p. 86. *VCH Wilts*, xi, pp. 165-81. *CIPM*, xxiii, #143. *CFR 1413-22*, pp. 279, 343. The two exceptions were John Hall’s manors of Shipton Bellinger and Swaythling, which, as already mentioned, were pledged as collateral for a loan, rather than offered for sale.

⁷⁵ TNA, CP 25/1/46/80, #41 and CP 25/1/46/88, #233.

⁷⁶ *WFF*, #417.

⁷⁷ R.H. Hilton, *The Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England* (London, 1969), pp. 18-19.

⁷⁸ NRO, DCN 44/122/12. Hare, *Prospering Society*, p. 109.

⁷⁹ Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, ii, p. 281.

purchases: Simon Grendon of Exeter, for instance, rented a parcel of land in Cowley, including 200 acres of pasture, for the term of the lives of the owners.⁸⁰

It is worth noting here that, in contrast with the manors discussed above, the acquisition or rental of sub-manorial parcels of land cannot be seen as evidence that the townsmen involved were seeking an *entrée* into landed society. Indeed, this section suggests that involvement of townsmen in rural land fell into two distinct categories based on what sort of property they held: those who acquired one or more manors, and those who purchased or rented sub-manorial land. Whether this reflected a difference in each group's motivation for looking outside the city walls for land is a question which will be addressed below.

II (c) - Where

As well as what these men acquired, we must also consider where it was. While the location of urban purchases was no doubt controlled as much by availability as by the preferences of the townsmen, geographical patterns nonetheless emerge within our examples. One pattern shared across our four example towns is that of proximity to the town itself: this is unsurprising given that these men, whatever their involvement in the countryside, were originally townsmen and (for the very great majority) continued to consider the town the centre of their interests. In addition, the majority of urban-held property which was distant from cities was being sold, such as the reversion of a messuage and land in Milton Damerel (near Devon's Cornish border) sold by John Glamville of Exeter in 1417.⁸¹ John Burgate of Norwich sold land in Didlington and Foulden (near Norfolk's border with Cambridgeshire) in 1404-5, while Thomas Castleton of Salisbury quitclaimed a messuage in Wootton Bassett, the other side of Wiltshire from Salisbury.⁸² Although we cannot be certain, it seems probable

⁸⁰ TNA, CP 25/1/44/65, #86.

⁸¹ TNA, CP 25/1/45/77, #56.

⁸² NFF, p. 393. *CAD*, i, C.858.

that these were inheritances, or perhaps property which had been used as security for loans. In Exeter and Southampton, the pattern of extramural property appears to be entirely determined by proximity to the town, although it is notable that property in other boroughs and market towns could draw the citizens further afield: Dartmouth, Newton Abbot, Great Torrington and Plymouth in Devon, Winchester and Petersfield in Hampshire.⁸³

In Salisbury, however, the geographical pattern of the citizens' rural property was quite different. Leaving aside the very frequent ownership of property in Old Sarum, Stratford-sub-Castle, Fisherton Anger and other settlements which formed the city's suburbs, the holdings are spread out in a distinct band of south-east Wiltshire⁸⁴ stretching from just south of Salisbury itself to Ludgershall and Netheravon in the north (see Map 3). The valleys of the Bourne, Salisbury Avon, Wylde and Till are dotted with land which was held by a citizen of Salisbury. By contrast, only three parcels of land outside these valleys have been identified, and only one of these (Thomas Castleton's at Wootton Bassett, mentioned above) was outside the south-east quarter of the county.⁸⁵ Such a pronounced pattern requires explanation, especially given how it relates to the geographical distinctions which split Wiltshire in half.⁸⁶ The fact that almost all of these properties were in manors on the chalkland suggests that the choice of location was based on the agriculture of this region, which centred on wool or grain.⁸⁷ However, rather than the whole of Salisbury Plain being represented, or a rough ring of properties centred on the city, the distribution is markedly skewed towards the eastern side of the Plain, to the north of the city. The western half of the Plain, in the valleys of the Nadder, Ebbles and upper Wylde, was entirely without land held

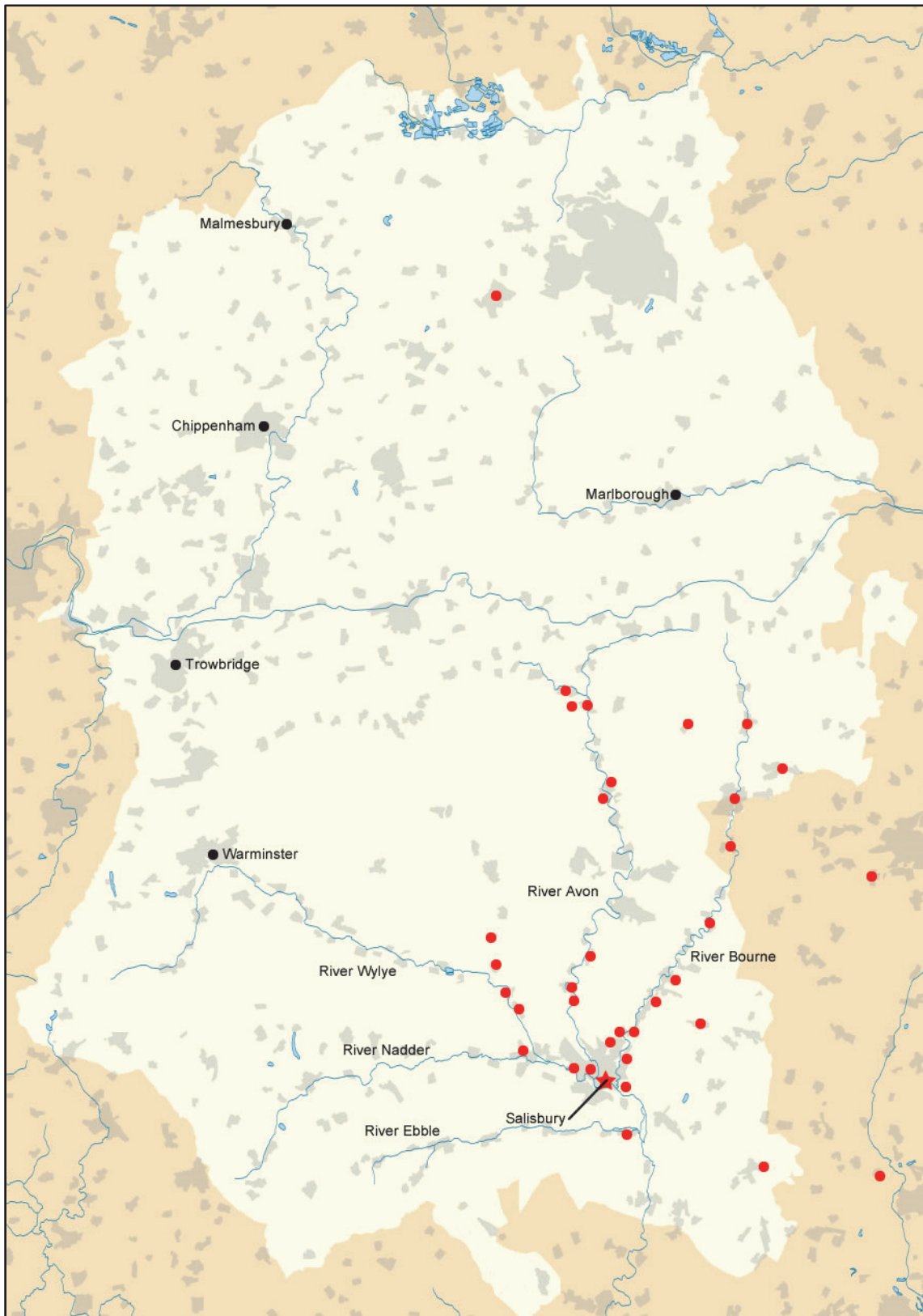
⁸³ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 52-3. TNA, CP 25/1/45/76, #16, CP 25/1/45/70, #14, CP 25/1/45/73, #90 and CP 25/1/45/68, #153.

⁸⁴ Including a small salient of Hampshire around Shipton Bellinger.

⁸⁵ *CAD*, i, C.858.

⁸⁶ Above, pp. 32-3.

⁸⁷ Hare, *Prospering Society*, pp. 12-13, 60-72.



Map 3 – Rural land held by citizens of Salisbury, 1377-1509

by men of Salisbury, despite much of it being far closer to Salisbury than places like Netheravon or Collingbourne Kingston where citizens did hold land. Given that there is no real distinction in the physical geography of these two areas, we must instead consider other options, the most likely of which is the differing levels of church landholding.⁸⁸

Although a high percentage of all of Salisbury Plain was held by the church, it was especially predominant in the western half of the chalkland. In particular, the Wiltshire lands of Wilton and Shaftesbury Abbeys and of the bishop of Winchester were clustered here.⁸⁹ By contrast, the valleys in which Salisbury citizens purchased land were roughly split between the church and secular lords, but the majority of the land they bought was located on non-ecclesiastical manors, including those held by the duchy of Lancaster, the lords Hungerford, the lords West and the Berkeleys of Beverstone.⁹⁰ The few ecclesiastical manors on which Salisbury citizens did purchase land were all immediately outside the city: the bishop of Salisbury's manors of Milford and Woodford and the abbess of Wilton's at Laverstock.⁹¹ The reasons for the citizens' preference for non-ecclesiastical land are probably two-fold. Firstly, it is generally acknowledged that the manorial system was far stronger on manors held by the church, particularly in retaining various servile dues and services.⁹² Secondly, the church (particularly these ancient and wealthy Saxon institutions) was less likely to have needed to sell land in the past to raise money. If the freehold parcels which citizens most frequently bought were either less common on ecclesiastical manors, or had been alienated with more onerous exactions still owing to the lord, then it would go some distance to explaining the trend described here. Another possibility is that townsmen did acquire land on ecclesiastical

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-18.

⁸⁹ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, ii, pp. 109-11. *Victoria County History of Dorset* (2 vols., 1908-68), ii, pp. 73-9.

⁹⁰ *VCH Wilts*, vi, pp. 37-50; x, pp. 136-46; xv, pp. 143-53. *WFF*, #125, 417. TNA, C 1/10/78. *CIPM (old)*, iv, p. 385. All of these properties were bought in freehold from previous freehold owners; none involved purchase from the manorial lords. As noted above, these were most likely parcels of land which had been alienated from the manor or assarted before the Black Death.

⁹¹ *VCH Wilts*, vi, pp. 90-3, 221-7. *Valor Ecclesiasticus* ii, p. 69. *WFF*, #23, 389. TNA, C 1/10/78. *CIPM (old)*, iv, p. 385.

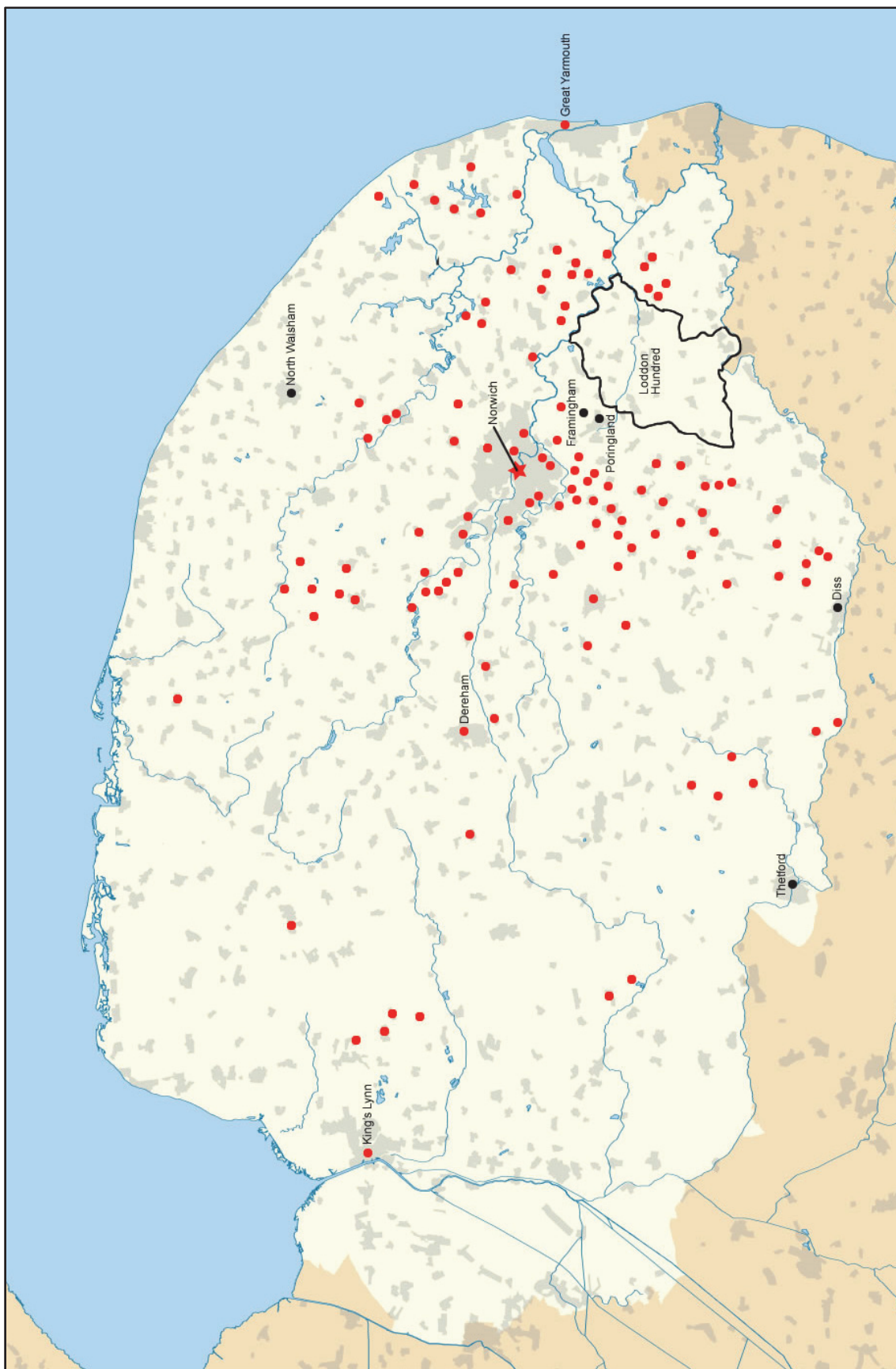
⁹² M. Bailey, *The English Manor c.1200-c.1500* (Manchester, 2002), p. 8.

manors, but that it was held in copyhold: it is noteworthy, however, that neither of the studies of the peasant land market in Wiltshire mentions townsmen.⁹³

In Norwich, a more complicated situation emerges (see Map 4). Although, as in Exeter and Southampton, the overall pattern forms a ring surrounding the city, we can determine a definite preponderance of property in three distinct areas. The first, and greatest, stretched from immediately south of the city almost up to the border with Suffolk on a roughly south-south-west axis, generally between the Newmarket and Ipswich roads and extending slightly east of the latter. Humbleyard hundred, just to the south-west of the city, was a particular centre of urban activity in the land market. The second area stretched along the Fakenham road, running out of the city to the north-west, while the third was between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. These acquisitions were predominantly in the central, eastern and southern region of Norfolk, noted for its heavy soils and dispersed, pastoral (particularly cattle-based) agriculture; it was also an area noted in the sixteenth century as having a more widely-based landownership structure than the north and west of the county.⁹⁴ However, as in Wiltshire, there was little to differentiate areas *within* this region in terms of geography or agriculture, and we are again left to consider the possibility that different forms of lordship explain why Norwich men invested in some areas but not others. There are definite signs that they avoided areas held by the higher secular aristocracy and the church: particularly striking is the gap in urban-owned land in the region of Poringland and Framlingham (just to the south-east of Norwich), which coincided with a group of manors held by the earldom/duchy of Norfolk. Similarly, the complete lack of examples in Loddon Hundred, despite its position

⁹³ J.N. Hare, 'Lords and Tenants in Wiltshire, c.1380-c.1520' (London Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1975). R.C. Payne 'Agrarian Conditions on the Wiltshire Estates of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Lords Hungerford and the Bishopric of Winchester in the 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries' (London Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1939). Britnell, it should be noted, found that the occupation and subletting of copyhold land was a reasonably common practice in Colchester.

⁹⁴ Hassell-Smith, *County and Court*, pp. 3-8. T. Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, Society, Environment* (Oxford, 2003) is entirely dedicated to identifying the different forms of agriculture and settlement in East Anglia, and its impact on society.



Map 4 – Rural land held by citizens of Norwich, 1377-1509

between two areas with a high frequency of urban ownership, strengthens the suggestion that townsmen avoided areas with strong manorial institutions, as Loddon had a noticeably less subdivided manorial system than other parts of the county, and included several other manors held by the earls of Norfolk.⁹⁵

Areas of fragmented lordship, it would seem, attracted townsmen to invest in rural property, or perhaps they *could* only acquire land in these areas. In particular, it would seem that a history of weak lords and fragmented manors was particularly attractive, as this produced the freehold parcels and smaller, subdivided manors which townsmen bought. It is notable that in Norfolk the areas where townsmen acquired land were in hundreds held by the crown or in private hundreds which had decayed, such as Depwade.⁹⁶ In addition, these were areas which (as with much of Norfolk, although particularly strongly here) in earlier centuries had a very high population density and a high proportion of freemen.⁹⁷ There is also a strong possibility that townsmen themselves were a force which encouraged and sustained fragmentation of lordship and tenure. In particular, the fact that townsmen were not peasants, and that they maintained loyalties and interests outside of their rural property increased the likelihood of their possessions becoming effectively detached from normal structures of lordship.

II (d) – Why

Having examined the questions of which townsmen bought rural property, what they bought and where it was located, we are in a better position to ask why they bought it, although this is a question still fraught with difficulties. As mentioned above, Sylvia Thrupp offers a range

⁹⁵ According to Blomefield's survey of manors in Loddon Hundred, only a small minority had been subdivided (notably Loddon itself), compared to a hundred such as Humbleyard or Henstead where this was the norm. Blomefield, v, pp. 1-122, 417-527; x, pp. 93-193.

⁹⁶ Blomefield, v, pp. 123-4.

⁹⁷ Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, pp. 32-5, 46-50.

of reasons and several are represented in the examples found in this survey.⁹⁸ One man can be shown to have used rural land for the benefit of his soul: William Sedman of Norwich bought the manor of Bowthorpe in 1409 and granted it to the Collegiate Church of St. Mary in the Fields sometime after 1413 to endow a ‘fifth conduct’ called ‘Sedman’s Priest’.⁹⁹ William Bockett’s landed investments allowed provision for his widow, as his will ordered that his manor of ‘Laybrook’ in Ringwood should be used to provide an annuity.¹⁰⁰ We even have one example of the investment in property for leisure, as William Soper’s mansion at Newton Bery was perfectly positioned for hunting in the New Forest which, as a verderer, was Soper’s right; the account of a Florentine guest makes clear that this was something he took frequent advantage of.¹⁰¹ Thrupp also suggests that townsmen used land as a form of capital in case of later financial difficulty: this is perhaps the case for some examples here, but to demonstrate this intention is impossible from our evidence.¹⁰² However, these proposed motivations do not encompass all of our examples above, and it is necessary to consider the other reasons suggested by Thrupp, Britnell and others: the use of manors to purchase entry into landed society, and the acquisition of property to produce income through rent.

There is a logical symmetry here concerning the two different types of property identified above, that one group of townsmen acquired manors to secure gentility, and that another bought sub-manorial plots to rent out for profit. For some who purchased manors, gentry status was definitely their aim, as demonstrated both by their actions and their outcomes. The Appleyard family again provide the best example. Not only did they purchase several manors, but they also sought to consolidate their position by acquiring additional forms of

⁹⁸ Above, pp. 47-8.

⁹⁹ Blomefield, ii, p. 386. Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, PROB 11/9/60.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Rose ed., *Navy of the Lancastrian Kings*, p. 16. *CPR 1422-9*, p. 460. *CCR 1441-7*, p. 259.

¹⁰² Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, pp. 122-3, 127-8.

lordship, notably a grant of view of frankpledge for the manor of Hethel.¹⁰³ Together with their personal involvement (including marriages) with members of the substantial gentry, it is clear that membership of county society was at least one goal of their rural activities, and quite possibly the main intention.¹⁰⁴ A generation later, Robert Toppes provides a reasonably similar example, also from Norwich.¹⁰⁵ John Batyn of Exeter also fits this category, as he founded a gentry family which lasted until at least 1499.¹⁰⁶ However, there are only two further definite examples of an urban family forming a gentry line from our towns and these – the Halls of Salisbury and the Wilfords of Exeter – present further complexity. In the case of the Wilfords, this is because we have no record of how they acquired their rural land, which makes it difficult to judge whether securing gentility was their definite intention.¹⁰⁷ The Halls, meanwhile, acquired their manors as a consequence of an unpaid loan: this may represent a strategic gamble to acquire manorial lordship, but it may equally suggest that they came to possess manors almost by accident.¹⁰⁸

There were also families who probably bought manors as a means of joining landed society, but failed because of problems of inheritance and mortality. Thomas Wetherby of Norwich was one example: having built up an estate of at least three manors near Norwich, Wetherby retired to the country as an esquire following the defeat of his faction in city politics.¹⁰⁹ However, his heirs were his two daughters, and thus his property descended to their husbands, members of the gentry families of Wynter and Jenney.¹¹⁰ Given the similarity of his career to the Appleyards, especially in his personal dealings with county society, it seems

¹⁰³ CPR 1388-92, p. 489. TNA, C 143/411/26.

¹⁰⁴ Below, pp. 152-5.

¹⁰⁵ Below, pp. 152-4.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, E 210/9907.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, CP 25/1/45/73, #77 and CP 25/1/45/75, #129.

¹⁰⁸ Above, p. 59.

¹⁰⁹ NRO, Phi/99 577x1 and MC 44/36, 500x1. TNA, C 1/26/281. *CIPM*, xxvi, p. 214. Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, pp. 20-2. W.J. Blake, 'Thomas Wetherby', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 32 (1959), pp. 60-72.

¹¹⁰ See below, pp. 152-3.

highly likely that had Wetherby been survived by a son, his property would have formed the basis of a new gentle line. This pattern probably also applies to lawyers with urban backgrounds such as William Alexander of Salisbury, as all of the examples of such men from our towns died without male heirs: in Alexander's case, his property descended to a friend by an entail, while John (III) Shapleigh of Exeter's land was probably inherited by his daughter, the wife of the Devon lawyer John Gambon esq.¹¹¹

In other cases, however, townsmen's purchase of manors does not neatly fit with this assumption that their aim was to secure gentility. John Asger of Norwich, for example, chose to sell his manor of 'Morton Hall' (Morton-on-the-Hill, about eight miles north-west of Norwich), along with land in nearby Weston Longville, and apparently gained more than six hundred marks by doing so.¹¹² Given that these figures were used by his widow to claim that Asger was wealthy at his death (apparently to the sum of £4000), it follows that these sales took place shortly before his demise.¹¹³ However, Asger was survived by a son, also called John and also a merchant of Norwich, who, had his father intended, could presumably have inherited the manor and other lands. The fact that John senior instead chose to sell off his possessions would seem to suggest that the purpose of the manor was unrelated to any desire to enter landed society, while his apparent wealth indicates that the sale was not due to poverty.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, John Winterton of Norwich acquired the manor of Witton perhaps as the inheritance of his wife, but rather than taking the opportunity to establish himself as a gentleman, he sold it to the dowager countess of Norfolk.¹¹⁵ William Sedman, mentioned above, used his manor of Bowthorpe (one of the few in our sample which was not

¹¹¹ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 24; iv, p. 347.

¹¹² TNA, C 1/14/18.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Admittedly, the fact that the younger John died only a few months after the elder may suggest that he was critically ill when the father chose to sell the property. *CPR 1429-36*, pp. 112, 116; Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 20; Blomefield, iv, p. 266.

¹¹⁵ *NFF*, p. 376. Blomefield, vii, pp. 265-7.

subdivided, and which included an advowson) to endow a collegiate priest instead of to support any pretensions to gentility.¹¹⁶

For the majority of urban manor-owners identified in our sample, we have no substantial indication of what they intended to use their property for, but these examples of townsmen treating manors in ways which were very different from traditional perceptions should give us pause before we accept the idea that townsmen with the means to do so always sought to become gentlemen. It is worth recalling here the pattern identified above, where most townsmen who served as mayors bought their rural land, including manors, before they were elected to the mayoralty.¹¹⁷ If the purpose of buying manors was to acquire gentry status and thus ‘escape’ towns, why would townsmen who had already purchased lordships continue to live in boroughs and take part in their governance? Moreover, even if every manor-owner whose intentions and aspirations are unknown is assumed to have purchased his manor(s) for the purpose of joining county society, none of them can be proven to have succeeded in the ‘acid test’ of establishing a gentry family: either accidents of mortality prevented them, or townsmen’s attitudes to manorial lordship were significantly more diverse than has previously been recognised.

If the situation regarding manors is more complicated than might have been expected, what of the sub-manorial parcels? Here we are particularly frustrated by the lack of direct evidence of what these lands were used for: had, for instance, rent rolls or household accounts survived for some of our townsmen, we might be in a better position to conclude confidently. One possibility is that this land was used for direct production, whether for household consumption or for sale. The Cely letters, for instance, include Richard (I) Cely’s complaint

¹¹⁶ Blomefield, ii, pp. 385-7.

¹¹⁷ Above, pp. 55-6.

that he could not manage the family business and his ‘hosbanry in the contre’ at the same time without assistance, while Thrupp found an example of a similar date where a mercer of London ‘with lands in Bedfordshire left his mother to manage sheep and wool.’¹¹⁸ Thrupp also found that bequests of grain and stock were a frequent component of London wills and that trading in agricultural produce produced on their own estates was a common practice, to the extent that one master goldsmith had to be sworn to properly train his apprentice, rather than employing him to thresh corn.¹¹⁹ In our towns, evidence of direct involvement in production is limited to Salisbury: here, the predominance of drapers amongst the men who bought land, and of provision for grazing of sheep on the land they purchased suggests that these men intended to establish a private supply of wool. Certainly, Salisbury men are known to have owned sheep, and on at least one occasion to have bequeathed them to one another.¹²⁰ The acquisition of two mills near Salisbury by John Butterleigh, a prominent cloth merchant and known sheep-owner, could also be considered as part of a trend of merchants seeking to contribute to their own supply chain, although it is uncertain whether these were, in fact, fulling mills.¹²¹ Another possible example is that of William Pakyn of Salisbury, who was rewarded by the city government for selling grain at his own loss during a time of high prices. While it is not certain that this was his own produce, it is certainly a possibility, especially given contemporary views on reselling and forestalling grain.¹²²

The other possibility is that these sub-manorial parcels were purchased in order to provide a source of income through rents, as suggested particularly by Britnell.¹²³ As mentioned above, this could be seen as an extension of the widely-acknowledged practice of townsmen building

¹¹⁸ A. Hanham ed., *The Cely Letters, 1472-1488* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 91-2. Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, p. 130.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

¹²⁰ E.g. WSHC, G23/1/212 (Domesday Book 3), f. 68. *CPR 1388-92*, p. 495.

¹²¹ TNA, CP 25/1/207/28, #20. *WFF*, #23.

¹²² LB1, #264. For examples of Salisbury bylaws concerning sale of grain, seen *ibid.*, #203, 344, 374, 419.

¹²³ Above, p. 47.

up substantial portfolios of property within their boroughs.¹²⁴ Certainly, citizens in our towns were involved in the urban rental market, sometimes to quite a significant extent. The episcopal rental of Salisbury in 1455, for instance, records the urban property owned by the citizens, with particularly impressive individuals including William Swayne (thrice mayor) who owned twenty three tenements and shops, and John Hall (four times mayor) who held sixteen.¹²⁵ William Lightfoot (mayor in 1451-2) owned three inns, as well as a number of smaller properties.¹²⁶ In the 1454 Terrier of Southampton a similar pattern emerges, albeit generally on a smaller scale commensurate with the town's smaller size. William Soper, probably the wealthiest burgess, is noted as owning and renting out six properties and having previously done the same with three more.¹²⁷ The Terrier also included former owners, with William Nicoll (at least four times mayor in the 1410s and 1420s) recorded as having once held no fewer than 25 properties in the town and Thomas Middleton (mayor four times in the 1400s) sixteen.¹²⁸ In the Southampton Terrier, where occupation as well as ownership is recorded, men are often recorded as owner and occupier of one (generally substantial or 'capital') tenement, with the remainder of their property explicitly recorded as being rented, mostly to other, less prosperous townsmen.¹²⁹ Similar patterns of prominent citizens collecting together a substantial urban rent roll have been discovered elsewhere, especially by Thrupp in London and by Kowaleski in Exeter, who noted that men in the highest echelon of civic society were three times more likely to sue for debts relating to rent than those who belonged to the next highest social tier.¹³⁰ As mentioned above, some historians have questioned the value of rents to merchants and other townsmen, but the cases of Londoners with annual rental incomes of £120 and £153 and the numerous examples here

¹²⁴ Above, pp. 46-7

¹²⁵ WSHC, D1/1/5, ff. 155-162d.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ L.A. Burgess ed., *The Southampton Terrier of 1454* (London, 1976), #117, 125-7, 147, 149-50, 262, 474.

¹²⁸ For Nicoll, *ibid.*, #98, 119-21, 164-6, 174-6, 245-6, 265-6, 268-9, 272, 273-4, 279, 287, 341, 357. For Middleton: #12-14, 17, 216, 251-2, 253-6, 334, 467-8, 476, 489.

¹²⁹ In Soper's case, all his property was rented out, as he himself had retired to Newton Bery. Above, p. 70.

¹³⁰ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, pp. 119-21. Kowaleski, 'Commercial Dominance', pp. 205-7.

of men with a dozen or more rented properties must indicate that rents could form a significant source of income.¹³¹

If there was a vibrant market for land and rents in towns, why would townsmen look beyond the city walls for opportunities? One possibility is that this was an attempt to diversify their sources of income, in the event that economic difficulties within the town might reduce either the rental price or the overall demand for property.¹³² However, even to engage with this question is to accept an underlying assumption that, from the perspective of our townsmen, there was some critical difference between purchasing land for rent in towns and doing so in the countryside, and it is far from clear that this was the case. Purchasing and renting out rural land may well have brought these men into contact with different jurisdictions and institutions (and may therefore also have required them to develop the expertise necessary to navigate those systems), but their underlying motive was identical: to generate profit by investing their capital in rentable property.

Two objections arise to this suggestion that townsmen might have viewed urban and rural land as being equally promising investment opportunities. The first is that only a very small number of townsmen, according to our investigation, acquired rural property, compared to the more widespread involvement in urban rentals. Secondly, in contrast to the large portfolios of tenements in towns, those who expanded their interests to the countryside only acquired single properties. Taken together, these points might indicate that rural property was acquired only by a certain subset of townsmen, and that the intended use was distinct in purpose as well as in pattern from their urban rents. Closer investigation, however, renders

¹³¹ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, p. 120.

¹³² The decline in urban rents over the later middle ages has been discussed as part of the general 'urban decline' debate, although no satisfactory conclusions seem to have ever been reached. See e.g., Dobson, 'Urban Decline' p. 18; Palliser, 'Urban Decay Revisited', p. 3.

these objections unpersuasive. Firstly, while townsmen (according to the pattern identified above) only rarely purchased more than one parcel in the countryside, these single purchases were themselves substantially larger than the tenements held in the towns. They would, therefore, have been more expensive than urban dwellings, but they could also probably be rented out for a higher sum. While conducting any form of comparative, quantified ‘cost-benefit’ analysis is impractical, the difference in scale alone between a single urban tenement and a substantial farm surely implies a commensurate difference in both price and rent.

Furthermore, if the source material used in this study very likely underestimates townsmen’s involvement in rural land, this is especially the case for these smaller, sub-manorial plots. The possession of manors was far more likely to be recorded, particularly as they were often held in ways which interested central government, notably knight service (as recorded by the Feudal Aids) and as tenants-in-chief of the crown (inquisitions *post mortem*). By contrast, smaller parcels were, in general, only recorded when they changed hands and here the difficulties presented by using deeds are particularly problematic.¹³³ Margaret Yates, for instance, has noted that fines were increasingly concerned with only larger, more complex parcels as the fifteenth century drew on, which in her view was the result of a sluggish land market and an increase in the average size of peasant farms. However, it is equally likely that this instead reflected a change in the use of fines (which, as Yates notes, were an increasingly expensive and complex means of transferring property), with smaller property instead being transferred by deeds which have either not survived, or else are buried in sprawling, uncatalogued collections.¹³⁴

¹³³ See above, pp. 48-9.

¹³⁴ Yates, ‘Market in Freehold Land’, pp. 581, 582-92, 597-8.

This is in stark contrast to the records for *urban* property, which are mostly concerned with exactly these sorts of small transactions. These are easily accessible to historians due to the general practice of enrolling deeds relating to urban property in town court rolls and books of evidence, making the task of locating urban deeds much simpler.¹³⁵ Indeed, without this more helpful form of organisation (and perhaps also the better rate of survival associated with institutional archives), would the pattern of townsmen's urban property not look remarkably similar to that described above for their rural land? Without these sources we would most likely be forced to conclude that only a few townsmen were involved in urban renting and that even for those who were, it was a minor practice of little social and economic relevance. While it is impossible to prove, there must be a strong suspicion that ownership and renting of rural property was substantially more important to late medieval townsmen than might appear at first glance.

In general, then, the reasons why townsmen acquired rural property seem to be far more diverse than much of the historiography suggests.¹³⁶ Indeed, in all likelihood townsmen bought land for a wider range of reasons than those discussed here, and often for a combination of purposes: the evidence is simply insufficient to make stronger conclusions. One important theme, however, is that these purchases seem, for the most part, to have been intimately connected with townsmen *as urban figures*, forming an extension of their role as town-based businessmen. The idea of merchants desperately toiling at their trade to acquire the means to purchase a landed estate and 'escape' towns simply cannot be supported as being a common practice from the evidence discussed here. Indeed, this concept can barely be sustained at all, given that even those few who did join gentry society, such as the

¹³⁵ E.g. DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Rolls. WSHC, G23/1/212-215. Wallis-Chapman ed., *Black Book*. This practice was enforced in Salisbury by the bishop as lord of the city. LB2, f. 37.

¹³⁶ The honourable exceptions here being Thrupp's very wide ranging treatment, and O'Connor's recognition of the complexity of townsmen's attitudes to land.

Appleyards of Norwich, did not hasten to cast off their urbanity immediately upon acquiring landed estates. It was only upon the inheritance of sons who had never been involved in urban government (and who had, perhaps, themselves grown up in the country) that families such as the Appleyards truly changed from urban to rural figures.

This is rather surprising. There is an assumption in much of the historiography of late-medieval England that to have been or become a landed gentleman was in and of itself a positive thing, and that those who possessed the means to elevate themselves to such a rank would almost universally have taken the opportunity to do so. Often this assumption is only implicit, or only displayed by omission, such as in discussions of men who aspired to landed gentility which do not consider the question of *why* they would choose to do so. On other occasions, however, the pre-eminence of landed gentility is explicitly stated. The most developed discussion of the aims and expenditure of late-medieval lawyers, for instance, focuses on their acquisition of rural land and lordship.¹³⁷ In the words of the author, '[i]n fifteenth-century England, success and security were measured in one commodity – land' and men 'turned...to the law for the money to purchase an estate'.¹³⁸ Introducing a volume on the 'attitudes' of fifteenth-century society, Rosemary Horrox states that '[i]t was axiomatic that anyone who achieved wealth or influence should invest their gains in land as soon as possible' and that while '[t]he acquisition of land did not concern the whole population', those excluded from this concern were those who could never conceivably have afforded it.¹³⁹

In the specific context of townsmen, we can find similar assertions of the universal desirability of landed gentility. Jennifer Kermode, for instance, suggests that 'it might be

¹³⁷ Ives, *Common Lawyers*, part iv, especially pp. 330-53.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹³⁹ R.E. Horrox, *Fifteenth Century Attitudes* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 2-3.

supposed that merchants cherished social ambitions' but, faced with only a handful of examples of townsmen becoming landed gentlemen, she concludes that too little land was probably available and that '[f]or the majority the most they could hope for was status within their own communities'.¹⁴⁰ Even Sylvia Thrupp chooses to concentrate on the factors which might frustrate or ease a townsman's passage into the landed gentry, rather than investigating whether this was the aim of all substantial citizens or only a certain subgroup.¹⁴¹ Other urban historians have, however, given more thought to the question of how townsmen viewed landed gentility. In contrast to her sweeping remarks quoted above, Rosemary Horrox has elsewhere produced a far more nuanced view of how townsmen might have acquired gentry status, concluding that *landed* gentility was only one of the possibilities.¹⁴² Instead, she argues that townsmen could claim to be gentlemen based on a number of factors including royal office, royal and aristocratic service, wealth, and even their status within their home boroughs, as well as land. If the examples from our four towns caution us against assuming that successful townsmen universally or frequently sought landed gentility, we should not take this as evidence that they were entirely disbarred from acquiring gentry status.

A few townsmen did, however, demonstrably seek landed gentility as well as or instead of the sort of 'urban' gentility discussed by Horrox, and it is still unclear what distinguished these men. The suspicion must be that a simple matter of personal preferences and ambitions was responsible, as Stephen O'Connor concluded in his investigation of Adam Fraunceys and John Pyel.¹⁴³ Another possibility (or alternatively something which contributed to such personal preferences) is related to the fact that many of the gentry families who are known to have had urban backgrounds had originated in smaller, less prestigious towns. The

¹⁴⁰ J.I. Kermodé, 'The Merchants of Three Northern Towns', in C.H. Clough ed., *Profession, Vocation and Culture in later Medieval England* (Liverpool, 1982), p. 37.

¹⁴¹ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, pp. 279-87.

¹⁴² Horrox, 'Urban Gentry'.

¹⁴³ O'Connor, 'Adam Fraunceys and John Pyel'.

Hawleys, for instance, dominated the government of Dartmouth in the fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, but their concerted investment in rural land and lordship meant that the last two male members of the family were reputed as esquires.¹⁴⁴ The Spring family of Lavenham demonstrate a similar transformation, albeit at a slightly later date.¹⁴⁵ Were particularly eminent figures in smaller boroughs more likely to seek gentility than the leading citizens of larger towns? If so, could it perhaps be a reflection of the differing status of large boroughs: was it more prestigious to be, say, mayor of Exeter than mayor of Dartmouth, and did the latter therefore need to look elsewhere for ways to improve his ‘worship’? This possibility may be profitably connected to Horrox’s concept of ‘urban’ gentry, as it seems plausible that the various elements which together could be used to support urban gentility might have been more readily available for citizens of larger towns. If men from smaller settlements like Dartmouth and Lavenham were, for example, less likely to secure royal offices as well as receiving less prestige from their positions in urban government, then perhaps ‘urban’ gentility was unavailable to them, making land and lordship their only route to social advancement. Alternatively, might this pattern have been a reflection of a less developed sense of community in smaller towns, perhaps leading to a more outward-looking mentality among their most prosperous citizens?

III – Aristocrats in Towns

‘Transmural’ landholding was not, of course, restricted to the ownership of rural land by townsmen: members of the gentry and nobility could and did purchase property in towns. Unfortunately, we immediately encounter a similar range of issues caused by the limitations of the available evidence. As mentioned above, transactions involving urban property are generally more accessible than those concerning rural land, due to the practice of enrolling

¹⁴⁴ For biographies of John (I) and John (II) Hawley, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 328-32.

¹⁴⁵ C. Tracey *et al.*, ‘Thomas Spring’s Chantry and Parclose at Lavenham, Suffolk’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 164:1 (2011), pp. 221-2.

private deeds in municipal records, and also the possibility of transferring urban property in wills.¹⁴⁶ However, these sources only give evidence for urban property which changed hands during this period. Any property which stayed within a family line, such as a gentry family's townhouse, is less likely to have been enrolled in such a manner. It also seems plausible that gentlemen and other aristocrats would have been less interested in enrolling their deeds in city records: for townsmen, this was an important means of authenticating their purchases for security, something which the nobility and gentry were more used to doing through witnesses and feoffees.¹⁴⁷

Non-urban records pose additional problems for identifying urban property. Although many gentlemen were, for instance, the subject of inquisitions *post mortem* (on account of holding manors in chief), their urban property was sometimes not included. Thus, for instance, we know from another source that Sir John Baynton owned two tenements in Salisbury in 1455, but these do not appear in the inquisition held on his death a decade later.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, the Pastons are known to have owned a tenement called 'Paston's Place' in Norwich, along with the advowson of the parish church of St. Peter Hungate, but neither appears in John (I) Paston's inquisition *post mortem*.¹⁴⁹ The reasons for these exclusions are difficult to determine, but it seems to have been a particular problem in Norwich: perhaps it was the result of separate administrative structures (exaggerated in Norwich's case by its status as a county from 1404 onwards).¹⁵⁰ Another possibility is that urban property, being freely disposable,

¹⁴⁶ Above, pp. 48-9.

¹⁴⁷ As already mentioned, this was not the case in Salisbury due to the bishop's requirement that transfers be recorded. However, many of the 'Domesday Books' (in which deeds and wills were enrolled) have been lost, and there is also evidence suggesting the rule was often ignored. LB2, f. 37. For the gentry and feoffees, see e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 291-312.

¹⁴⁸ WSHC, D1/1/5, ff. 159d-60. *CIPM (old)*, iv, p. 331. It does, however, appear in the IPM of Nicholas Baynton almost fifty years earlier: *ibid.*, iv, p. 60.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 336. This does, however, record that he owned a tenement in Great Yarmouth. Blomefield, iv, pp. 330, 333.

¹⁵⁰ Southampton was also granted county status but, as discussed below, far fewer aristocrats held property in Southampton than in Norwich.

was more likely to have been alienated before death. Similar issues affect other sources of information on aristocratic property: feudal aid assessments, for instance, do not include urban property as it was not held by knight service. As such, the most useful forms of evidence for aristocrats' urban property are the rare occasions when a 'snapshot' of ownership was recorded. The two best examples of this are the Southampton Terrier of 1454 and the 1455 episcopal rental of Salisbury, both of which contain an apparently-complete survey of the ownership of property in the city.¹⁵¹ More fragmentary evidence of this type exists elsewhere, such as the various landgable assessments which have survived for Norwich from the 1460s and 1470s, while some records of national taxation (notably the 1412 assessment) also record urban property, albeit only substantial holdings.¹⁵² There is, therefore, sufficient evidence of urban property owned by aristocrats to draw some meaningful conclusions, especially when we also accept the testimony provided by early-modern antiquaries, who had access to material (particularly in the form of physical demonstrations of ownership, such as stained glass and other forms of heraldry) which has subsequently been lost. The most important point is that aristocrats' property in towns can be broadly divided into two categories: large collections of property, much or all of which was rented out, and single, larger dwellings (or townhouses). We will investigate each of these in turn.

III (a) - Rental Property

Collections of rented tenements are less interesting for our purposes than townhouses, as they reveal little other than that aristocrats were willing to use urban property to diversify their sources of income. Aristocrats of a variety of ranks came into possession of portfolios of houses in towns, but in the case of the substantial gentry it seems to have been an almost-

¹⁵¹ Burgess ed., *Southampton Terrier*. WSHC, D1/1/5, ff. 155-62d.

¹⁵² NRO, NCR Case 7i. *Feudal Aids*, vi, pp. 449-58, 529-42. R. Virgoe, 'A Norwich Taxation List of 1451', in his *East Anglian Society*, pp. 65-78.

accidental consequence of marrying the heiresses or widows of urban lawyers. There is no evidence of gentlemen of this rank actively purchasing urban property in our towns, suggesting that the motivating factor for these marriages was the heiress's rural manors: the collection of urban tenements was, at most, a bonus. However, these gentlemen do seem to have seen some value in urban property, as they rented the tenements out, rather than simply disposing of them. Richard Holt, a substantial Hampshire esquire, acquired a group of tenements in Southampton by marrying Joan, the heiress of William Chamberlain, recorder of Southampton from c.1428-c.1439.¹⁵³ The Southampton Terrier records that in 1454 Holt had rented out eighteen tenements, an empty plot and a garden, while two further tenements were recorded as vacant.¹⁵⁴ Joan Chamberlain subsequently re-married to Constantine Darell, another esquire, taking the Southampton property with her.¹⁵⁵ This was matched in the case of the Dorset esquire Thomas Hussey, who married the widow of the Salisbury lawyer William Alexander: again, the motivating factor was presumably her life interest in her first husband's rural property, but it is noteworthy that Hussey not only kept the Salisbury tenements, but also arranged for them to pass to his son.¹⁵⁶ In some instances, the origin of a substantial gentleman's urban property is unknown, such as the four tenements and two shops which Sir Stephen Popham is recorded as having once held in Salisbury and the unspecified possessions mentioned in Sir William Bonville's will.¹⁵⁷ However, the fact that we have no definite examples of such high-status men buying multiple properties in towns means that we should be cautious of any suggestion that these more mysterious portfolios

¹⁵³ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 514.

¹⁵⁴ Burgess ed., *Southampton Terrier*, p. 165.

¹⁵⁵ Darell is recorded as holding the same property in the later annotations to the terrier (dating to the first decade of the sixteenth century), but these later entries do not record tenancies, only ownership. *CIPM (Hen VII)*, i, #1255.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander's rural property was entailed on himself and his wife for their lives. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 24; iii, pp. 466-7. WSHC, D1/1/5, f. 157.

¹⁵⁷ For Bonville: F.C. Hingeston-Randolph ed., *The Register of Edmund Stafford* (London, 1886), p. 391. *CIPM*, xix, p. 165. For Popham, WSHC, D1/1/5, f. 160. These were perhaps inherited from his great-uncle, Sir Laurence St. Martin, who held property in Salisbury on his death in 1385. *CIPM (old)*, iii, p. 76. *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 113-15, 116-17.

are evidence that some substantial gentlemen were indeed active investors in urban tenements.

Aristocrats of slightly lesser rank, by contrast, demonstrably did seek out opportunities to supplement their income with urban rents. A uniquely well-documented example from elsewhere is the substantial collection of urban property in Coventry amassed by the founder of the Catesby family, the lawyer William Catesby, across the fourteenth century.¹⁵⁸ As well as a family townhouse, this included 30-40 rental dwellings, which generally provided an annual income of about £20 across the fifteenth century.¹⁵⁹ In our four towns, we only have evidence of similar holdings in Salisbury and Southampton, something which may reflect a genuine absence of such investments in Exeter and Norwich, but might also be a result of the more extensive records available for Salisbury and Southampton.¹⁶⁰ The most spectacular example was William Ludlow, a royal household servant and minor officeholder in Wiltshire.¹⁶¹ In the 1455 episcopal rental of Salisbury, Ludlow was found to own over forty houses in the city, more than twice as many as any other man.¹⁶² Another royal servant, Edmund Langton, held a more modest collection of five properties.¹⁶³ Lawyers also bought up substantial groups of urban property, including those which were inherited by the more significant figures discussed above. As well as purchasing property, some of these lower-ranking aristocrats married widows or daughters of townsmen and thereby acquired pre-existing collections of tenements. Ludlow, for instance, had gained at least twenty of his properties as his wife's inheritance: before this, they had been held for life by her mother, who had re-married to another royal servant (and associate of Ludlow's), Richard Etton.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ N.W. Alcock, 'The Catesbys in Coventry: A Medieval Estate and its Archives', *Midland History*, 15 (1990), pp. 1-36.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁰ Above, p. 83.

¹⁶¹ For Ludlow's career, see *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 561-2.

¹⁶² WSHC, D1/1/5, f. 158d.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 161.

¹⁶⁴ *WFF*, #386. For Etton, below, pp. 130-1.

John Dawtrey, a royal customer in Southampton in the reign of Henry VII, probably married the widow of Walter William (mayor in 1482-4) who brought with her twenty properties in the town.¹⁶⁵

As discussed in the next chapter, ownership of urban property was often a prelude to these men taking part in urban government, but this was almost certainly not their primary motivation in purchasing tenements: if they were simply seeking to qualify themselves for urban office, one tenement would often have sufficed, as property requirements for office were only occasionally specified.¹⁶⁶ Instead, acquiring urban rents is a symptom of the fact that these men were generally too poor to purchase manorial lordship and too low status to marry into the gentry, meaning that they had to look elsewhere for ways to invest their money. We might draw a parallel with the ambitious lawyers and others (like the townsmen already discussed) who were likely to buy small, subdivided or contested manors or assemble their own ‘reputed’ manors from assorted plots of land: like urban property, these were beneath the notice of the established gentry, but could be a meaningful investment for those of slightly lower status.

III (b) - Townhouses

At a basic level, townhouses are rather straightforward: as discussed above, towns such as these were the sites for various events which were of importance to the local nobility and landed gentry, making a townhouse an obvious convenience.¹⁶⁷ This was particularly relevant for substantial county lawyers, whose professional business often brought them to towns.

¹⁶⁵ TNA CP 25/1/294/82, #8. It is not entirely certain that Walter William’s widow and Dawtrey’s wife are the same, but it seems very likely. William certainly left his Southampton property to his widow by terms of his will and Dawtrey certainly held property in Southampton which had formerly been held by the William family. TNA, PROB 11/7/269. Burgess ed., *Southampton Terrier*, #374-6, 384. Wedgwood records that Dawtrey married Jane, the widow of ‘Watkyn Williams’ but does not cite his sources. *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 263.

¹⁶⁶ Palliser ed., *Cambridge Urban History*, pp. 300-1.

¹⁶⁷ Above, pp. 12-14.

Indeed, the residences originally acquired by lawyers seem to have represented a substantial proportion of gentry townhouses: as successful legal families joined the gentry or married into existing gentry lines, they took their urban property with them. Sir Robert Berney's Norwich residence ('Berney's Inn'), for instance, was an inheritance from his father, an important county lawyer whose two sons founded separate gentry families.¹⁶⁸ It later came into the possession of William Phelip, lord Bardolf, via their mutual friend Sir Thomas Erpingham.¹⁶⁹ The Copleston family rose to gentility through the success of John (I) (d.c.1433) and John (II) Copleston (d.1458), both important county administrators employed by the diocese of Exeter and the earls of Devon.¹⁷⁰ Their townhouse in Exeter, 'Kelly's Inn', had come to the family by the gift of a lawyer, Thomas Raymond, who in 1418 bequeathed it to his wife for life and thence to John (II).¹⁷¹

This pattern of certain residences passing between different aristocratic families was not limited to property once held by lawyers. One particularly extreme example was the tenement later called 'Skipwith's Place' in Norwich, which in 1420 passed from the Elmham family to Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, by a provision in the will of Sir William Elmham's widow.¹⁷² At various other points, it had been held by John Yelverton (d.1408) and by a William Morley (perhaps the lord Morley of that name, who died in 1379), while by 1474 it was in the hands of William Skipwith esq.¹⁷³ The townhouse owned by Sir Simon Felbrigg in the same city eventually came into the hands of the Yelverton family and then passed to the

¹⁶⁸ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 208-10.

¹⁶⁹ *CIPM*, xxv, p. 408.

¹⁷⁰ For this family, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 651-3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 652; iv, p. 179.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, iii, p. 17.

¹⁷³ NRO, NCR, Case 7i, Landgable assessment for Conesford and Berstrete wards, 1474. According to the antiquary Francis Blomefield, this property also passed through the hands of lord Bardolf and Sir John Carbonel, although this is hard to confirm. Blomefield, iv, p. 106.

Pastons.¹⁷⁴ In Exeter, the Bonville family's 'hostiel' had been acquired by Sir William (I) (d.1408) from Lord Audley.¹⁷⁵ The means by which these houses changed hands is often unclear, but they were regularly transferred as a provision in a will, while some (such as Bonville's) appear to have been simple purchases. Very occasionally, aristocrats also inherited what appear to be townhouses from townsmen: John Norman esq., for instance, inherited a single property in Norwich as well as two manors in Helmingham by marrying the heiress of sometime-mayor Gregory Draper.¹⁷⁶ As this range of examples suggests, we have more evidence for townhouses in Norwich and Exeter than in Salisbury and Southampton. Norwich's townhouses are particularly interesting because, thanks to the antiquarian Francis Blomefield, we have far more evidence of their actual location within the city as well as confirmation that the 'messuage' or 'tenement' was, in fact, a substantial townhouse. In Exeter this is sometimes unclear, but it seems fair to assume that most of the gentlemen who are recorded as owning solitary messuages (especially named properties) were, in fact, the owners of townhouses rather than miscellaneous rental properties. If this is accepted, then both cities can be shown to have been the site for over a dozen townhouses, owned by a respectable cross-section of the nobility and substantial gentry of the surrounding county.

In Salisbury and Southampton, by contrast, there were far fewer examples, despite the fact that they were the subjects of comprehensive ownership surveys in this period. In 1455, there are five examples of probable townhouses in Salisbury, owned by Lord Stourton, Sir John Baynton, the local gentlemen Simon Milborne and John Stoke esq., and the lawyer (and episcopal bailiff) John Whittocksmede.¹⁷⁷ Inquisitions *post mortem* add a couple of tentative

¹⁷⁴ Known variously as the 'Music House' and 'Wensum Lodge', the building still stands. Blomefield, iv, pp. 72-3, 76-7. C. King, 'House and Society in an English Provincial City: The Archaeology of Urban Households in Norwich, 1370-1700' (Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2006), pp. 99, 146; figure 83.

¹⁷⁵ Hingeston-Randolph ed., *Register of Edmund Stafford*, p. 291. *CIPM*, xix, p. 165.

¹⁷⁶ For Draper's landholding, see above, p. 56. For this marriage, see below, p. 151; and Blomefield, iv, p. 489.

¹⁷⁷ WSHC, D1/1/5, ff. 155-62d. Stourton, Baynton and Stoke almost certainly possessed townhouses, as they held named capital messuages ('Buntysplace', 'the Abbey' and 'the Swan', respectively). Stourton and Baynton were obviously substantial figures, but Stoke is totally unknown unless he is the man of that name who was of

additional examples.¹⁷⁸ In Southampton, there are no definite examples, although it is possible that single tenements owned and rented out by the gentry (notably by the Popham and Berkeley families) may have been used as townhouses at other points.¹⁷⁹ This variation in the number of townhouses is presumably linked to the differing relationships between each city and its region. As discussed in the Introduction, Wiltshire was home to far fewer aristocratic families than Devon or Norfolk, and this may explain the commensurate lack of aristocratic residences in Salisbury. Southampton, meanwhile, lacked the ‘county’ functions that Exeter, Norwich and (to a lesser extent) Salisbury performed, and was also not the seat of a diocese.

This interpretation would confirm the hypothesis that gentlemen who acquired townhouses probably did so mostly for practical reasons, connected to the role of some towns as venues for events which were important to the gentry. It is also notable that the men discussed above were significant figures from across their respective counties, rather than gentlemen from the immediate vicinity of the town, again suggesting that these townhouses were related to the town’s administrative functions rather than being extensions of adjacent landed estates. However, even if owning a townhouse was a practical measure, there was probably also a less practical element to the way that aristocrats actually used their townhouses: they were an obvious means to display their owners’ status, both to townsmen and to rural peers. It is notable, for instance, that of the Norwich townhouses for which we have evidence, the vast majority fronted onto one of the city’s major thoroughfares, King Street, which led from the cathedral and the main marketplace to the city’s southern gates at Carrow.¹⁸⁰ This clustering

some importance in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, including as JP in the latter. *CPR 1446-52*, pp. 578-9; *1452-61*, pp. 648, 675.

¹⁷⁸ Sir Thomas Romsey (*CIPM (old)*, iv, p. 52) and Sir Hugh Cheyne (*ibid.*, iii, p. 113).

¹⁷⁹ Burgess ed., *Southampton Terrier*, #101-2, 353-6. The Berkeley property is rather less likely to have been a townhouse, as it apparently consisted of three cellars with superstructures and a vacant plot.

¹⁸⁰ Blomefield, iv, pp. 76-7, 79, 83-4.

suggests the existence of what might even be described as a gentry neighbourhood within the city, which implies the possibility of competition, as well as of socialisation and commensality among the families in residence. The fact that Robert Toppes, one of the Norwich citizens who demonstrably aspired to gentility (he both purchased a rural manor and married into the gentry), purchased a house in this district is perhaps indicative of this area being popularly associated with the gentry.¹⁸¹ Presumably this is the house in which we find Margaret Paston dining with Toppes's wife, Lady Felbrigg and other 'jantyll women' in 1451, again suggesting that townhouses could play an important role in the gentry's social lives.¹⁸² In many respects, a townhouse was more suitable than even an elaborate country house as a means of both entertaining friends and displaying wealth, as it was visible and accessible to all those who visited the town, rather than just to the those who lived near or happened to visit a country residence. This again suggests that towns could be important theatres in gentry life, but it does little to indicate a desire to take part in urban affairs, or to mingle with the civic elite. Indeed, this sort of clustering might even indicate that the gentry particularly sought to avoid living amongst the urban elite, whose residences were generally in the streets to the west of the cathedral and on the north side of the Wensum.¹⁸³ There was even something of a barrier between these two, formed by the castle and the Augustine and Franciscan Friaries, although we should be wary of pushing this thesis too far, as King Street itself was an important commercial thoroughfare on account of its numerous stathes and moorings along the length of the Wensum.

¹⁸¹ King, 'House and Society', p. 100. It should be noted that Thomas Wetherby, who also purchased manors and married his daughters into the gentry, was the alderman for Conesford ward, which includes this area. The exact site of his own residence is unknown. Maddern, *Violence*, p. 200. For more on Wetherby and his links to the Norfolk gentry see below, pp. 149-50, 257-9.

¹⁸² J.D. Gairdner ed., *The Paston Letters* (6 vols., London, 1904), ii, p. 251.

¹⁸³ See e.g. Cozens-Hardy and Kent eds., *Mayors of Norwich*, pp. 15-30 for the mayors of this period, who almost universally lived in this area of the city.

The use of townhouses to display status was matched by the gentry's use of religious institutions in towns to display their piety, particularly in testamentary bequests. The most obvious beneficiaries were cathedrals, friaries and certain prestigious hospitals. Sir Thomas Erpingham, for instance, contributed a new gateway to Norwich cathedral, a new church building for the Dominicans and a substantial stained glass window to the Augustine Friars, which apparently portrayed the arms of all the gentry families of Norfolk and Suffolk which (like Erpingham's) failed in the male line between 1327 and 1419.¹⁸⁴ This was particularly extravagant, but is otherwise quite typical of a gentleman's acts of piety: as well as the parishes in which they held manors, their bequests most frequently went to religious foundations in provincial towns.¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, of course, the popularity of urban religious institutions for aristocratic bequests was a reflection of the popularity of cathedrals and friaries, almost all of which were located in towns. However, we should note that far more modest urban religious institutions also received contributions from the gentry. John (I) Paston, for instance, rebuilt the church of St. Peter Hungate in Norwich, while a number of gentry families appear to have contributed to the rebuilding of St. Giles, Norwich, during the reign of Richard II.¹⁸⁶ Others used provincial towns as the site for their own foundations. Sir William (I) Bonville (d.1408), for instance, ordered the creation of a 'Maison Dieu' in Coombe Street, Exeter, to be funded by the amortisation of land worth fifty marks per annum, including all his 'Rente' in Exeter.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, the influential Devon lawyer (and Exeter recorder) William Wynard chose Exeter as the site for the almshouses he established.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Blomefield, iii, p. 524; iv, pp. 86-8, 544.

¹⁸⁵ For the geography of the gentry's religious patronage, see e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 229-37; eadem, 'Religion', in R. Radulescu and A. Truelove eds., *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 134-50.

¹⁸⁶ Blomefield, iv, pp. 246, 330.

¹⁸⁷ Hingeston-Randolph ed., *Register of Edmund Stafford*, p. 291.

¹⁸⁸ See *Statement Relating to William Wynard's Charity in Exeter* (Exeter, 1865) for a history of Wynard's 'godeshouse' or almshouses.

It is probably not too cynical to suggest that, alongside genuine religious devotion and a fear of hellfire, one factor which motivated gentlemen to donate generously to religious institutions (particularly in highly visible forms such as buildings and stained glass) was to publically stress their piety (and the financial capability to support it) to their peers. That towns were one of the major settings in which this took place is again probably a result of the fact that they were natural gathering points for the gentry of a region, and thus the ideal location for a structure such as the Erpingham Gate, which served to illustrate not only a man's religious belief but also his wealth, power and 'worship'. However, just as with townhouses, there is little indication that these endowments were in any way connected with any interest in urban government or urban society on the part of the benefactor. The actual town was, it seems, quite irrelevant apart from as a physical location: it was a host for prestigious religious institutions and a central geographical point in the lives of the landed gentry.

IV – Conclusions

These two investigations into transmural landholding have distinct similarities. Although a range of townsmen bought property in the countryside and a number of aristocrats bought property in towns, the majority of each group did so in a way which was ultimately part of their original identity, rather than in a way which combined or confused 'urban' and 'rural'. Townsmen bought rural land, but for the most part it did not change their position as urban-based figures whose primary interests were in commerce and urban government. Gentlemen and other aristocrats bought and maintained townhouses, but as a means of furthering their interests as rural figures, rather than as a means of interacting with urban society. As a 'theatre' in which townsmen and aristocrats might have interacted, therefore, transmural landownership has not been especially productive: there is little indication that these men

purchased their transmural property in order to interact with political society on the other side of the city walls.

There is, of course, the possibility that such interaction might have occurred accidentally: there would naturally have been more of a chance of contact occurring if members of each group were in the same physical location regularly. In addition, holding property in the countryside would have brought townsmen under the authority of various manorial and county offices, roles which were normally discharged by aristocrats and their retainers and servants. Conversely, ownership of townhouses and other urban property would have brought aristocrats into contact with town governments, as they were drawn into the jurisdiction of urban magistrates and became liable for urban taxation. On a subtler level, it also seems plausible to suggest that familiarity with the physical environment in which the other group operated might have led to an appreciation of its social and political structures. However, we must recall the problem discussed in the Introduction: the evidence available to us does not give much insight into these more informal forms of urban-aristocratic interaction.¹⁸⁹ In particular, although we can reasonably conclude that physical proximity produced some contact between aristocrats and townsmen, we cannot go further and ascertain the wider importance of such interactions. If townsmen and aristocrats met one another because of their transmural property then that is, of course, interesting, but in order to judge the significance of such meetings we must also be able to answer questions about the nature of the contact (what, for instance, did they discuss?) and its longer-term impact (did any friendships or other meaningful relationships emerge?). In the absence of evidence which would help us answer questions of this kind, it is impossible to conclude that such ‘accidental’ contact was an important form of urban-aristocratic connection.

¹⁸⁹ Above, p. 23.

In both urban and aristocratic society, however, there were exceptions to the pattern of limited and inconsequential contact: townsmen who bought manors as a means of joining the gentry, and aristocrats (particularly lawyers and royal servants) who bought urban property, both as an investment and (as we shall discuss in the following chapter) to qualify for urban office. Taken together, these exceptions have a number of similarities: they were generally ambitious men who aspired to use the income from their profession, service or trade to secure their long-term financial position and also to make a bid for higher status, including gentility. This is a group of figures we will encounter again in subsequent chapters, as their liminal status allowed them to easily cross the administrative and social boundaries between town and country.

2 – Government

I – Introduction

Royal government was a theatre which both united and divided urban and aristocratic society. Members of both groups took part in government and recognised themselves as being the king's officers, but they nevertheless discharged responsibilities in very different spheres. Indeed, the concept of an overarching 'royal government', containing both urban and rural local government may not even have occurred to them. Urban and rural local government were ultimately very different from one another, and not only in terms of their spheres of competence and the personnel who staffed them: there was also a very striking distinction between what might be termed their philosophies. In the countryside, a combination of property requirements and tradition created a stratified structure, in which each of the familiar handful of offices was held by a succession of men of a similar social status and from a similar background, appointed by the king (or, in practice, often the chancellor). From the greater gentry who served as sheriffs and justices of the peace, through the lesser gentlemen and professional administrators who discharged the office of escheator, to the marginal figures who were employed in roles such as coroner or tax collector, the gradations of local government both reflected and reinforced the hierarchy of landed society in the county. Thus a society which was based on landed wealth (and ultimately on the authority and coercive power which land and lordship brought) produced a government organised along the same lines, as government naturally has to involve those with the authority to make it function.¹

In towns, the situation was weighted towards slightly different priorities and values. Perhaps most obviously, the offices were filled by election, rather than by the nomination of the king or chancellor. As in the countryside, residency was important, but was more formalised

¹ See e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 263-77.

through the institution of citizenship (the ‘liberty’ or ‘freedom’ of the town). Citizenship could be gained in a number of ways, but the majority were founded on the principle of the town being a person’s home and place of business.² However, within the higher echelons of city government, perhaps the greatest prerequisite for holding office (besides the obvious necessity of wealth) was administrative experience. Unlike in rural local government, where the ‘appropriate’ office for a man was determined by his status, urban government maintained a *cursus honorum* whereby men advanced sequentially through a series of offices, (theoretically) gaining experience and competence along the way. Although hegemony or dictatorship were discouraged by ordinances preventing consecutive mayoral terms or re-election within a certain period, experience and seniority were evidently considered a virtue, and probably an outright requirement, in candidates.³ Evidence from Salisbury suggests that citizens were well aware of the perceived importance of experience and competence in civic administration, and believed that questioning a rival’s ability and record was a productive angle of attack. In 1457, disputes between members of the city assembly became so heated that an ordinance was enacted forbidding the use of certain invectives.⁴ As well as insults (‘chorle knave harlotte’) and predictable claims concerning wealth (‘and I as ryche as thow and gretter of lyvelode than thow’), the assembly also prohibited comments on citizens’ competence in government: ‘I ... have bore the worship and the astate of this city and kept it as well as thow’. In the same way that county government bore a distinct resemblance to county society, there was a parallel between the organisation of urban government and the structure of the trades in which townsmen laboured. Each aspiring citizen served an ‘apprenticeship’ in lesser offices and on the city council, gaining experience under the watchful eye and control of more senior men, before perhaps graduating to become a ‘master’ himself.

² Palliser ed., *Cambridge Urban History*, p. 301.

³ E.g. LB1, #258, 264, 448; RCN, i, p. 120.

⁴ LB2, ff. 31-31d.

In light of these differences in jurisdiction, personnel and philosophy, we might expect little crossover between urban and rural local government, and for the most part this proves to be the case. However, examining the exceptions provides us with the means to both confirm and nuance this hypothesis, and also identifies two groups – lawyers and royal servants – whose unusual situation and status allowed them to cross the governmental divide between town and countryside far more frequently and more easily than either townsmen or the landed aristocracy. This chapter first identifies those townsmen who did take up roles in government outside borough administrations, analysing the men involved and the offices they held. This is followed by a discussion of the situations in which aristocrats, particularly the landed gentry, could find themselves in positions with authority over towns and townsmen, especially through roles in the county administration and the control of royal revenues from trade. Finally, the chapter investigates those aristocrats who went one step further and became directly involved in urban government: this discussion revolves around lawyers and royal servants, who comprise the overwhelming majority of these men.

II – Townsmen in Extramural Government

Although few townsmen served in royal government outside their home boroughs, it is nonetheless important to discuss those rare occasions when they did. As ever, exceptions can teach us much about the rule, and in this instance there are important points to be made about the few men who did accept non-urban offices. One group of such exceptions, however, needs to be mostly discounted: those men who were from urban backgrounds, but who had trained as lawyers. Ultimately, these men were appointed to royal office because of their legal training, and their urban origins were irrelevant.⁵ William Alexander, for instance, would not have been appointed as deputy chief steward of the south parts of the duchy of

⁵ The connections these men made among landed society on account of their profession and their frequent possession of rural property may also have been a factor.

Lancaster if he had been a draper or grocer rather than a lawyer, while John Alderford would almost certainly not have become escheator of Norfolk.⁶ It is, however, worth noting that these men did take up these positions, indicating that they possessed not only the qualifications but the desire to do so: the latter was not necessarily the case for our other townsmen.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, very few townsmen served in senior positions in county administration: no citizen of any of our four towns, for example, was appointed sheriff. Only two townsmen were made escheators, and both of these held property outside their towns.⁷ William Appleyard of Norwich was appointed escheator of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1402-3, but it is doubtful whether this would have been the case had he not also possessed a substantial landed presence outside the city.⁸ The case of John Hall of Salisbury is slightly more confused. Hall was appointed escheator of Wiltshire and Hampshire in November 1463, at which point his stake in the Hampshire manors of Shipton Bellinger and Swaythling is frustratingly unclear.⁹ Hall had acquired an interest in Shipton Bellinger as security for a loan he extended to Robert Bodenham in 1455, which Bodenham failed to repay on the agreed date in 1461.¹⁰ Although Bodenham was said to hold the manor on his death in 1466, Hall's own inquisition *post mortem* of 1479 recorded his possession of both Shipton Bellinger and Swaythling, another Bodenham manor in Hampshire.¹¹ As such, it is unclear whether

⁶ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 19-21, 23-4.

⁷ Josiah Wedgwood's contention that John Tillard of Exeter served as escheator of Somerset and Dorset in 1449-51 is almost certainly incorrect: there is nothing to connect the Exeter bailiff and MP of that name with the John Tyler who was appointed escheator. *CFR 1445-52*, p. 146. *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 856.

⁸ For the Appleyards' land, see above, pp. 57-8. It is noteworthy that Appleyard's son Nicholas was never appointed escheator, or to any office more senior than tax collector, despite having left Norwich to become a 'proper' gentleman. Perhaps William's experience as an urban magistrate (having served three terms as bailiff) and the prestige associated with being undoubtedly the most influential citizen of his time was also a factor in the government's decision to appoint him. *CFR 1399-1405*, p. 185.

⁹ *CFR 1461-71*, p. 123.

¹⁰ *CCR 1452-61*, p. 59.

¹¹ TNA, C 140/21/34; C 140/70/33.

Hall actually held the manors in 1463, but the suspicion must be that his interests in rural property, however contested, were responsible for his appointment as escheator.

John Hall also provides a rare example of a townsman serving as a Justice of the Peace in the county. Rather than because of landowning, Hall's appointment to the Wiltshire bench in November 1456 was apparently on account of his election as mayor of Salisbury in the same year.¹² Hall was explicitly recorded in the appointment as 'mayor of Salisbury', and was removed from the bench in the first revision after his term ended.¹³ Another example of a citizen serving as JP was William Duke of Exeter, and the circumstances are almost identical. Duke was appointed to be a JP in Devon as 'mayor of Exeter' in June 1457, and, as with Hall, was removed as part of the first re-organisation after his term as mayor ended.¹⁴ The near-contemporaneous timing of these two mayors' terms on the bench is perhaps indicative of a wider government policy, but these were the only two appointed at this point (or at least explicitly appointed as mayors) and there is little to connect the situations in Wiltshire and Devon besides the more general tide of instability, which was hardly limited to these counties or these two years. There was some precedent for the appointment of senior townsmen as commissioners during periods of instability: a number of townsmen were appointed to assist in suppressing the aftershocks of the Peasants' Revolt in March and December 1382, for instance. In Devon, Exeter was represented by Robert Wilford, perhaps the greatest Exeter citizen of his time, while in Salisbury both John Butterleigh and the serving mayor (for the second commission, Butterleigh himself) were appointed.¹⁵ In Norwich and Southampton, four and three important citizens were appointed to the respective county commissions.¹⁶

¹² *CPR 1452-61*, pp. 680-1.

¹³ Hall was removed from the bench in November 1458, a year after his mayoral term ended. *Ibid.*, pp. 680-1.

¹⁴ Duke was removed in June 1458, nine months after he stepped down as mayor. *Ibid.*, p. 664.

¹⁵ *CPR 1381-5*, pp. 140-1, 246, 248.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2, 247-9.

These men may, of course, have been appointed to suppress the rebels within their towns, but they nonetheless were technically empowered to act throughout the county.

In general, it seems that townsmen were not considered appropriate figures to hold senior office in rural local government, with the exception of those who themselves held rural property. This may simply reflect the inadequate status and landed wealth of most townsmen, but it is also worth considering whether the majority of townsmen would have considered it worthwhile, since rural office was, after all, quite distant from their interests as urban businessmen. By extension, it is plausible that Appleyard and Hall sought to burnish their gentle credentials by actively seeking out responsibilities associated with members of landed society. The lower echelons of local government, however, saw rather more activity on the part of townsmen. Their most common role was that of tax collector, although even here their presence was very much an anomaly. Sometimes, tax collectors were appointed just for towns, and on these occasions only low-ranking townsmen were chosen. A typical example is the group appointed to collect a tax in Salisbury in 1406, consisting of John Lake, Pleasant (or Placidacius) Day, Thomas Biston and William Dunning: none of these men ever held senior office in the city.¹⁷ By contrast, when townsmen were appointed to collect taxes in the county (or on a joint commission for city and county), only the most distinguished citizens were considered appropriate. In 1384, Nicholas Taylor (a former mayor of Salisbury) was included amongst the collectors for Wiltshire, while in 1436, William Soper (the greatest and most influential citizen of Southampton at the time) served as a tax assessor in Hampshire.¹⁸ John Butterleigh, five times mayor of Salisbury, collected a tax in Wiltshire in 1385, although Thomas Eston of Exeter had not yet served any of his four terms as mayor when he was commissioned to raise a tax in Devon in 1404.¹⁹

¹⁷ *CFR 1405-13*, p. 65.

¹⁸ *CFR 1383-91*, p. 71; *1430-7*, p. 259.

¹⁹ *CFR 1383-91*, p. 81; *1399-1405*, pp. 283, 289.

In general, county tax collectors were from the lower ranks of landed society: those who served alongside Eston in 1404, for example, did not include any prominent county administrators, or members of important county families. Nicholas Taylor's companions of 1384 included two knights, Sir Humphrey Stafford and Sir Robert Russell, but neither of these was especially influential (although Stafford was to become so in neighbouring Dorset) and the remainder of the collectors were miscellaneous or even anonymous figures.²⁰ This indicates that, in the context of the county administration, even very significant citizens were considered minor figures, ranking alongside the middling or even 'parish' gentry. William Soper's appointment as a tax assessor in 1436, by contrast, found him serving alongside the abbot of Hyde and several members of the greater gentry of Hampshire, including Sir Stephen Popham and John Uvedale. Soper was, however, a nationally-important figure due to his prominent role in naval administration, and this appointment reflects more on his personal prestige than on townsmen in general.²¹

The other royal offices to which townsmen were often appointed were those associated with the oversight of trade and industry, such as in the customs administration or the regulation of cloth manufacturing. Many of the most important citizens served in these offices throughout the period, but this did not constitute a true connection between urban and landed society, as the responsibilities of these roles were mostly discharged within towns.²² In some instances, these appointments did give townsmen authority outside their home borough: as customers, for instance, they might be appointed to supervise an extended stretch of coastline including several ports, while aulnagers might be appointed for whole counties.²³ Even here, though, they were mostly only given power over craftsmen and

²⁰ For Stafford: *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 437-8.

²¹ For Soper's career, see *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 405-8 and Rose ed., *Navy of the Lancastrian Kings*, pp. 6-28.

²² E.g. *CFR 1377-83*, pp. 9-10; *1383-91*, pp. 3, 55; *1391-9*, pp. 12-13; *1413-22*, pp. 3-4, 113; *1422-30*, pp. 22-3, 107; *1430-7*, pp. 13-16; *1437-45*, pp. 58-60. *CPR 1377-81*, p. 67; *1391-6*, pp. 234, 337; *1416-22*, p. 175.

²³ E.g. *CFR 1391-9*, p. 123; *1399-1405*, pp. 38, 276; *1471-85*, #111.

merchants, rather than landed society. However, it is certainly worth noting that the governmental experience of many senior townsmen was, as a result, not limited to their own boroughs.

Apart from the shire administration and the regulation of commerce, there were a small number of miscellaneous organs of government in which townsmen found a role. One was a link between the citizens of Salisbury and the neighbouring royal park and forest at Clarendon. Although this connection mostly resulted in aristocrats becoming involved in the affairs of the city (as discussed below), there were several occasions when citizens took up office in the forest. At least three Salisbury men became verderers. Richard Juwell, for instance, was a verderer until 1404 (when replaced due to being ‘too much engaged upon business of the king’), but evidently continued to play some role, as he was empowered to sell timber in 1406.²⁴ Walter Shirley, twice mayor of Salisbury, was dismissed in 1424 on account of ‘not being a fit person’, while in 1445 the sheriff of Wiltshire was ordered to elect a replacement verderer after the death of John Everard, who had only recently paid a fine to avoid election as mayor.²⁵ This connection between a city and a royal park is not mirrored elsewhere in our towns. In Norwich, this was because there were no royal forests nearby, but Southampton and Exeter were close to the New Forest and Dartmoor respectively. However, the only citizen who is known to have held office in these forests was William Soper, whose exceptional career again makes this more of a reflection of him personally.²⁶ Why was Salisbury different? At least in part, this may be attributed to sheer proximity: city and forest shared a boundary (the river Avon) and several settlements which were effectively suburbs of the city (Milford and Laverstock) were within the borders of the forest. Indeed, several forest eyres were held in the city, while in 1377 the justices of the Forests required

²⁴ *CCR 1402-5*, p. 256. *CPR 1405-9*, p. 179. What other royal business occupied Juwell is not recorded.

²⁵ *CCR 1422-9*, p. 91; *1441-7*, p. 247. LB1, #394.

²⁶ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 405-8.

Salisbury citizens to undertake the office of vendor of underwood within the forest.²⁷ It seems, however, that the citizens wished their involvement to be voluntary (and perhaps also personal, rather than on account of their citizenship), as they successfully petitioned the king in parliament against this demand. It is also plausible that the limited self-governance enjoyed by Salisbury (and the commensurately weaker and less prestigious civil offices) meant that ambitious townsmen looked outside the city for opportunities for profit and authority, although the lack of more than a few examples makes this a difficult argument to sustain.²⁸

In general, townsmen were not frequently employed in royal government outside of their home boroughs. With notable exceptions such as William Soper of Southampton and William Appleyard of Norwich, townsmen were either considered unsuitable to hold significant county office, or they themselves did not wish to expend time and effort on such responsibilities. Soper and Appleyard provide contrasting examples of the circumstances under which townsmen might go against this trend. As discussed in the previous chapter, Appleyard is an almost perfect example of the stereotype of the merchant who sought to elevate his family socially: by investing mercantile profits in land and manorial lordship, Appleyard (building on the work of his father) founded a gentle family.²⁹ His service as escheator can be seen as part of this process, being a recognition by the crown and the community that he now commanded sufficient means and status to hold authority in the countryside, but it was also perhaps a way for Appleyard himself to demonstrate his arrival in county society. By contrast, Soper's service was in a far more professional capacity: it would be more accurate to describe him as a bureaucrat or administrator than as an aspiring gentleman.³⁰ Despite almost forty years in very profitable royal service (his salary alone was

²⁷ *CPR 1377–81*, p. 75. *VCH Wilts*, iv, pp. 391–433; v, p. 79. *RP*, iii, p. 390.

²⁸ Although it is perhaps worth noting here that Salisbury citizens were unusually active in the affairs of the other local boroughs when compared to their counterparts in Exeter and Norwich.

²⁹ Above, pp. 57–8.

³⁰ *HoP 1386–1421*, iv, pp. 405–8.

£40 when he was keeper of the king's ships between 1420 and 1442) and being commonly reputed as an esquire, Soper seems to have had no interest in establishing himself in Hampshire society, investing little in land besides his mansion at Newton Bery, and building few connections with gentry families. Apart from these two examples, the majority of townsmen's service to royal government was minimal, and the offices which a few citizens did hold (such as tax collectors) illustrated the low status that even prosperous townsmen held in comparison to the landed gentry. The exception was in spheres where townsmen were already actors, notably maritime trade and other areas of the economy where there was government oversight. Here, they possessed the knowledge, the contacts and perhaps also the financial muscle to discharge the role successfully, in contrast to, for example, offices in the county administration where they lacked the status, authority and, ultimately, the coercive power of the more typical incumbents.

III – Aristocrats in Urban Government

If townsmen were rarely involved in royal government outside the city boundaries, the same could not be said for men travelling in the other direction, as aristocrats frequently connected with or even took part in urban government. The circumstances of these interactions varied widely, but can be roughly divided into two categories. Firstly, there were those figures who were granted power and authority over towns, generally as a result of holding royal office. The second group consists of those men who, for a variety of reasons, personally and directly took part in the business of urban government, most frequently through election to offices within the towns. This section will discuss each of these groups in turn, as well as the circumstances in which aristocrats became involved in urban society and government.

III (a) – Authority through Office-Holding

Although towns had their own governments and enjoyed chartered privileges exempting them from various parts of the royal administration, a number of royal officers nonetheless occasionally exercised authority over urban governments, or else discharged responsibilities which sometimes affected towns and townsmen. In some cases, towns actively sought to reduce any intrusion into their affairs. Salisbury, for instance, arranged with the sheriff of Wiltshire that neither he nor his officers would do anything within the city without the mayor's permission.³¹ An attached caveat was that the sheriff could act 'in defectu predicti maioris', suggesting that the city was actually negotiating for the mayor to conduct the sheriff's duties within the city. In other cases, the citizens instead sought to influence these officers, generally through gifts. All of our cities, for instance, either attempted to persuade a sheriff to conduct himself in a certain way, or rewarded him for doing so. In 1491-2, for instance, Exeter paid 20s to the sheriff for writs concerning men 'who break the earth' in the city's close at 'Radhi Hill'.³² John Lancaster, sheriff of Norfolk in 1423-4, was paid 16s 8d by the city of Norwich for the 'imbesillatio' of a writ against the mayor concerning a man he had arrested at Cringleford (outside the city boundaries): the possible translations of this term (defacing, suppressing, mutilating) indicate that this may not have been an entirely legitimate exercise.³³ Southampton, meanwhile, gave a hogshead of Gascon wine to William Brocas, the sheriff of Hampshire, in the hope that he would empanel a favourable jury in a case between the town and the king concerning the goods of John Welling, presumably a felon.³⁴ The escheator appears far less frequently but in a rare example from 1504-5, Exeter gave the escheator of Devon 20s to delay an inquisition concerning the city's manor of

³¹ LB1, #246.

³² DHC, ECA, CRA 1491-2. The location of 'Radhi Hill' is unknown, but perhaps refers to Redhills in Exeter St. Thomas. J.E.B. Gover *et al.*, *The Place Names of Devon* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1932), ii, p. 438.

³³ CAB, f. 145d. R.E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List* (Oxford, 1965), p. 234.

³⁴ Gidden ed., *Stewards Books*, i, pp. 28-9.

Awliscombe.³⁵ These examples suggest that towns generally wanted to influence royal officers when the town had interests beyond its walls and therefore beyond its own jurisdiction, such as Exeter's manors of Duryard and Awliscombe, or else when legal cases straddled the boundary, thus similarly coming under the cognisance of the crown. Another situation was when the town needed expertise its citizens did not possess, such as when Exeter rewarded Sir Hugh Courtenay of Haccombe, then sheriff of Devon, for overseeing a muster in the city in 1418-19.³⁶

Besides permanent offices such as the shrievalty, there were several temporary royal appointments which could grant aristocrats authority over towns. The most common was an appointment to a royal commission, typically one to inquire into some matter within the town, or in both the town and the county. These matters could vary greatly, as a series of examples from Southampton demonstrates. In 1389, the mayor of Southampton and two local gentlemen, John Uvedale and John Stephens, were placed on an inquiry commission in the town to determine the circumstances surrounding the removal of a prisoner from the custody of the earl of Arundel.³⁷ Six years later, the earls of Kent and Salisbury and three Hampshire gentlemen (Henry Popham, William Ringbourne and John Wayte) were commissioned to inquire into unspecified treasons and felonies in Southampton.³⁸ In 1407, a similarly powerful commission, this time comprising the bishop of Winchester, Sir John Berkeley, Henry Popham and Richard Wallop, were instructed to audit the expenditure of money granted to the town by the king for the purpose of maintaining the town defences.³⁹ The bishop of Winchester and Berkeley were again involved in the town's affairs through an inquiry commission of 1415, in which they were ordered to investigate the withholding of

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ DHC, ECA, CRA 1418-19.

³⁷ *CPR 1388-92*, p. 210.

³⁸ *CPR 1391-6*, p. 653.

³⁹ *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 240; *1405-8*, p. 356.

rights and monies owing to Southampton castle from various townsmen.⁴⁰ *Oyer et terminer* commissions were also occasionally appointed to carry out the king's will within towns. In 1401, one such commission was appointed to pursue counterfeiters who were thought to be operating in Exeter and elsewhere in Devon: this commission comprised the county's legal elite, including Sir John Hill, Sir William Hankeford, John Wadham and Thomas Raymond, who was Exeter's recorder.⁴¹ In 1443, another *oyer et terminer* commission was appointed specifically to inquire into 'lack of good governance' in Norwich.⁴² Its members included two noblemen with substantial local interests (the duke of Norfolk and the earl of Oxford) but otherwise it was staffed by senior legal figures.⁴³ A commission to inquire into similar issues in 1433 contained a similar selection of lawyers, but a far broader sample of Norfolk's political elite: the difference is probably linked to the fracturing and factionalisation of county society in the intervening decade, to which the Norwich situation was closely linked.⁴⁴

In exceptional circumstances, royal officers could take direct control of towns: urban liberties were, after all, a gift of the crown and could be suspended on account of poor governance, contumacy or rebellion. In our four towns this occurred twice, both in Norwich (in 1437-8 and 1443-7) during the bitter factional conflict in the city in the 1430s and 1440s.⁴⁵ Three keepers or wardens were appointed by the crown to govern the city during these suspensions. Two, John Welles (1437-38) and Thomas Catworth (1446-7), were important citizens of London: both had served as mayor of the capital, Welles in 1431-2 and Catworth in 1443-4.⁴⁶ Both had some links to Norwich, as Catworth was a citizen (gaining admission as a grocer

⁴⁰ *CPR 1413-16*, p. 293.

⁴¹ *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 554.

⁴² *CPR 1441-6*, p. 199.

⁴³ A few of the lawyers (notably William Paston and William Goderede) were themselves active in Norfolk political society. A further member of this commission was Edmund, lord Grey of Ruthin, whose presence is difficult to explain given his lack of local interests.

⁴⁴ For this, see below, pp. 283-9. For the commission, *CPR 1429-36*, p. 351.

⁴⁵ Below, pp. 254-60, 283-9.

⁴⁶ Cozens-Hardy & Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, pp. 23, 25. For Catworth, *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 165-6. For Welles, *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 802-5.

in 1431-2) and was later to be buried in Norwich, while Welles had been born in the city and held property there.⁴⁷ Welles was also closely associated with prominent members of Norfolk society, notably Sir Henry Inglose and Sir John Fastolf. The other warden, however, was Sir John Clifton (1443-6), a significant figure in East Anglian society and a close associate of both the earl of Suffolk and Fastolf.⁴⁸ This was a rare combination of loyalties in Norfolk at that time, and this may well have made him a suitable candidate to resolve the tensions in the city, which were connected to the feud between Suffolk and Fastolf.⁴⁹ Clifton's position was certainly more than a sinecure, as his wife blamed his poor health (he was to die in 1447) on the pressures of dealing with governing the city and its bitterly divided ruling group.⁵⁰

Other members of Norfolk's political elite were also involved during these periods, including Walter Eton who was appointed sheriff of the city during Welles' term as warden. A lawyer born into a Norwich family, Eton had previously served as the city's recorder but by 1437 it would seem that he too had joined the group surrounding Fastolf, and had also been employed by both the abbey of St. Benet's at Hulme and Norwich Cathedral Priory.⁵¹ His colleague as sheriff, John Lynford of Stalham, was another associate of Fastolf, but had no previous connections with Norwich, and he had to be admitted to the freedom at the same time as his appointment as sheriff.⁵² With the suspension of liberties, justices of the peace also needed to be appointed, and these were drawn mostly from the local legal elite. In March 1443, William Yelverton and Sir John Clifton were appointed, while in November they were joined by the bishop of Norwich, John Damme (a local lawyer and the city's recorder) and

⁴⁷ For Catworth's freedom, see Rye ed., *Freeman of Norwich*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 24. Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 84, 99, 145, 147.

⁴⁹ This is discussed in detail below, pp. 283-9.

⁵⁰ NRO, NCR, Case 9d, #5.

⁵¹ *CPR 1436-41*, p. 123. For Eton's background and his service to the abbey of St. Benet, see *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 2-3. For his employment by the prior of Norwich see NRO, DCN 45/12/32. For his position on Sir John Fastolf's council see A. Smith, 'Aspects of the Career of Sir John Fastolf' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1982), pp. 48-9.

⁵² Smith, "The Greatest Man of That Age", p. 148. Rye ed., *Freeman of Norwich*, p. 90.

William Paston.⁵³ August 1446 saw the appointment of the notorious John Heydon and also of John Jenney, another local lawyer of note.⁵⁴ These commissions placed them alongside prominent citizens (notably John Gerard, Thomas Ingham and Richard Brasyer) in judgment upon malefactors in the city. The commission appointed in 1437, by contrast, comprised only two men, both Londoners: John Welles (as governor) and John Carpenter, city clerk in London.⁵⁵ A few patterns can be discerned here. Firstly, it seems that, where possible, the government sought to appoint experienced urban administrators such as Welles, Catworth and Carpenter. In addition, it is notable that Welles and Catworth were familiar with the city, but were not so close as to have been drawn into the factionalism within the governing elite. However, in particularly dire circumstances, a powerful member of local landed society was evidently considered necessary.⁵⁶ The appointment of Sir John Clifton suggests that the choice of this person was linked to the situation in county society: Clifton had little to recommend him for the position, besides his unusually broad set of political connections, which besides his links to Fastolf and Suffolk also included the duke of York.⁵⁷

The unique situation of Salisbury amongst our examples, that it was a private episcopal borough, led to a similar situation of aristocrats holding power directly over a town, as the citizens were permanently under the authority of the bishop's bailiff and steward. These offices were generally held by lawyers or experienced estate administrators, rather than significant gentlemen. A typical example was Thomas Hungerford who was the episcopal bailiff from 1368 until his death in 1397.⁵⁸ William Westbury, later a judge of the King's Bench, held the same office from 1410 until 1426 or 1427, and he was followed by Robert

⁵³ *CPR 1441-6*, p. 475.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *CPR 1436-41*, p. 89.

⁵⁶ For details of the riots, see I. Atherton *et al.*, *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City and Diocese 1096-1996* (London, 1996), pp. 262-6; and Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 175-205.

⁵⁷ Castor, *Duchy*, p. 99.

⁵⁸ *HoP 1386-21*, iii, pp. 443-6.

Long, a local gentleman-administrator.⁵⁹ Quite how much contact and responsibility this position entailed is unclear, but the citizens evidently considered these men worthy of largesse: they frequently granted the incumbent a livery (often of silk) and other gifts such as wine.⁶⁰ Long was also elected the city's MP in 1442 and then appointed to audit the citizens' accounts in 1444, indicating a degree of trust in Long and in his competence.⁶¹ Long's successor, the lawyer John Whittocksmede, was similarly elected to parliament in February 1449.⁶²

Some royal offices instead gave power over individual townsmen, or at least those involved in certain professions. Most importantly, minor gentlemen frequently became involved in the customs administration, particularly as the controllers of the customers. This role gave them an important responsibility in an area of government of great importance to many townsmen, but could also draw them into direct contact with urban figures. A typical example was Nicholas Banaster, a minor Hampshire gentleman who served as controller in Southampton between 1415 and 1428.⁶³ This brought him into close association with William Soper, and he was to spend this period being Soper's controller, first as customer and then as keeper of the king's ships.⁶⁴ He also served with Soper on a number of commissions to oversee the muster of various armed companies heading to France.⁶⁵ An unusually eminent figure to hold the same role was Charles Dynham, a younger brother of John (V), lord Dynham, who was appointed controller in Exeter in 1485.⁶⁶ Dynham was evidently serving in this capacity as early as 1481, when his deputy (an Exeter merchant) purchased a pardon.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 616-18. LB1, #98, 203.

⁶⁰ E.g. LB1, #89, 98, 203, 217.

⁶¹ LB1, #375, 390.

⁶² LB1, #425.

⁶³ *CPR 1413-16*, pp. 333, 396; *1416-22*, p. 392.

⁶⁴ *CPR 1422-9*, p. 64.

⁶⁵ *CPR 1416-22*, pp. 148, 199, 201, 202, 267, 386.

⁶⁶ *CPR 1476-85*, p. 536.

⁶⁷ *CPR 1476-85*, p. 261.

The office of aulnager was also occasionally held by gentlemen: just as the same office could give a townsman authority over rural clothmaking, so could it involve members of the county political elite in an industry of critical importance, especially in Salisbury. The first aulnager of Salisbury was Thomas Bonham, an important local administrator in the service of, amongst others, the bishop of Salisbury and the duchy of Lancaster.⁶⁸ Sixty years later, the office (along with the farm of the proceeds) was granted to John Whittocksmede, a similarly important local figure and also the bishop's bailiff.⁶⁹ In 1485, the aulnager in Devon and Cornwall was Sir Thomas Arundell, a member of the most important gentry family in Cornwall.⁷⁰

Two important and intertwined themes emerge from this discussion. Firstly, the power that these aristocrats held over cities, and thus also the assistance they could sometimes offer, was inextricably linked to their office. When the citizens of Southampton attempted to persuade the sheriff to empanel a favourable jury, the fact that the sheriff was William Brocas was irrelevant: it was Brocas as the sheriff of Hampshire that interested the citizens. As such, when these men lost their offices, they also lost their ability to help cities. This in turn was responsible for the second theme: possession of an office may have brought an individual aristocrat into contact with towns, and may have even caused a beneficial relationship between them to develop, but there is no evidence that any connection was maintained after his loss of office. It may seem plausible that a town might have chosen to continue contact with a sheriff or other officer who had proven useful, perhaps by seeking him out for his advice on similar matters, but there is no evidence of this actually taking place.

⁶⁸ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 280-1. *CFR 1391-9*, p. 123.

⁶⁹ *CFR 1445-52*, p. 193. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 944-5.

⁷⁰ *CFR 1485-1509*, pp. 21-2.

The absence of evidence might, of course, be an example of the problem discussed in the Introduction, in which the surviving source material privileges certain types of contact over others: perhaps an informal request for advice from a former sheriff was unlikely to be recorded.⁷¹ However, the examples of royal officers assisting towns discussed above are known to us because town governments chose to reward the men in question, and these rewards were entered in the town's accounts. As such, if towns did seek the advice of former officers, they either chose not to reward them, or else did so in a way which did not incur expense for the communal purse: it is difficult to understand why either of these possibilities should be the case. The most likely explanation, therefore, is that towns did not seek the advice or assistance of former royal officers, again suggesting that the aid which sheriffs and escheators could provide to towns flowed from their office, rather than from their personal influence or power.⁷²

III (b) – Direct Involvement in Urban Government

In general, urban government has been approached by historians as being almost uniquely the domain of townsmen. The reasons for this are obvious: town government *was* dominated by the citizens and, as has often been stated, they guarded their rights jealously. In addition, other groups in society would have been unwilling or even simply unable to involve themselves. The poor, both rural and urban, lacked the resources and status, while the landed gentry presumably felt urban government to be both beneath them and irrelevant to their own landed interests.⁷³ However, to leave the question there would cause us to overlook a number of aristocrats who did in fact become involved in urban government. The urban office held most frequently by aristocrats was that of a town's MP, but this rarely led to any

⁷¹ See above, p. 23.

⁷² It may be relevant that the majority of aristocrats who enjoyed close relationships with cities were of a higher rank than men who were appointed sheriffs. Below, chapter 4.

⁷³ For the ability of the urban poor to pressure city governments, see e.g. Liddy, 'Urban Conflict'; Liddy and Haemers, 'Popular Politics'.

real connection between the town and the aristocracy, other than by strengthening links which already existed. Towns, for instance, quite frequently elected aristocrats with whom they had pre-existing connections, notably their legal counsellors or men who had previously held office within the city government. Their election as MPs no doubt represented a deepening of the link between these men and towns, but the connection had already been established by other means. On other occasions, our towns elected men with whom they had a pre-existing but indirect connection, as the men concerned were servants or allies of a magnate who had provided the city with lordship. Thus in 1382, when Exeter was closely associated with the earl of Devon, we find the city electing two men with whom it had no known connection, Robert Stoke and Thomas Notecombe.⁷⁴ These men simultaneously sat for the earl's borough of Plympton, strongly suggesting that they were the earl's servants.⁷⁵

This example naturally raises the subject of 'carpetbaggers', a historiographical concept which has produced an unhelpful dichotomy whereby those elected can be split into 'proper' urban figures (who represented the town's true interests) and the carpetbaggers (who represented their own, or their lord's, interests).⁷⁶ This division ignores the fact that the motives of a town and those of a gentleman or lawyer elected as that town's MP were not necessarily incompatible or antagonistic. Without anything approaching parliamentary voting or debating records this is difficult to prove, but it is quite possible to imagine a situation in which a carpetbagger might be able to represent the town on some issues (economic or commercial matters, for instance) but then act in their own or their lord's interests on others

⁷⁴ Alexander, 'Exeter MPs', p. 188.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', p. 146.

⁷⁶ M. McKisack, *The Parliamentary Representation of the English Boroughs during the Middle Ages* (London, 1932), especially pp. 100-18. J.S. Roskell, *The Commons in the Parliament of 1422: English Society and Parliamentary Representation under the Lancastrians* (Manchester, 1954), pp. 125-41. P. Jalland, 'The 'Revolution' in Northern Borough Representation in Mid-Fifteenth-Century England', *Northern History*, 11 (1976), pp. 27-51. K.N. Houghton, 'Theory and Practice in Borough Elections to Parliament during the Later Fifteenth Century', *Historical Research*, 39:100 (1966), pp. 130-40. S.J. Payling, 'The Rise of Lawyers in the Lower House, 1395-1536', *Parliamentary History*, 23:1 (2004), pp. 103-20.

(such as high politics). We can go further and even suggest that, on some occasions, the parliamentary motives of a town and an aristocrat might overlap. It is, for instance, quite plausible that Exeter's unusual election of 'carpetbaggers' to the parliaments of November 1449 and 1450 was a response to events in France: given that the city's prosperity was underpinned by the Gascon wine trade, the military failures of the late 1440s must have seriously alarmed the citizens.⁷⁷ In these circumstances, the election of two men associated with the duke of Exeter can be seen as an attempt to bolster the hand of the duke of York, to whom the duke of Exeter was still linked (or, at least, was perceived to be).⁷⁸ However, although these men may well have represented the city's interests, their election does not imply that they had a personal link with urban society: it is not even certain that they ever visited their constituency. There is also no suggestion that representing the town in parliament led them to go on to forge a wider relationship with the townsmen. As such, these men are not examples of aristocrats forming links to urban government and society by way of direct participation: we must look instead at the urban offices with responsibilities within towns.

Perhaps surprisingly, some of the men who developed a presence in urban government were landed gentlemen, albeit of a very specific type. Two similar examples are Thomas Temse and Thomas (III) Hussey, who both became involved in the government of Salisbury. These men shared a number of similarities. Both were younger sons, Hussey of a family of middling gentry from Dorset and Temse from a very minor family of gentlemen-administrators from Rood Ashton in west Wiltshire.⁷⁹ In addition, both men acquired property in Salisbury incidentally, or even accidentally. Hussey's father had acquired tenements in the city through

⁷⁷ For these men, below, pp. 280-1.

⁷⁸ A. Curry ed., 'Henry VI: Parliament of 1450, Appendix 10', in C. Given-Wilson *et al.* eds., *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, (Internet version, Scholarly Digital Editions, Leicester, 2005). Accessed 2016.

⁷⁹ For the Husseys, *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 465-8. For the Temses, *VCH Wills*, viii, pp. 198-218; xi, p. 169.

his second marriage and passed them to Thomas (III) by the terms of his will.⁸⁰ Temse had married Agnes, the granddaughter and heiress of John Levesham, who had been mayor of Salisbury in 1414-15 and was one of the few Salisbury citizens who invested in manorial lordship in this period.⁸¹ For Temse, the major benefit of the match was probably Levesham's manor of 'Cormayles' in Netheravon, but the marriage also brought him property in Salisbury. Their urban property allowed both men to join Salisbury's government, although this did not prove any more than temporary in both cases. Temse's involvement lasted longer, from c.1438 until c.1449, while Hussey's was limited to 1469 until c.1473.⁸² Despite these short periods of engagement, both men were elected to significant offices: Temse was elected constable (a position normally reserved for former mayors) while both sat on the higher city council of twenty-four and were elected as MPs. However, both men disappear from the city records suddenly and with no apparent explanation. Hussey established himself as a reasonably substantial gentleman in Wiltshire, while Temse became a very obscure character, although he continued to hold property in Salisbury and his manor in Netheravon, and in 1453 he was appointed as a tax collector in Hampshire.⁸³

Perhaps the most notable thing about Hussey and Temse was their shaky hold on gentle status. Both were younger sons and both lacked the rural property to be truly described as landed gentlemen. As such, it may be that involvement in the government of a substantial provincial city, especially if it included prestigious appointments such as election as the city's MP, was actually a boost to such men's status. For Hussey in particular, it is likely that his departure from Salisbury was on account of his growing status in the shire and it is worth

⁸⁰ Above, p. 84.

⁸¹ *CIPM*, xxiii, #143. *CPR 1416-22*, p. 271.

⁸² For Temse, LB1, #342, 347, 353, 368, 377, 391, 396, 408-9, 423, 425, 431, 436. For Hussey, LB2, ff. 88d, 92d, 96, 111.

⁸³ For Hussey, see *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 488-9 (although note that Wedgwood's attribution of Hussey's parenthood is incorrect). For Temse, *CFR 1430-7*, p. 286; *WFF*, #648; *CIPM (Hen VI)*, i, #919.

noting that when established gentlemen happened to come into possession of urban land, they generally did not become involved in urban politics. For example, the estate inherited by Joan Chamberlain, the daughter and heiress of a Southampton lawyer, was held by both her husbands (Richard Holt and Constantine Darell, both substantial Hampshire esquires) but neither used it as a means to insert themselves into the town's affairs.⁸⁴ One exception was Hussey's father, Thomas (II), who, as mentioned above, had come into possession of property in Salisbury through his second marriage.⁸⁵ This marriage had taken place by 1449, but it was not until 1467 that Hussey joined the city government.⁸⁶ Frustratingly, the circumstances behind Thomas (II)'s sudden election to the council of twenty-four are difficult to reconstruct, exacerbated by the fact that he died only a year afterwards. In addition, given that his election took place at the height of the dispute between the city and the bishop (which defined Salisbury's politics from 1450 until 1477), and that Hussey had been qualified to hold office for almost two decades without showing previous interest, it seems likely that his sudden entry to city politics may have been the result of the citizens' desire for assistance against the bishop.

In general, however, the landed gentry very rarely took part in urban government. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that urban government was both too ignoble and too distant from their interests, but we should also consider the other perspective: townsmen were unlikely to welcome figures who might import rural factionalism and discord into the city, something which the ruling elite were generally at pains to avoid.⁸⁷ The combination of these two perspectives accounts for the exceptions provided by Temse and Thomas (III) Hussey.

⁸⁴ Above, p. 84.

⁸⁵ Above, p. 84.

⁸⁶ Hussey had also been elected to be alderman in 1453 and reeve in 1461, but, as discussed below, this was part of what appears to be a concerted attempt by the citizens to elect inappropriate figures to these roles as part of the city's dispute with Bishop Beauchamp. Below, p. 213.

⁸⁷ Below, p. 138

Their status on the boundary of gentility meant that not only was urban office a more fitting role for them, but also that they posed little threat to the town's security or independence. This liminal status was shared by two other groups, lawyers and royal servants, and members of both of these groups established connections and interests on both sides of the urban boundary, thus qualifying them as aristocrats who became involved in urban affairs.

Lawyers

Although they came from a range of backgrounds, lawyers were a definable section of medieval society on account of their training and profession.⁸⁸ Perhaps as a result of this, their status within society was unusual. It was quite common, for example, for a lawyer to be simultaneously associated with clients from different strata of society (albeit limited to those from the prosperous, property-owning end of the spectrum), ranging from townsmen and minor gentlemen through to the greater nobility.⁸⁹ Lawyers themselves often claimed gentle status, whether on account of their personal background (such as being the younger sons of gentlemen) or because of the wealth they earned through their profession (and particularly the common decision to invest this in land and lordship).⁹⁰ However, in contrast to the true landed gentry, lawyers were not distanced from towns by their status and lack of interests, as they had professional reasons to interact with town governments.

The most common form of interaction between urban government and lawyers was, of course, through the provision of legal advice. For the most part, our four towns demonstrated very similar patterns in their employment of lawyers in this period, revolving around the two key positions of the recorder and the salaried counsellor.⁹¹ Salisbury was the

⁸⁸ For the social position of lawyers, see e.g. Musson, 'Legal Culture'; Ives, *Common Lawyers*, part iv.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-46.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-53. Musson, 'Legal Culture'.

⁹¹ For a wider discussion of the office of recorder, see J. Lee, 'Urban Recorders and the Crown in Late Medieval England', in L. Clark ed., *The Fifteenth Century III: Authority and Subversion* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 163-79.

only exception to this pattern: while the city retained local lawyers as counsel, it did not employ a recorder, perhaps because the citizens did not have the right to dispense petty justice through a mayoral court.⁹² In general, however, these positions were filled by very similar figures in each of these towns. Under normal circumstances, these men were drawn from the legal elite of the county, that is the substantial lawyers who acted for members of local landed society and who were often aspiring gentlemen themselves. One example is Nicholas Radford, who served as counsel for Exeter from 1418 until 1442.⁹³ In that year, he was elevated to become recorder, an office he held until he was murdered in 1455.⁹⁴ Radford was well connected in Devon and beyond: perhaps most importantly, he was employed at various times by the earls of Devon and Huntingdon and by Lord Bonville, the three most substantial noblemen in Devon at the time.⁹⁵ His local importance and legal training were also recognised by the crown, leading to his appointment as a Devon JP between 1424 and his death, and as an apprentice-at-law for the duchy of Lancaster from 1439.⁹⁶ By the time of his murder, Radford had accumulated a sizable estate, centred on Upcott (between Exeter, Tiverton and Crediton) and was said to have at least £2000 in plate and coin.⁹⁷ For him, employment by the city of Exeter (which predated his known aristocratic contacts) may well have been an important first step in his career, bringing him into contact with more established lawyers and perhaps enhancing his reputation as a man of law.

Radford had many similarities with other city lawyers, and a number of common themes can be identified in their careers. Firstly, almost all were local men and, in particular, were drawn

⁹² This right was, of course, in the hands of the bishop and his officers.

⁹³ DHC, ECA, CRA 1418-42.

⁹⁴ G.H. Radford, 'Nicholas Radford, 1385(?)–1455', *TD.A*, 35 (1903), pp. 251-78.

⁹⁵ For Devon and Bonville, *ibid.*, and Cherry, 'Struggle for Power'. For Huntingdon, M.M.N. Stansfield, 'The Hollands, Dukes of Exeter, Earls of Huntingdon and Kent, 1352-1475' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1987), pp. 216-17, 245. Other clients included the duke of Buckingham and Cardinal Beaufort. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁹⁶ *CPR 1422-9*, p. 562; *1429-36*, p. 615; *1436-41*, p. 581, *1441-6*, p. 469; *1446-52*, p. 588; *1452-61*, p. 664.

R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster* (2 vols., London, 1953), i, p. 453.

⁹⁷ Radford, 'Nicholas Radford', pp. 254-5. *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 168-70.

from the county in which the city was situated. For Norwich and Southampton, both far from county boundaries, this is unsurprising, but it is worth noting that Exeter and Salisbury employed men from distant parts of their respective counties in apparent preference to those from parts of other counties which were actually closer to the city. Exeter, for example, retained Thomas Raymond (whose property near Holsworthy was closer to Cornwall than Exeter) and the two Robert Hills of Shilstone (near Ivybridge) but no-one from west Dorset or south-west Somerset.⁹⁸ Presumably this pattern related to the way the legal system was organised around the county, creating legal communities defined by the administrative border, something which also drew lawyers to cities like Exeter on account of their position as central loci of the judicial process. Many of these lawyers owned property in the ‘county town’. We have already encountered ‘Kelly’s Inn’ in Exeter, which served as the Exeter house of the lawyers Thomas Raymond and John (II) Coplestone.⁹⁹ Raymond’s predecessor as recorder, John Hill, also maintained a residence in the city, named ‘Hill’s Court’.¹⁰⁰ Edmund Wynter (retained by Norwich in the 1430s) possessed a ‘mansion’ in the city and it is possible that his father, John, who had also been employed by Norwich, may have been its previous owner.¹⁰¹ Others had residences very close by: William Wynard (recorder of Exeter, 1418-1442) held manors immediately to the east (Clyst Barneville) and south-east (Wonford) of the city.¹⁰² Some were even closer to home, as they themselves had been born into city families. John (III) Shapleigh of Exeter followed his father and grandfather in the city’s service, although his ‘mystery’ was the law rather than trading in cloth as they had done.¹⁰³ Similarly, Walter Eton (recorder of Norwich, 1407-c.1415, 1423-1430) and John Alderford

⁹⁸ For Raymond: Cherry, ‘Crown and Political Society’, pp. 366-8. For Hill: *ibid.*, pp. 357-8.

⁹⁹ Above, p. 87

¹⁰⁰ This name survives to the present day. A. Jenkins, *Civil and Ecclesiastical History of the City of Exeter and its Environs*, 2nd ed. (Exeter, 1841), p. 344.

¹⁰¹ NRO, NCC, Will Register Wylbey, #147.

¹⁰² TNA, C 1/10/257; PROB 11/1/289.

¹⁰³ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 346-7.

(Norwich's attorney in the London courts, before 1406-1423) were both from prominent city families.¹⁰⁴

A second similarity between these lawyers was their close connection with prominent members of local landed society. Thomas Raymond (Exeter) was a liveried retainer of the earl of Devon, acted as an attorney for the earl of Huntingdon and as a feoffee for Sir William Bonville, as well as serving as the steward of several Devon monastic houses.¹⁰⁵ William Alexander (Salisbury) was an intimate of Walter, lord Hungerford, to whom Alexander almost certainly owed his appointment as deputy chief steward of the south parts of the Duchy of Lancaster.¹⁰⁶ Thomas Derham (retained by Norwich, 1407-1430) was connected with a number of Norfolk gentlemen, including Sir Thomas Erpingham, Sir Edmund Thorpe, William Rees and John Wynter, and was able to choose Sir Thomas Tuddenham as the supervisor of his will.¹⁰⁷ William Chamberlain (recorder of Southampton c.1428 until c.1445) had sufficient presence in Hampshire to count Sir Maurice Berkeley and William Brocas esq. amongst his feoffees, and to marry his daughter and heiress to Richard Holt esq.¹⁰⁸ That substantial late-medieval lawyers possessed numerous contacts with the gentry and nobility is, of course, well known, but it is important to recognise that these same men provided services to local boroughs at the same time, and might have thereby formed a connection between urban and aristocratic society.

Indeed, cities' employment of lawyers sometimes followed patterns which appear to relate to the lawyers' clients in the county, although we should be cautious of concluding that a city

¹⁰⁴ Eton's father, William, had been bailiff in 1377 and 1384: Blomefield, iii, p. 116. Alderford's father, Peter, had also been bailiff: *ibid.*, iii, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 366-8. TNA, JUST 1/1502, m. 210. *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 178-80.

¹⁰⁶ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 23-4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 777-9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 513-14.

and a magnate sharing lawyers implied any greater link between the two. The 1380s and 90s, for example, saw Exeter retain Thomas Raymond, John Hill, Robert Hill snr, Robert Hill jnr, Walter Clopton and William Hankeford, all of whom were liveried by the earl of Devon in 1384-5.¹⁰⁹ In addition, another of the city's legal advisors, John Cary, had lent the earl money in the early 1380s, while the only lawyer employed by Exeter in this period who had no known links to the earl, William Frye, was only just beginning his career in law.¹¹⁰ While this might be taken as evidence of a strong connection between Exeter and the earl, that is by no means certain: a better explanation is that these men were a nearly comprehensive selection of the eminent Devon lawyers of this period, and that both the city and the earl sought to benefit from their counsel. A more persuasive example of a city employing lawyers based on their political connections is Norwich from 1436 onwards, when a succession of lawyers with links to the Fastolf-Paston-Yelverton connection were engaged by the city: these men are discussed in a later chapter as part of a wider exploration of Norwich's involvement in Norfolk's politics.¹¹¹ Unlike the previous example of Exeter in the late fourteenth century, however, this is an instance of a city employing only lawyers from a narrow, factional group: given that, as discussed below, the city was actively hostile to Fastolf's opponents (notably the earl of Suffolk), it is perhaps unsurprising that Norwich and Fastolf employed the same lawyers.

A similar situation developed in Salisbury from 1450 onwards, during the citizens' dispute with Bishop Beauchamp. On this occasion, however, rather than being forced to employ lawyers associated with a certain faction in county politics, Salisbury was cut off from local counsel altogether. In previous decades, Salisbury had employed similar lawyers to our other towns (although, as noted above, the city did not employ a recorder). In 1396-7, for example,

¹⁰⁹ DHC, ECA, CRA for 1380-1400. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Society', appendix 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141. *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 145-6.

¹¹¹ Below, p. 285.

the citizens gave fees and livery to *inter alia* William Stourton (a very prominent Wiltshire lawyer who was Commons speaker in 1413 and whose son was ennobled in 1448), John Gowayn (another prominent Wiltshire lawyer, twice MP for the county) and John Wyking (a local lawyer and administrator, twice escheator of Wiltshire).¹¹² Between 1417 and c.1446, the city's legal representation was dominated by William Alexander who was in fact a Salisbury man by birth, but had risen high in the service of Walter Hungerford and was sufficiently influential in the county to be elected Wiltshire's MP in 1415.¹¹³

The effect of the struggle between Beauchamp and Salisbury was very obvious from the patterns of the city's retention of Wiltshire lawyers: they stopped completely.¹¹⁴ From the early 1450s onwards, the citizens did not employ a single significant lawyer from the county, such as Henry Long, John Whittocksmede or Thomas Tropenell, perhaps the three most successful lawyers active in the county in this period.¹¹⁵ The problem, of course, was that these men were themselves employed by the bishop or were indirectly connected to him. Long was the steward of the bishop's estates from before 1455 until after 1479, while Whittocksmede was the episcopal bailiff of Salisbury for much of the same period.¹¹⁶ Tropenell, while not directly connected with the bishop, could count the bishop's nephew amongst his intimates and was also closely associated with Long and Whittocksmede.¹¹⁷ In addition, the importance of the bishop of Salisbury in aristocratic society in Wiltshire cannot be overstated: alongside the lords Hungerford and a few monasteries, the bishop was one of the few resident magnates in the county. The paucity of such figures meant that opportunities

¹¹² For Stourton: *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 496-9. For Gowayn: *ibid.*, iii, pp. 166-7. For Wyking, e.g. *CPR 1385-9*, p. 321; *1388-92*, pp. 268, 272; *1399-1401*, p. 125; *CFR 1391-9*, p. 57; *1399-1405*, p. 93.

¹¹³ For Alexander, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 23-4.

¹¹⁴ For more on the dispute between city and bishop, see below, pp. 211-16.

¹¹⁵ For summaries of their careers, see *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 550, 875-6, 944-5.

¹¹⁶ For Whittocksmede: Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, pp. 240, 242-3, 249, 251-2. For Long: LB2, f. 21; WSHC, D 1/2/11, f. 25d.

¹¹⁷ For Tropenell, Whittocksmede and Long: E.g. *CCR 1447-54*, pp. 147-8; *1461-8*, pp. 225-6, 271-2; Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, ii, pp. 125, 220-1, 257. For Tropenell and Sir Richard Beauchamp: *ibid.*, i, p. 67; ii, pp. 209, 211, 219, 222.

for lawyers and estate administrators to find employment in Wiltshire were seriously limited, and the importance of individual lords was commensurately increased. One result of this was to limit the size of the legal community in the county. By contrast, Devon's more populous landed society could support more lawyers, and so when Exeter was involved in a similar dispute with its bishop in the 1440s, it did not share Salisbury's problems. Although Exeter temporarily lost the services of one of its long-term counsel when John (II) Copleston sided with the bishop, and although the bishop could command 'a greet barre' of Devon lawyers, the city could still marshal an impressive legal team of its own.¹¹⁸ In Salisbury, the citizens resorted to representing themselves and, when this failed, they instead sought out substantial lawyers from other counties, particularly Devon.¹¹⁹ Given the fact that many lawyers possessed substantial links to county society, it is unsurprising that these allegiances interacted with the cities' own external connections and relationships. The examples above demonstrate that these interactions could produce a number of different outcomes, although the effects for towns were all decidedly negative, as lawyers in general seem to have considered their aristocratic clients to be more important. This is perhaps predictable: for many lawyers, their relationships with towns were limited to being professional, whereas their county clients may have been neighbours, friends or even kin (and, in addition, employment by the aristocracy may well have been more prestigious).

For most lawyers, the provision of legal advice and representation was the full extent of their involvement in town governments. A few, however, developed their relationships further: these men fall into three categories. The first group (who comprised the majority of such

¹¹⁸ Copleston had been in episcopal service for decades and evidently considered his relationship with the bishop more important than his work for the city. The citizens seem to have been sympathetic to this, as Copleston continued to receive his pension from the city, although he was not paid for work or advice until after the dispute with the bishop had been concluded. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 651-3. DHC, ECA, CRA 1445-1450. Shillingford Letters, pp. 3-74. Quotation from p. 19.

¹¹⁹ LB2, f. 76d. E.g. John Denys of Orleigh, Thomas Tremayle and Thomas Dourish. LB2, ff. 86d, 109d, 112a. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 269, 278, 867-8.

figures) were actually townsmen by birth who had trained in the law rather than trade, such as John (III) Shapleigh who served on Exeter's council of twelve in 1431-2, or John Alderford who was sheriff of Norwich in 1428-9.¹²⁰ In this instance, the broadening of their interests was actually outwards (such as through Alderford's relationships with a range of Norfolk gentry), although the effect was still to bridge the divide between town and country by the means of the status of their profession. The second group were those lawyers from the county who simply came to consider the town a centre of their interests, or even a home. These men are perhaps more interesting from the perspective of the historian of lawyers rather than the historian of towns, but it is worth noting that figures like William Wynard not only requested to be buried in towns, but also concentrated their charitable works there.¹²¹ Others, as mentioned above, acquired residences in towns, probably due to the position of many boroughs as centres within the legal system. Whether this sort of contact had any meaningful impact on the relationship between county lawyers and townsmen is difficult to judge, but it should certainly caution us against viewing the legal elite solely as a part of *rural* affairs.

The final category of lawyers whose relationship with towns went further than the provision of legal advice finds only one example in our towns: Thomas Calwodeley, whose involvement in the government of the city of Exeter was on an entirely different scale to any other lawyer in our four examples. Calwodeley was in many respects an entirely typical county lawyer, in the mould of Nicholas Radford and the other lawyers discussed above. He possessed a wide range of contacts in Devon landed society,¹²² acted as a local administrator for absentee

¹²⁰ For biographies of these men, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 19-21; iv, p. 347.

¹²¹ Above, p. 91. TNA, PROB 11/1/289. D. Lepine and N. Orme, *Death and Memory in Medieval Exeter* (Exeter, 2003), p. 37. Lepine and Orme argue that Wynard's choice of the Franciscans for his tomb suggests that he thought of himself as an Exeter man, as the Devon gentry who wished to be buried in a friary tended to prefer the Dominicans (to whom Wynard gave 100 marks for a new cloister). *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹²² E.g. the earl of Devon (Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 273, 277) and the duke of Exeter or Lord Fitzwaryn (*CFR 1445-52*, pp. 77, 147).

lords,¹²³ and invested his profits in a substantial landed estate.¹²⁴ It was only in his relationship with Exeter that Calwodeley differed from his peers, but here the differences were remarkable. It is unclear when Calwodeley was first employed by Exeter, but in 1455 he was admitted to the freedom without fine on account of his provision of counsel to the corporation.¹²⁵ Grants of freedom to legal counsel were reasonably common, but Calwodeley's later role in Exeter's government was quite exceptional. In 1456, he was elected to be the city's receiver, a position he held again in 1460-1.¹²⁶ This was complemented by four elections to be the city's MP (in 1459, 1467, 1472 and January 1483) and three terms as mayor (1467-8, 1480-1 and 1486-7).¹²⁷ Just as Calwodeley's career as a county lawyer appears entirely typical, so his activity in towns seems equally typical of a successful member of the ruling elite. He even followed the example of many of his urban peers by bequeathing property to the city, although rather than a tenement in the city, he left (via feoffees) the manor of Awliscombe, underlining his position as a figure with one foot each side of the city walls. The lives of Calwodeley's sons also reflect their family's divided loyalties: Thomas (II) and Oliver seem to have been more country figures, while John served as Exeter's mayor on three occasions.¹²⁸

Given our sample size of one, it is difficult to draw conclusions concerning why Calwodeley's involvement in urban government differed so greatly from his legal peers. One possibly-significant difference between Calwodeley and other lawyers is that he possessed a substantial collection of properties in Exeter (over thirty dwellings, apparently worth £10 per annum) as opposed to the single residences which other lawyers such as Thomas Raymond

¹²³ E.g. the lords Zouche (*HoP 1439-1509*, p. 150) and perhaps the duchess of York: the duchess accused Calwodeley of not rendering account for his term as her receiver in Devon in 1476-7, although Calwodeley's defence was to claim that he had, in fact, never been her receiver. TNA, CP 40/871, r. 106d.

¹²⁴ TNA, C 131/82/39; C 1/48/455.

¹²⁵ Rowe and Jackson eds., *Freemen of Exeter*, p. 52.

¹²⁶ DHC, ECA, CRA 1456-7, 1460-1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* for these years.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* for 1495-6, 1501-2, 1507-8. *CIPM (Hen VII)*, ii, #774. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 150-1.

acquired.¹²⁹ Unfortunately, we have no evidence of quite when Calwodeley acquired this portfolio: his urban property might have been a result, rather than the cause, of his involvement in Exeter's government. Another possibility is a simple matter of personal preference, although that in itself would be worthy of comment, as it would imply that a substantial county lawyer felt that his interests could be advanced through becoming a governor of a provincial town.

Lawyers, then, could easily traverse the boundary between town and countryside, and they often did so. Whereas landed gentlemen's interests were generally distant from urban affairs, county lawyers were drawn into contact with town governments through employment, and through the important position of towns within the systems of local justice. Also unlike the landed gentry, these lawyers were evidently considered welcome additions by the corporation. For the most part this was, of course, on account of their legal expertise, but it should also be noted that most lawyers shared the marginal gentle status held by men such as Thomas Temse discussed above: their position in society was based on their profession and their (recently acquired) wealth, rather than on the power associated with land, lordship and lineage. As such, their involvement in urban government would not threaten the town's independence and was unlikely to import factional disturbances from county politics into the town.

Royal Servants

The second group of men who moved with ease between responsibilities in towns and elsewhere were royal servants, particularly those who combined a low-ranking position in the royal household with a minor role in provincial government. Our towns furnish us with two groups of such men: those whose responsibilities in customs administration drew them

¹²⁹ TNA, C 131/82/39.

into the government of Southampton, and those who combined roles in the royal parks of Wiltshire (especially Clarendon) with positions in the government of Salisbury. That it was these two towns that allowed royal servants to join their government, rather than Exeter or Norwich, is perhaps predictable, given that Salisbury and Southampton were undoubtedly the weaker pair.¹³⁰ As such, their leading citizens were probably more willing to accept aristocrats, perhaps in the hope that they might strengthen the town government, either financially or by taking on civic responsibilities. Current and former royal officers served in almost every tier of urban government, from William Pakyn's two terms as mayor of Salisbury down to Geoffrey Ponynges, whose fourteen years as the city's serjeant-at-mace had been preceded by over a decade serving Henry VI as one of the eight foresters of Clarendon.¹³¹

Almost exclusively, these men were royal servants before their involvement in towns began. A typical example was that of Vincent Pittlesden, who had enjoyed a lengthy career in the service of the crown before he was elected sheriff of Southampton in 1466.¹³² Having been a customer in Devon and Cornwall since the 1440s and the escheator of those counties in 1455-6, Pittlesden was drawn to Southampton by his appointment as customer there in 1460.¹³³ This was followed by a term as controller of the customers and as deputy chief butler between 1461 and 1466, at which point he had evidently caught the eye of the town government.¹³⁴ Similarly, Edmund Langton had already held office as the launder of Clarendon for fifteen years when he first appeared as a member of the city council of

¹³⁰ There is one example from Exeter, the valet of the crown William Frost, who was elected mayor of the city at the time of Henry VII's visit to the city in 1497. However, this was his only involvement in the city's government (although he provided assistance to the citizens, as discussed below, pp. 206, 208-9.) and so this would appear to be an example of the city seeking royal favour by electing a royal servant, rather than a true instance of a royal servant taking part in city government on his own terms.

¹³¹ TNA, E 372/281, m. 56; E 372/292, m. 5d. LB1, #422. LB2, f. 54d.

¹³² TNA, E 372/312, m. 63. Davies, *History of Southampton*, p. 174.

¹³³ *CFR 1437-45*, pp. 314, 317-18; *1445-52*, pp. 51, 54, 56; *1452-61*, pp. 4, 8, 57, 58, 59, 60, 97, 145, 199, 254, 256, 257.

¹³⁴ *CPR 1461-7*, pp. 12, 26.

Salisbury in 1448.¹³⁵ There are a few exceptions to this pattern of men being employed in royal service before engaging with urban politics, but they are based on inconclusive evidence. William Pakyn, for example, was elected to be an alderman of Salisbury in 1416, whereas his known involvement in royal government began in 1423 when he was appointed as purveyor of the king's works at Clarendon.¹³⁶ However, it is clear from this appointment that he already held office there (as deputy to the clerk of the works) and so his royal service may well have predated his election as alderman. As such, it seems appropriate to conclude that these men were indeed outsiders who became involved in towns, rather than townsmen who sought to expand their interests through service to the crown. What else can be said about these men?

Perhaps the most important characteristic of these royal servants was the minimal status they possessed on their own account, and thus their reliance on royal office and patronage. Many claimed to be gentlemen or even esquires and yet utterly lacked the landed wealth to support such pretensions. None were significant landowners: William Ludlow, who combined a career in the royal household and the royal park at Ludgershall with roles in the government of Salisbury, was extremely unusual in that he possessed a manor.¹³⁷ William Pakyn (mayor of Salisbury, 1428-9 and 1442-3) styled himself a gentleman, while Richard Hayne (member of Salisbury's city council, 1453-80) claimed to be an esquire and was recognised as such in a royal commission.¹³⁸ However, Pakyn is only known to have owned miscellaneous property in Salisbury and elsewhere, while his heir (also a 'gentleman') was found to hold property worth just 20s per annum on his death (only a few months after Pakyn's own demise).¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *CPR 1429-36*, pp. 263-4. LB1, #417.

¹³⁶ *CPR 1422-9*, p. 107. LB1, #169.

¹³⁷ For a summary of his career, see *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 561-2. For his manor of Hill Deverill, *ibid.*, and TNA, C 140/66/36.

¹³⁸ Pakyn: *CPR 1416-22*, p. 434; *CFR 1430-7*, p. 308. Hayne: *CPR 1452-61*, p. 657; Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, p. 59.

¹³⁹ *CAD*, vi, C.4996. *CPR 1436-41*, p. 562. Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, pp. 160-3.

Similarly, Hayne's possessions are not known to have extended beyond a collection of property in Salisbury's suburbs.¹⁴⁰ As such, it seems certain that they based their claims to gentle status on their service to the crown, particularly at Clarendon. As previously noted, Pakyn was employed as clerk of the works there from 1423 at the latest, and this position was later held by Hayne between 1445 and 1451.¹⁴¹ Hayne also found favour with the Yorkists, as he was appointed constable of Old Sarum castle in 1466.¹⁴² The status of such men on the boundaries of gentility is made further apparent by the variations and fluctuations in the titles they chose or were afforded by others: Pakyn, for example was variously described as a yeoman (1425) and as a merchant (1445) in the court of Common Pleas, while being acknowledged as a gentleman in a pardon (1422) and a royal grant (1437).¹⁴³ Hayne, meanwhile, alternated between being a gentleman and an esquire, while Edmund Langton was suddenly described as being an esquire in 1461, having never previously been afforded a title at all.¹⁴⁴ The difficulties for both contemporaries and historians in determining the status of such figures is well known, but it is important to note here that while gentlemen and even esquires were involved in urban affairs, these were men who relied on service and patronage for their rank, rather than their own landed possessions.¹⁴⁵

The local responsibilities which these men held were generally of limited importance and prestige compared to the significant county offices. The royal servants who joined Southampton's government were drawn to the town through roles administering the royal revenues from the port, generally the offices of customer or controller of the customers. Their counterparts in Salisbury were employed in lower-ranking positions, such as that of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., i, p. 59.

¹⁴¹ *CPR 1422-9*, p. 107; *1441-6*, p. 372.

¹⁴² *CPR 1461-7*, p. 524.

¹⁴³ TNA, CP 40/659, r. 107; CP 40/736, r. 333. *CPR 1416-22*, p. 434. *CFR 1430-7*, p. 308.

¹⁴⁴ *CPR 1452-61*, p. 657. *CCR 1441-7*, p. 212. *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, p. 59.

¹⁴⁵ See e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 67-8; Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, pp. 240-1; R.L. Storey, 'Gentlemen Bureaucrats', in Clough ed., *Profession, Vocation and Culture*, pp. 90-129.

clerk of the works at Clarendon or as launder of the royal forest. However, although the status of these positions themselves did not alter across the period, the status of the *other* royal offices which their incumbents held fluctuated markedly. The general trend was for progressively more important figures to be granted these offices, and in particular they increasingly came to be dominated by men with connections to the royal household and affinity. Under Richard II and the Lancastrians, the majority of appointees are not known to have held other royal responsibilities, or had held provincial positions of a similarly low rank. Thomas Appleby of Southampton, for example, was appointed to be customer of Southampton in 1381, having previously been the royal receiver of the Channel Islands.¹⁴⁶ William Pakyn and John Chaffyn were both clerk of the works at Clarendon under Henry VI, but neither is known to have held royal office elsewhere.¹⁴⁷ Vincent Pittlesden, discussed above, provides an example of someone who might be described as a professional royal administrator in the localities, but who is not known to have possessed any links to the household.

In the reign of Henry VI, however, we encounter men who held local office but also some menial position in the royal household. The earliest is Richard Etton, who represented Salisbury in the parliament of 1435, as well as serving on the city council and as a man-at-arms in the company granted by the city for the defence of Calais in 1436.¹⁴⁸ Prior to this, Etton had been launder of Clarendon from 1416 until 1433, while in 1414 he had been granted a substantial annuity on account of his position as ‘king’s esquire’.¹⁴⁹ He is probably also the Richard Etton who served in the household contingent on the Agincourt campaign.¹⁵⁰ In 1440 his annuity was re-conferred jointly on him and William Ludlow,

¹⁴⁶ For a summary of Appleby’s career, see *HoP 1389-1421*, ii, pp. 41-2.

¹⁴⁷ *CPR 1422-9*, p. 107. *CPR 1452-61*, p. 151.

¹⁴⁸ LB1, #254-6, 258, 300, 305, 308, 312, 315-20.

¹⁴⁹ *CPR 1413-16*, pp. 239, 403-4; *1429-36*, pp. 263-4.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, E 101/407/10, m. 2.

describing them as ‘king’s sergeants’.¹⁵¹ As already mentioned, Ludlow was another early example of a man who held royal office both in the household and the localities. Indeed, his (temporary) acquisition of the royal manor of Ludgershall in tail male was probably only possible because his position in the cellar of the household gave him access to Henry VI.¹⁵²

Later examples of men with royal links come almost exclusively from Southampton: although household men continued to be appointed to positions at Clarendon, the connection with Salisbury seems to have been severed after 1461.¹⁵³ The Lancastrian servants who were removed from their offices at Clarendon and elsewhere, such as Ludlow, Langton and Chaffyn, remained involved in Salisbury’s government, but they were not joined by the Yorkist appointees who replaced them.¹⁵⁴ In part, this was probably the result of the new incumbents being unfamiliar: many of the Lancastrians had themselves spent a decade or more in their royal offices before becoming involved in the city government (or at least at such a level in the government for their presence to be recorded). However, we must also keep in mind the city’s isolation during the period c.1460-c.1475, when its dispute with Bishop Beauchamp reached its peak. Beauchamp does not seem to have lacked connections to the household of Edward IV and was frequently able to induce royal intimates such as Maurice Berkeley and John Tuchet, lord Audley, to act as arbitrators.¹⁵⁵ As such, it seems possible that royal servants with household connections may have decided that involvement in Salisbury’s affairs was not in their interests, as it might have brought them into conflict with other members of the royal establishment.

¹⁵¹ *CPR 1436-41*, p. 420.

¹⁵² *CPR 1446-52*, p. 247.

¹⁵³ E.g. William Middleton, esquire of the household, who was appointed porter and then keeper of Clarendon in 1479 and 1481 respectively. *CPR 1476-85*, pp. 157, 242.

¹⁵⁴ Langton, for instance, last appears in the city records in mid-October 1470, suggesting he may have fought for the Lancastrians during the Readeption. LB2, f. 94.

¹⁵⁵ E.g. LB2, ff. 83d, 85d-86d, 109, 109a, 119c.

In Southampton, by contrast, a healthy number of men with royal connections were first drawn to the town by roles in the customs administration and then became involved in urban government and politics. However, these men were generally part of the wider royal affinity, rather than menial figures from the royal household. In the second reign of Edward IV, the customs were placed under the authority of, *inter alia*, William (II) Overay and Roger Kelsale, respectively esquire and yeoman of the crown.¹⁵⁶ Both became important figures in Southampton, Overay as mayor and Kelsale as an influential burgess.¹⁵⁷ Under Henry VII, the pattern changed slightly: although men with royal connections continued to combine roles in the Southampton customs with involvement in the town government, their formal connections to the royal affinity and household came later. Thomas Thomas, for example, was appointed controller of the customers in November 1486 and was elected MP for the town in 1495.¹⁵⁸ However, it was not until 1499 that he was noted as being an esquire of the body.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Thomas Overay was appointed gauger in the port of Southampton in November 1485 and quickly became involved in the town's affairs, serving three consecutive terms as mayor in 1488-1491.¹⁶⁰ However, it was not until 1499 that he was described as an esquire of the body, although in 1495 he had been termed the 'king's servant.'¹⁶¹ A particularly extreme example of this was (Sir) John Dawtry, whose involvement in both customs and government in Southampton began as early as 1489, but who did not become a knight of the body until 1515.¹⁶² It is very likely, however, that all three of these men were actually connected to the crown before these dates: Wedgwood, for instance, believed that Thomas Thomas came from Wales with Henry of Richmond, while Dawtry was heavily involved with

¹⁵⁶ CPR 1467-77, p. 268. CFR 1471-85, pp. 128, 129, 130. For Overay as an esquire of the crown, DHC, ECA, CRA 1470-1. For Kelsale, HoP 1439-1509, p. 510.

¹⁵⁷ Davies, *History of Southampton*, pp. 174, 202. Wallies-Chapman ed., *Black Book*, i, pp. 7-13.

¹⁵⁸ HoP 1439-1509, pp. 846-7. CPR 1485-94, p. 158.

¹⁵⁹ CPR 1494-1509, p. 164.

¹⁶⁰ CPR 1485-94, p. 83.

¹⁶¹ CPR 1494-1509, pp. 58, 189.

¹⁶² HoP 1439-1509, p. 263.

the government as a contractor and military provisioner.¹⁶³ Thomas Overay was recorded at court in 1492, but, as already mentioned, his probable relative William (II) had been an esquire to Edward IV (and, having taken part in Buckingham's Revolt, returned to England with Henry), while Thomas's own appointment as both captain of Jersey and esquire of the body suggests a lengthy pre-existing connection with the crown.¹⁶⁴

This picture of the Yorkist and early Tudor customers of Southampton provides us with two important insights. Firstly, there is a pattern of the crown drawing the customs administration more closely into its control, but doing so through the deployment of royal servants to the localities, rather than by centralising responsibilities to London. We might draw a parallel here with the extension of the royal affinity into the counties during this period, which saw offices such as the shrievalty increasingly held by men with a direct connection to the crown: it is worth noting that something similar was taking place in parts of the royal administration which were of importance to townsmen.¹⁶⁵ Secondly, although these men arrived in Southampton as royal servants, they became personally involved in the town's affairs as a consequence, sometimes adopting it as a home and even a centre of their interests.

One factor which probably eased the transition of such men between royal service and roles in town government was ownership of urban property. Almost all of our examples owned houses in the towns in which they held office. Of course, possession of property in a town was a prerequisite for holding office there, but it seems unlikely that these men bought tenements simply to become eligible for election. Some of these men probably required residences near to their royal responsibilities. The significant construction works undertaken

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 263, 846.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 653. For (Sir) William Overay see above and K. Hillier, 'Four Southampton Rebels of 1483', *The Ricardian*, 5:64 (1979), pp. 14-19.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. D.A.L. Morgan, 'The King's Affinity in the Polity of Yorkist England', *TRHS*, 23 (1973), pp. 20-1. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 523-47.

by John Dawtry to create what is now Tudor House in Southampton, for example, should probably be seen in this light.¹⁶⁶ Many had bought property some years before they were elected to urban office. Richard Etton was known to have property in Salisbury in 1423, three years before he first appears in the city's records and twelve years before he was elected MP.¹⁶⁷ Edmund Langton bought a dwelling in Salisbury in 1439, nine years before he attended a city assembly.¹⁶⁸ As well as his substantial holdings in Salisbury, William Ludlow had also acquired property in Southampton and while this did not lead to him holding office there, it did enable his son John (who had shared a number of his father's royal appointments under Henry VI) to become mayor in 1478-9.¹⁶⁹ As previously mentioned, urban property (including some held by Etton, Ludlow and Dawtry) could also be acquired by marrying into urban families, something which itself undoubtedly served to strengthen these men's connection to their new home, and may have encouraged them to take part in urban politics.¹⁷⁰ The Overays of Southampton, meanwhile, were the only example of royal servants acquiring urban property through personal inheritance. William (II) was the son of William (I), a naturalised Italian who had been mayor of Southampton in 1398-9 and 1406-7 and who died in c.1434.¹⁷¹

In summary, these men were examples of what might be termed the 'service', 'administrative' or even 'courtier' gentry. They lacked the lordship which defined the landed gentry, and instead owed their status to their roles in royal government and, particularly in the Yorkist and early Tudor period, in the royal household and affinity. Although frequently not natives of the area (Thomas Thomas, for example, was probably Welsh, while Roger Kelsale was

¹⁶⁶ Burgess ed., *Southampton Terrier*, #276. Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, p. 238.

¹⁶⁷ *WFF*, #386.

¹⁶⁸ *WFF*, #528.

¹⁶⁹ Burgess ed., *Southampton Terrier*, #74-6, 118, 151-6, 230-1, 234. *CPR 1441-6*, pp. 74, 250; *1476-85*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁰ Above, pp. 85-6.

¹⁷¹ *CPR 1391-6*, p. 458. Davies, *History of Southampton*, p. 173. Wallis-Chapman ed., *Black Book*, i, pp. 62-5, 87, 95.

probably from Cheshire), their local royal responsibilities caused them to establish themselves in Wiltshire and Hampshire.¹⁷² From there, their purchase of urban property (whether as a residence or as an investment) led them into contact with and then involvement in urban government. At this point we must recall to mind the ‘marginal’ status of the minor gentlemen and county lawyers discussed above: just like them, these royal servants may have been gentry of a sort, but they were qualitatively different from the landed or county gentry. Positions in town governments were not beneath them in honour or prestige, and they lacked the local connections which might have resulted in them importing county factionalism into the town.

IV – Conclusions

Government was a theatre which saw significant interaction between townsmen and aristocrats, both within the town and without. However, on most occasions it took the form of aristocrats holding power over townsmen, or becoming directly involved in urban government. Few townsmen served in royal offices which were both outside the town and outside the usual spheres of urban interest, and those who did were unusual figures who were themselves involved in rural affairs through landholding. Many aristocrats, by contrast, held positions which gave them authority over towns or townsmen, but the relationships created between towns and these men were fleeting, lasting only so long as they held office. Those aristocrats who became directly involved in urban government, by contrast, certainly established an extended, personal relationship with the citizens. However, it is not clear that all of these men truly represented a connection between towns and local landed society or the aristocracy more widely. The royal servants, for instance, had few connections with the local gentry and nobility, and so did not bridge the urban-rural divide. The significant local lawyers, on the other hand, represented just such a connection, as their profession linked

¹⁷² Hillier, ‘Four Southampton Rebels’, p. 15. *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 846.

them with both towns and county society, as well as with other groups such as religious institutions. This could, however, cause difficulties for towns when they needed legal representation, as their lawyers' other employers could include the town's opponents.

We are left with the vexing question of why the minor royal servants sought out positions of responsibility in these two towns. As ever with this sort of question, we lack any sort of direct evidence of motivations and are instead left to infer patterns from individuals and their actions. One distinct possibility is that these men were too minor ever to become figures of real substance in county political society, and so had to look elsewhere for advancement. None of these men, for example, were ever elected to parliament for a county. William Ludlow, Vincent Pittlesden and Richard Hayne all sat for other boroughs, albeit much lesser ones: Ludlow six times for Ludgershall, Pittlesden once for Plymouth, and Hayne once for Heytesbury and once for Poole.¹⁷³ Similarly, none were appointed as JPs, and only Pittlesden served as escheator.¹⁷⁴ None served as sheriffs of a county. Furthermore, what status these men did have was not built on land (they had little), nor on long association with the area (most were from elsewhere), nor lineage (most were of unknown and probably humble origins), but upon their position as administrators and royal servants. The upshot of these factors was two-fold. Firstly, these men were not of such exalted status as to consider a role in the government of a major town as being beneath them and secondly, many of them seem to have been alert to the possibilities of diversifying their spheres of operations. It is particularly noteworthy, for example, how many of these figures were occasionally identified as merchants in pardons and other royal and legal documents.¹⁷⁵ However, while activity in the mercantile sphere might imply the pursuit of profit, holding urban office often resulted

¹⁷³ *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 439, 561, 687.

¹⁷⁴ *CFR 1452-61*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁵ E.g. William Pakyn: TNA, CP 40/736, r. 333. Vincent Pittlesden: *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 688; TNA, C 131/76/8. Thomas Appleby: *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 42. Thomas Overay: *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 653. Richard Hayne: TNA, C 241/230/79.

in more financial loss than gain. Positions such as membership of the city council of Salisbury were unsalaried, while service in senior office, such as William Pakyn's two terms as mayor of Salisbury or Vincent Pittlesden's year as sheriff of Southampton, could involve substantial personal contributions to the city's finances, of which repayment (and certainly prompt repayment) was by no means guaranteed.¹⁷⁶ The inevitable conclusion of this is that these men were seeking something other than simple financial gain from their involvement in urban government.

Perhaps the most arresting suggestion is that these men believed that urban office contributed to their own personal prestige. Perhaps, unlike for the landed gentry, serving in the government of a major provincial town was considered appropriate or even honourable for men of this rank. Certainly, town governments believed that their towns corporately had 'worship' which could be affected by the quality of their governance, and that individual townsmen themselves derived prestige from their careers in urban politics and administration. Did William Ludlow, for example, gain more standing in the eyes of his peers by being elected as MP for Salisbury than he did when elected for the incomparably smaller and poorer borough of Ludgershall? Did William Pakyn's two terms as Salisbury's mayor contribute to his 'worship' in the same way as his position at Clarendon did? Was Roger Kelsale's gravitas increased by his influence in Southampton's government, over and above the standing he possessed as a yeoman of the crown? Moreover, did the experience they gained in urban government count in their favour outside the town boundaries? Frustratingly, these questions are almost impossible to answer, but in the absence of any significant financial benefit, the motivation for these men is surely that they stood to gain in

¹⁷⁶ The only real exception was the payment of MPs, which could be reasonably well paid, such as the £11 6s paid to the Salisbury MPs of February 1449 and the £17 paid to those from the following November. How much of this represented an actual salary rather than the re-imbursment of expenses, however, is unclear. LB1, #444.

another theatre: the most likely option is that it was the benefit to their reputation and standing which drove them to involve themselves in the governments of Salisbury and Southampton.

A similarly difficult question is that of why the townsmen were willing to allow these royal servants to play significant roles in their government. Most portrayals of late medieval towns see them as being very protective of their rights of self-governance, and cautious or even hostile towards any intrusion by aristocrats. However, such figures did have qualities which were surely desirable to the corporation: as noted above, experience and aptitude in government and administration were highly valued by senior townsmen, and men such as Pittlesden and Ludlow were hardly novices. Perhaps equally important was that these men had experience of negotiating the workings of royal government, and may have had connections there which could be turned to the city's use. Of course, these qualities and connections were shared (and perhaps even bettered) by members of the landed gentry and the nobility, and yet any attempt by these greater figures to become directly involved in the government of the city was strenuously resisted, as the relationships between Exeter and the earl of Devon and between Norwich and the earl of Suffolk, discussed in a later chapter, demonstrate.¹⁷⁷ The difference between these two groups in the eyes of townsmen was surely that the minor royal servants were not a threat to the town's independence and that the ensuing relationship was thus likely to be symbiotic, rather than resulting in the domination of the aristocrat over the town. These lesser figures (including the minor gentlemen and lawyers like Thomas Temse, Thomas (III) Hussey and Thomas Calwodeley) were unlikely to see towns as a potential addition to their local powerbase, simply because they lacked such a powerbase: they were geographical outsiders with little or no rural land.

¹⁷⁷ Below, pp. 221-2, 243-7.

3 – Direct Connections

I - Introduction

The previous chapters focused on two ‘theatres’ – land ownership and government – within which townsmen and aristocrats were drawn into contact with each other on account of their individual interests in those spheres. It does not necessarily follow, however, that their interests were aligned: indeed, it is easy to imagine situations where they might be mutually antagonistic, especially if the presence of members of both groups created additional competition for land or office. Furthermore, the fact that townsmen and aristocrats came into contact within these spheres does not imply that any form of relationship inevitably developed between men from each group. Although this chapter also examines a sphere in which transmural contact took place, its emphasis shifts to direct connections between aristocrats and townsmen, and to the relationships established between them which they believed to be to their mutual benefit. Five types of connection are explored, three of which deliberately mirror similar discussions concerning relationships within the aristocracy: retaining, marriage, and involvement in land transactions as feoffees and witnesses. These types of connection form the bedrock of many discussions of magnate affinities and political communities, but what part (if any) did townsmen play within them? The final two sections consider moneylending and the possible involvement of aristocrats in urban guilds, topics more in keeping with the traditional view of townsmen’s role in society.

II – Retaining

Amongst the aristocracy, perhaps the most direct type of connection was that between a lord and the men of his affinity, established both by retaining and by looser, less formal ties. These networks of service have, of course, been the subject of wide-ranging and sustained historiographical attention, but the role (if any) of townsmen within them has rarely been

touched upon.¹ For the most part, the absence of urban figures is because there were few obvious places for them within an aristocratic affinity, particularly within its professional core: most townsmen were merchants and manufacturers, rather than soldiers, lawyers or administrators. However, even if they were rarely direct retainers, townsmen might nonetheless have fitted more comfortably within the wider circles of the affinity. These were normally populated by the local gentry, who were valued by the lord for their local political influence, but a parallel can be drawn between these men and the leading citizens of local towns, if the lord had been interested in expanding his influence into the boroughs of his ‘country’.² However, this possibility is challenged by the perception that towns were fiercely protective of their independence, something which is obviously incompatible with lords retaining prominent citizens to take advantage of their urban influence. In this model, townsmen would therefore be restricted to a handful of specialised positions within affinities, all of which reflected their ‘normal’ roles in society. The most common were those of provisioner and what might be described as proto-bankers, the men who handled a lord’s money.³ Neither of these has been the subject of detailed study and it is not intended to include one here: there are no examples of the latter in our four towns (besides money-lending, discussed below), while the few men who contracted to supply victuals or ships for aristocrats’ military expeditions are not known to have had a wider relationship with their employers, indicating that these were probably simple business transactions, restricted to wartime.⁴ In summary, these hypotheses appear to deny the possibility of a role for townsmen in the service of the nobility: is this supported by the available evidence? Perhaps

¹ E.g. C. Carpenter, ‘The Beauchamp Affinity: A Study of Bastard Feudalism at Work’, *EHR*, 95:376 (1980), pp. 514-32; Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 8-18. Other works make reference to urban members of noble affinities, but do not consider the implications, e.g. McFarlane, *Nobility*, pp. 102-21; Cherry, ‘Courtenay Earls’, p. 85.

² The question of why magnates might have sought to do this is discussed below, pp. 309-12.

³ For the former: Curry, ‘Military Organisation’, pp. 149-50. For the latter, the best example is the relationship between John Welles of London and Sir John Fastolf: McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 179-84. Smith, ‘Aspects of the Career of Sir John Fastolf’, pp. 5-6, 103.

⁴ E.g. Walter Lange of Southampton’s provision of a ship and mariners for the duke of Surrey’s Irish expedition of 1398. *CPR 1396-9*, p. 438.

unsurprisingly, our towns produce very few examples of townsmen becoming directly and formally involved in magnates' affinities through retaining and employment. However, the examples of the handful of men who did establish such links should give us pause before we discount the possibility that such connections were important and interesting, and also perhaps less uncommon than we might first imagine. This section will discuss two different forms of aristocratic retaining found in our towns, before considering whether a scarcity of evidence may make such connections appear rarer than they were in reality.

The first form of service to an aristocrat – in the administration of estates – is evidenced by a solitary example, Roger Blickling of Norwich. Blickling's family were well-established Norwich citizens, with at least four previous Blicklings, including his father, Simon, having served as one of the city bailiffs.⁵ Roger himself was to serve three terms as bailiff (in 1386-7, 1393-4 and 1400-1) and was also elected as the city's MP in 1399.⁶ When peace commissions were issued for Norwich in 1397-1404, Blickling was one of four citizens chosen.⁷ It would seem that Blickling was also actively involved in trade, as he contributed towards the sums collected to finance the city's campaign for the establishment of a staple.⁸ He was then created the first constable of the staple, while in 1399 he was one of the citizens who deputised for the bailiffs while they attended on Henry of Bolingbroke.⁹ In general, this seems a quintessential career in urban government, and it provides no hint that Blickling had significant interests outside of the city walls. In fact, however, he had simultaneously spent this entire period in the service of Margaret Marshal, countess and later duchess of Norfolk.

⁵ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 253.

⁶ Blomefield, iii, pp. 116-17.

⁷ *CPR 1396-9*, pp. 98, 229, 239, 436; *1399-1401*, p. 562.

⁸ CAB, ff. 18d-20. This could be alternatively interpreted as a sign of his civic-mindedness.

⁹ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 253. Blomefield, iii, p. 115.

When Blickling first became involved with the countess is unknown, but in September 1382 (four years before his first known appointment in Norwich) she granted him the custody of her park at Lopham for life, along with wages of 3d per day and an annual livery marking him as her esquire.¹⁰ In 1394-5 and perhaps at other times, Blickling was also employed as one of her receivers.¹¹ The editors of the *History of Parliament* see Blickling's career in Norwich as evidence that he treated his employment by Margaret Marshal as 'something of a sinecure', but this seems a contentious judgement.¹² Blickling would hardly have been alone in combining a position as an aristocrat's official with other responsibilities. Many professional administrators, after all, could simultaneously serve a number of different employers (as well as their own interests) without being accused by historians of treating their jobs as sinecures: why should we assume differently for townsmen? In addition, a repeated theme in studies of late medieval aristocrats is that 'fees were not wasted on those who did nothing for them', and it seems unlikely that Margaret Marshal would authorise an annual expense of over £5 without expecting some return.¹³ It is plausible that her intention was to acquire some form of influence within Norwich itself, but this sits uncomfortably with Blickling's appointment as her receiver, which implies that his position in her network was as an official, not as a contact. Another possibility is that the countess intended to employ Blickling's urban connections more subtly, perhaps as a means of accessing urban finance networks, or even for the acquisition of luxury goods. It may also be relevant that Margaret was not a typical aristocrat, as her gender prevented her from using her extensive landed possessions as the foundation for political domination of the region.¹⁴ As such, her affinity may have been similarly unusual, containing fewer gentlemen but more figures like Blickling, who may have

¹⁰ *CPR 1381-5*, p. 528. This was later confirmed by royal inspections, including during the minority of the heir following the duchess's death in 1399. *CCR 1396-9*, p. 477. *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 132.

¹¹ R.E. Archer, 'The Mowbrays, Earls of Nottingham and Dukes of Norfolk, to 1432' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1984), p. 346.

¹² *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 253.

¹³ Quotation from McFarlane, *Nobility*, p. 109. Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, p. 44.

¹⁴ For a summary of her activities, see R.E. Archer, 'Brotherton [Marshal], Margaret, suo jure duchess of Norfolk (c.1320–1399)', *ODNB*.

provided administrative or financial expertise (which the countess needed) but without the socio-political cachet of the landed gentry (for which she perhaps had less need, and thus no desire to pay). It should also be noted that his connection with the countess was not the full extent of Blickling's extramural activities. Like several of his Norwich brethren, he was active in the Norfolk property market and possessed interests in a number of manors near Norwich.¹⁵ He was also occasionally involved as a feoffee outside the city walls for other townsmen and minor gentlemen, which saw him acting alongside substantial duchy of Lancaster figures like Sir Robert Berney and John Reymes.¹⁶ Taken together, this evidence gives the impression of a man who was generally broadening his horizons outside of his home town through involvement in landed society. In this context, service to a local magnate fits neatly, as does the opportunity it afforded to live nobly through the right to hunt in the countess's park.

A contrasting example of aristocratic retaining of townsmen is provided by three citizens of Exeter who were granted livery by the earl of Devon in the 1380s: unlike Blickling, it seems that these men were chosen deliberately for their pre-eminence in the city itself.¹⁷ The three in question, Robert (I) Wilford, John Grey and John Webber, were certainly ideal candidates if that was the earl's aim. Wilford was the leading citizen of his time, serving thirteen terms as mayor between 1373 and 1395.¹⁸ He was also employed by the crown, including as customer, collector of the 1377 Poll Tax and as a commissioner to suppress rebels in 1382.¹⁹ John Grey was a close associate of Wilford and also enjoyed a significant position in the city. Although his three mayoral terms were eclipsed by Wilford, he was elected to represent

¹⁵ *Feudal Aids*, iii, p. 626. Blomefield, v, pp. 12, 47, 445.

¹⁶ E.g. NRO, DCN 44/16/15; TNA, CP 25/1/168/179, #169; *CAD*, iv, A.9501. For Berney and Reymes, *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 208-10; iv, pp. 203-4.

¹⁷ British Library, Additional Charter 64320 (Livery Roll of the Earl of Devon, 1384-5).

¹⁸ DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Rolls and CRA for these years.

¹⁹ *CPR 1364-8*, p. 3; *1381-5*, pp. 140, 246. *CFR 1369-77*, p. 390.

Exeter in parliament no fewer than ten times, on two of which he simultaneously represented another Devon borough (Barnstaple in 1385 and Totnes in 1391).²⁰ Grey was also heavily involved in the customs in Exeter, serving as customer as well as holding the farm of the proceeds for several years in the early 1380s.²¹ Webber was a less prominent figure, but still important in the city government: although he did not serve as mayor or MP, he was an almost permanent fixture on the city council, and was also involved in the customs administration.²² In 1381 he had acquired a royal life exemption from holding any office, which may explain why he was never mayor.²³ When these men were retained by Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, in 1384-5, Wilford and Grey were without a doubt the most important citizens of Exeter, and Webber cannot have been far behind, making them an ideal selection for projecting the earl's influence into the city.²⁴ It seems unlikely that there was an alternative motivation for their livery, as none of the three is known to have had significant interests outside the city.²⁵ In addition, the retaining of leading citizens of Dartmouth (John (I) Hawley) and of Plymouth (John Sampson) makes it very likely that this was part of a wider policy to draw Devon's towns into the earl's orbit.²⁶

That the earl directly retained citizens is particularly intriguing given that he already possessed connections to Exeter through the other, more 'normal' members of his affinity. Of those also given the earl's livery in 1384-5, Thomas Raymond was the city's recorder and Walter

²⁰ *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 242-3.

²¹ *CFR 1377-83*, pp. 168, 195, 208.

²² DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Rolls for 1377-1399. *CFR 1356-68*, p. 347; *1369-77*, pp. 28, 92; *1377-83*, pp. 10, 132. *CPR 1381-5*, p. 129.

²³ *CPR 1377-81*, p. 598.

²⁴ Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 353-4, 372-3.

²⁵ Grey had an interest in property in Broad Clyst (shared with Guy, lord Bryan, another Courtenay associate) but this was minimal: 50a of land and a dwelling, worth 40s per annum. *CPR 1405-8*, p. 267. *CIM*, vii, #241. Wilford's grandson was to attain the rank of esquire and held a respectable amount of rural property, but it is unknown when the family acquired this. TNA, C 140/57/57.

²⁶ Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 355-6, 368-9.

Clopton, Robert Hill and John Hill were the city's salaried legal counsel.²⁷ The previous year saw the city reward Thomas Creedy with a mark of silver: on this occasion he was recorded as a royal sergent-at-arms, but he was also of the earl's livery and had previously served as the city's MP in 1380.²⁸ Another comital lawyer retained in 1384-5, John Wadham, had been Exeter's MP in 1379 (alongside Robert Hill) and was frequently rewarded by the city following his appointment to the Devon bench in 1389.²⁹ Should the earl have wished to influence the city, he already possessed a number of channels through which to do so, suggesting that either these were inadequate or that he intended to form a closer attachment between his lordship and the city.

This example from Exeter gives a very different picture of aristocratic retaining of townsmen from that presented by Roger Blickling. Rather than the employment of an official who happened to be a townsman, the earl of Devon retained prominent townsmen because they were prominent townsmen, and thus produced the possibility of extending his lordship into the towns within his 'country'. Quite how effective this proved is impossible to say, especially as we do not know if the earl expected some specific benefit, or whether spreading his lordship was its own reward. Nevertheless, it should be noted that retaining these three men did not result in the city limiting its noble contacts to the earl: in particular, it did not prevent the citizens from later giving numerous gifts to John Holland, earl of Huntingdon (and later duke of Exeter), who from 1388 onwards was locked in a struggle with the earl of Devon for control of the county.³⁰ It is possible, of course, that Huntingdon acquired his own

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 340-1, 356-8, 366-8. DHC, ECA, CRA 1384-5. Which Robert Hill (father and son were both lawyers) is unclear, but both were retained by the earl and from 1396 both were salaried by the city. Ibid., 1396-7.

²⁸ Ibid., 1383-4. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', p. 347. His brother Adam was to be elected for Exeter in September 1388. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 689.

²⁹ DHC, ECA, CRA 1378-9, 1390-1, 1392-3, 1396-7, 1397-8, 1398-9, 1399-1400, 1400-1. *CPR 1388-92*, p. 136. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 371-2.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 154-73. DHC, ECA, CRA 1388-1399.

contacts or retainers within the city: it may be relevant that Richard Boson, who emerged in the mid-1380s to join Wilford and Grey as one of the most prominent citizens, was in possession of four liturgical texts belonging to Holland at the time of the earl's death in 1400, and was in the military service of the earl's nephew, Thomas, duke of Surrey and lieutenant of Ireland, in 1398.³¹ In addition, he was connected with Robert Cary, a prominent ally of Huntingdon in the south-west.³² It is plausible that the late-1380s and 1390s saw a stand-off within the city between supporters of each earl. Wilford certainly remained connected with the earl of Devon: his will (1396) included provision for prayers for the souls of the earl's grandparents and the good estate of his uncle, William, the archbishop of Canterbury, while Wilford's executors were paid by the earl in 1396-7.³³ If Boson's links with the earl of Huntingdon went further than simply safeguarding his books, then the pattern of mayoralities between 1386 and 1395 may be a reflection of a divided city, for Wilford and Boson were elected as mayors in alternating years in this period.³⁴ In addition, the election of Michaelmas 1399 saw Grey returned as mayor for the first time since 1381 and the following year he was succeeded by Wilford's son, William: given that the triumph of Henry of Bolingbroke over Richard II was also the triumph of the earl of Devon over the earl of Huntingdon, these elections may well be significant.³⁵ William Wilford is only known to have worn the livery of Bishop Stafford of Exeter, but was certainly associated with elements of the Courtenay affinity.³⁶ His wife, Margaret, was the daughter of Sir Robert Cornu (one of those retained by the earl in 1384-5) and the widow of Robert Cruwys (although Robert's allegiances are unknown, the Cruwys family were close associates of the earls of Devon), while William's

³¹ *CIM*, vii, #137. *CPR 1396-9*, p. 390.

³² *CFR 1383-91*, p. 244. It may also be relevant that Huntingdon retained the prominent Plymouth merchant, Richard Spicer. *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, p. 428. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 168, 172.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 373. DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Roll 1396-7. Archbishop Courtenay was dead by the time the will was recorded in the mayor's court.

³⁴ DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Rolls for 1386-95.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1399-1401. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 164-6, 174-8.

³⁶ Hingeston-Randolph ed., *Register of Edmund Stafford*, p. 270.

executors included the earl's retained lawyer, Thomas Raymond.³⁷ It may also be significant that Richard Boson was not elected mayor again until 1409.³⁸

The information above concerning Richard Boson and the earl of Huntingdon is a collection of miscellaneous references, built upon scholarship of several different areas of late medieval history, but taken together forms a not-unpersuasive case for the existence of a relationship between Boson and the earl. By contrast, our knowledge of the link between the earl of Devon and his three Exeter contacts is indisputable, due simply to the existence of one document, the earl's livery roll for 1384-5. Without this single manuscript, our knowledge of the connection between Devon and Robert Wilford would be limited to the provisions of Wilford's will, a few miscellaneous payments and his appointment by the king to act as Devon's lieutenant in levying issues forfeited to the earl as admiral of the West.³⁹ For Grey, we would only know of his commissioning alongside Wilford in the same business, while the connection between Devon and Webber would be entirely lost. These facts are of immense importance, simply because livery rolls and similar documents that conclusively state the retaining of men are vanishingly rare: K.B. McFarlane knew of five, dating from between 1384 and 1519.⁴⁰ If a similar document had survived for the affinity of the earl of Huntingdon from the 1390s, would we find Richard Boson (and, indeed, other Exeter citizens) on it? If a later version of the earl of Devon's livery roll were to be found, might we find that he had increased his presence in Exeter to counter his rival? A painful suspicion must emerge from this: the probability that similar examples have irrevocably disappeared from view because of simple accidents of documentary survival. This also extends to the sort of example presented by Roger Blickling. We know of Blickling's connection with Margaret Marshal

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 401-2. *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 866-8. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 214, 273, 319, 344.

³⁸ DHC, ECA, Mayor's Court Roll 1409-10.

³⁹ *CPR 1381-5*, p. 452.

⁴⁰ McFarlane, *Nobility*, pp. 110-12.

because, unusually, Blickling felt it necessary to seek royal confirmation of his grant from the countess, and because the duchy of Norfolk archives are both reasonably extensive and have been the subject of scholarship. If more aristocratic papers had survived from the later middle ages, how many more examples of urban retaining would we discover? The problem is, of course, insurmountable. However, just as the tentative suggestion of a relationship between Boson and Huntingdon can be pieced together from an array of scattered clues, the examination of more oblique references may produce other examples of townsmen who were linked in some way to the local aristocracy. The remainder of this chapter will discuss other forms of direct connection between these two social groups, and consider the implications of these for a wider relationship between the men involved.

III – Marriage

Marriage is often cited as one way in which aristocratic affinities became social as well as political structures, as families within a connection bound themselves closer together through matrimony, sometimes with the explicit approval of their lord.⁴¹ A theme in this literature is that although the gentry mostly married within their own class, they were willing to consider betrothals with their inferiors ‘if the price was right’.⁴² In these studies, the inferiors in question were successful lawyers and prosperous yeomen, but could the category also include townsmen? For their part, townsmen are believed to have mostly married within urban society, although scholarship has focused on the practicalities of married life, rather than the simpler question of who married who.⁴³ The question of whether townsmen and gentry ever

⁴¹ E.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 101-5; Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 112-15; Cherry, ‘Courtenay Earls’, pp. 77-8. Studies of political communities in areas without a significant noble presence have, predictably, found less evidence of this phenomenon, e.g. Acheson, *Gentry Community*, pp. 155-73; Wright, *Derbyshire*, pp. 44-5.

⁴² Quotation from *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴³ See particularly the work of Jeremy Goldberg e.g. his ‘Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life’, in Thomson ed. *Towns and Townspeople*, pp. 107-28; *idem*, “‘For Better, For Worse’: Marriage and Economic Opportunity for Women in Town and Country”, in *idem* ed., *Women in Medieval English Society c.1200-1500* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 108-25.

intermarried has barely been touched upon, and we must be wary of imposing preconceptions from the later literary trope of the impecunious gentry family reluctantly accepting a wealthy merchant's daughter as a bride. While the exchange of money for status implied in this concept may well have been a factor in such marriages, it would be unwise to commence this investigation with the idea fixed in mind.

Indeed, an examination of the gentlemen who did marry the daughters of townsmen indicates that they were motivated by a more typical aristocratic objective: the acquisition of land. A standard example is provided by the daughters of Thomas Wetherby. Like some of his Norwich contemporaries, Wetherby had purchased manors near the city, in his case those of Intwood and Brundall.⁴⁴ However, his marriage had produced only daughters, Elizabeth and Joan, who therefore stood to inherit their father's property.⁴⁵ Each married a local gentleman: Elizabeth married John (II) Jenney, the younger son of an influential local lawyer who himself became a fixture in the local legal community.⁴⁶ Joan's husband, John (II) Wynter, was of similar stock, his father and grandfather having been prominent Norfolk lawyers and estate administrators.⁴⁷ By the terms of Wetherby's will, his manors were to be held by his widow for life and thereafter one was to pass to each daughter.⁴⁸ However, between the drafting of Wetherby's will and the inquisition *post mortem* upon his lands, Joan had died, leaving only a six-year-old daughter, who herself died before 1460.⁴⁹ As such, both Brundall and Intwood came into the hands of the Jenneys, although they sold Brundall in

⁴⁴ *CIPM*, xxvi, #375. TNA, C 1/26/281; C 1/916/47-49. Blomefield, vii, p. 220.

⁴⁵ A third daughter, Alice, had become a nun at Carrow, immediately outside Norwich. NRO, MC 44/36, 500x1.

⁴⁶ *CIPM*, xxvi, #375. For a summary of his career and that of his father John (I), see *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 498-9.

⁴⁷ For their careers, see *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 927-31.

⁴⁸ NRO, MC 44/36, 500x1. TNA, C 1/17/136; C 1/26/281.

⁴⁹ *CIPM*, xxvi, #375. TNA, C/1/26/281.

1478-9.⁵⁰ The salient points of this example are threefold: firstly, that Wetherby possessed manorial lordships, secondly that he lacked a male heir, and thirdly that both Wynter and Jenney were modest gentlemen-lawyers, rather than members of the greater gentry. Although the Jenneys were a family on the rise, they were still relatively unimportant in the 1440s and, furthermore, John (II) was a younger son who remained a more parochial figure than his brother Sir William or nephew Sir Edmund.⁵¹ The Wynters' star, by contrast, was waning: John (I) (d.1414) had risen high in the service of the duchy of Lancaster under Henry IV and Henry V, but his son Edmund (d.1448) never matched such a 'prominent position', although he was still respected enough to sit for Norfolk in six parliaments.⁵² John (II), however, sank into near obscurity, never sitting for parliament nor being appointed to the bench or to a commission.

Almost all historians of the gentry have stressed that heiresses to manorial lordships were highly sought after, simply because manors were very rarely offered for sale.⁵³ However, this ambition had to be balanced against the status of the heiress, as to marry too low beneath one's rank was evidently considered dishonourable. The example of Wetherby suggests that this consideration created an opportunity for aspiring men from the professional classes to enlarge their landed estates by marrying heiresses who would have made unsuitable wives for more established gentlemen.⁵⁴ Another factor which may have made urban heiresses more attractive to the lesser gentry was the type of manor which townsmen often held: as discussed

⁵⁰ *NFF*, p. 435. *CIPM (Hen VII)*, ii, #32. Brundall was the subject of a dispute with a certain Henry Boughsher, who claimed that he had been sold the reversion of the manor (on the death of Wetherby's widow) by the feoffees. The upshot of this case is unknown, although Boughsher is never known to have held the manor. TNA, C 1/26/281.

⁵¹ *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 498, 500-1.

⁵² *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 927-31. Quotation from p. 927.

⁵³ E.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 97-102; Wright, *Derbyshire*, pp. 42-4; Acheson, *Gentry Community*, pp. 165-6.

⁵⁴ A parallel might be drawn here with the common practice whereby such men married rich widows so as to benefit from their dower income.

above, townsmen mostly owned only subdivided manors, or ‘reputed’ manors spread across more than one parish or vill.⁵⁵ Wetherby was unusual in that his manor of Brundall does seem to have been a capital manor (and included the advowson), but his manor of Intwood was a typical collection of small parcels scattered throughout the four adjoining settlements of Intwood, Ketteringham, Carleton and Swardeston (although it too included the advowson), valued at a modest 100s per annum.⁵⁶ This type of manor was probably of limited interest to a member of the greater gentry, but would have made an attractive prospect for lesser men whose estates were based on similar holdings.

Similar examples can be found in our other towns. In Salisbury, John Levesham’s granddaughter and heiress married Thomas Temse, a younger son of a minor estate administrator, thus bringing him Levesham’s manor of ‘Cormayles’ in Netheravon.⁵⁷ John (III) Shapleigh of Exeter married his daughter to John Gambon, a reasonably influential Devon lawyer, although it is unknown whether Shapleigh’s manor of Brenton in fact passed to Gambon.⁵⁸ In Norwich, Joan, the daughter of Gregory Draper, married John Norman esq., who can almost certainly be identified with the yeoman of the crown of that name.⁵⁹ Although Draper’s memorial brass apparently portrayed seven sons and five daughters, his manors in Helmingham passed to Norman, suggesting that infant mortality preyed heavily on his family.⁶⁰ In all these examples we can find a similar pattern of an urban heiress to manorial lordship marrying an aristocrat who, although not a member of the substantial gentry, still commanded a significant position in political society. For the husband the benefits of such a match are obvious, but what may have persuaded the father of the bride?

⁵⁵ Above, pp. 61-2.

⁵⁶ For Brundall, Blomefield, vii, p. 220 and *NFF*, p. 435. For Intwood, *CIPM (Hen VII)*, ii, #32; Blomefield, v, pp. 40-2.

⁵⁷ Above, pp. 114-15.

⁵⁸ *CFR 1445-52*, p. 178.

⁵⁹ E.g. *CPR 1441-6*, pp. 40, 281. Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 25. Blomefield, viii, p. 236.

⁶⁰ Blomefield, iv, p. 489. Draper’s brass is lost, and Blomefield’s description does not specify whether his offspring were portrayed as adults or children.

One obvious answer is the status of the prospective husband, and how this may have reflected upon the father-in-law (particularly in the perceptions of his landed neighbours), but there were other, more immediate benefits. Perhaps most importantly, a marriage arranged with another family with landed interests could provide a townsman with an ally in landed society: even if his manors would pass out of the family upon his death, he might still need to defend them during his lifetime. In this connection, it is notable that John (III) Shapleigh appointed his son-in-law as his executor, while Gregory Draper acted as a feoffee for his son-in-law, both indicating that a bond of trust had been established.⁶¹ There may also have been more subtle benefits, such as providing a social (as well as political) entry into local society, and also the knowledge that their daughters and grandchildren would thereafter be members of the gentry.

The search for alliances was probably also responsible for the marriages of another group of gentlemen to the daughters of townsmen. Rather than heiresses, these were the daughters of those few townsmen who established their own families as more permanent members of landed society. As examples of such townsmen are almost entirely confined to Norwich, so too are examples of this sort of marriage. Robert Toppes (mayor of Norwich in 1435, 1440, 1452 and 1458), for instance, married his daughter Anne to Thomas Lovell esq. of Barton Bendish, while his son, also Robert, became a minor gentleman.⁶² As in the previous two chapters, William Appleyard of Norwich provides an exceptional example. Although the evidence is somewhat confused (and relies heavily on Francis Blomefield's unreferenced history of Norfolk), it would seem that three of Appleyard's daughters married into the

⁶¹ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, p. 347. *NFF*, p. 423.

⁶² Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 23. Toppes's manor of 'Hacons' in Great Melton eventually passed to the Lovells, as Toppes's son's only heir was illegitimate. Blomefield, v, p. 16.

gentry: Emma to Henry Grey, Elizabeth to Robert White and Katherine to John Ward.⁶³ Each of these men was a member of the established Norfolk gentry. Grey was the nephew of Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk (d.1399), and sat once as both JP and MP for Norfolk.⁶⁴ Robert White was a less prominent figure, perhaps as a result of the division of his father Sir John's estates between Robert and his younger brother, but his manor of Shotesham made him an important presence in the area where Appleyard's own landed possessions were concentrated.⁶⁵ A similar situation probably applied in the case of John Ward, whose property was centred on Kirby-Bedon, again in the general area of Appleyard's interests.⁶⁶ In addition to the three marriages contracted for his daughters, Appleyard's sister had married William Rees, another gentleman with property in the same region immediately south of Norwich.⁶⁷

Both Toppes and Appleyard also provide an example of the opposite trend, that of townsmen marrying the daughters of gentry families. Toppes took as his second wife Joan Knyvett, daughter of Sir John (III) Knyvett (d.1445).⁶⁸ This match may have been intended as the basis for an alliance between the two families, but Knyvett's often-troubled financial affairs make another reading possible. Knyvett's military career was particularly ill-favoured, as he was captured twice, once by the French and once by the Burgundians: the ransom for the latter alone was £1000.⁶⁹ Roger Virgoe saw the marriage of Knyvett's heir (also named John) to the daughter of a London grocer as being a result of this financial pressure, as the

⁶³ Blomefield, v, pp. 91-2, 92n, 451, 505. Note that there is some confusion in Blomefield about whether Emma was Appleyard's widow or his daughter but it seems likely that she was his daughter, especially as Henry Grey's arms were shown impaling those of Appleyard on his memorial brass. *Ibid.*, v, pp. 91-2, 92n.

⁶⁴ *CPR 1436-41*, p. 586.

⁶⁵ For Sir John, who sat for Norfolk in parliament seven times, see *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 829-30.

⁶⁶ Blomefield, v, p. 451.

⁶⁷ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 187-9.

⁶⁸ Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, p. 23. Virgoe, 'Earlier Knyvetts', p. 161. The heritage of Toppes's first wife, Alice, is unknown.

⁶⁹ Virgoe, 'Earlier Knyvetts', p. 164.

bride possessed a dowry of 350 marks.⁷⁰ In this context, the marriage of one of his daughters to a wealthy Norwich merchant fits neatly: even if a dowry might have to be funded, it would give access to a possible new source of capital and credit. One factor which complicates this interpretation is the date of the marriage, which took place at some point between 1443 and 1451: given that Sir John Knyvett died in 1445, it is possible that his son may have been head of the family when Toppes married into it.⁷¹ However, the younger John inherited his father's financial burden and was almost immediately embroiled in a lengthy (and presumably expensive) dispute over the inheritance of his mother, the sister and right heir of Sir John Clifton.⁷² As such, the possibility that Joan's marriage to Robert Toppes was negotiated with financial aims in mind still seems plausible, although his acquisition of the manor of 'Hacons' in Great Melton in 1450 may also have been relevant.⁷³ The marriage was certainly successful in establishing a mutually-beneficial relationship between the two families: Toppes, for instance, named his nephew, (Sir) William Knyvett, as his executor.⁷⁴

William Appleyard enjoyed similar links with two gentry families through his own marriages. Appleyard's first wife was Margaret, a member of the Clere family, middling gentry from Ormesby, near Great Yarmouth.⁷⁵ This formed a long association with the Cleres, with his last known involvement in their affairs being in 1417, two years before his death.⁷⁶ Following Margaret Clere's death, Appleyard probably remarried to another lady of the same name,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

⁷¹ Toppes and his first wife, Alice, were pardoned in July 1443: *CPR 1441-6*, p. 189. Toppes and Joan Knyvett were certainly married by July 1451, when they dined with Margaret Paston. Gairdner ed., *Paston Letters*, ii, p. 251.

⁷² For these disputes see Virgoe, 'Earlier Knyvetts', pp. 165-70.

⁷³ Blomefield, v, p. 16. Toppes was also prominent in the city faction which opposed the duke of Suffolk: given that Knyvett's chief obstacle in acquiring the Clifton lands was the duke's support of Knyvett's opponent, this may also have been a factor.

⁷⁴ TNA, C 1/210/21.

⁷⁵ Appleyard's father- and grandfather-in-law had both served as knights of the shire. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 43, 581-2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 43-5.

Margaret Rees, sister of William Rees (who, as discussed above, had married Appleyard's own sister) and widow of William Curson.⁷⁷ As well as this double marriage, Appleyard took part in a number of Rees's land transactions and later acted as his feoffee, indicating a strong bond between the two men.⁷⁸ This link between Appleyard and Rees is particularly interesting in light of Rees's own loyalties, as he was a retainer and servant of the Mowbray family throughout his life.⁷⁹ Rees was also a feudal tenant of the Mowbrays at his home manor of Tharston, as was Appleyard at his manors in Wymondham, East Carleton and Hethel.⁸⁰ So too were all three of Appleyard's sons-in-law, Robert White at Shotesham, John Ward at Kirby-Bedon and Henry Grey at Ketteringham.⁸¹ As noted above, Grey was also the nephew of the first Mowbray duke of Norfolk.⁸² This pattern may reflect little more than the predominance of the duchy of Norfolk's feudal overlordship in this area immediately south of Norwich (based around the ancient honour of Forncett and the manor of Framingham-Earl), but it is also perhaps a sign of Appleyard becoming involved in the wider affinity around the Mowbray dukes.⁸³ A similar situation can be perceived in the case of William Wilford of Exeter. As discussed above, Wilford's father, Robert, had been retained by Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, perhaps until Robert's death in 1395.⁸⁴ The heritage of Robert's own wife is unknown, but, as already mentioned, William married in a way that suggests that he shared his father's allegiance to the earl's affinity.⁸⁵ William also received the livery of Edmund Stafford, bishop of Exeter (1395-1419), while several of his wife's relatives were the bishop's *domicelli*: this could be an alternative (albeit not contradictory) explanation of the origins of his marriage.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ E.g. *NFF*, p. 384. *CCR 1389-92*, p. 489; *1399-1402*, p. 287. *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 446; *1405-8*, p. 472.

⁷⁹ *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 187-9.

⁸⁰ *Feudal Aids*, iii, pp. 626, 628, 649.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 625-6, 631.

⁸² *Blomefield*, v, p. 91.

⁸³ For Forncett and Framingham-Earl, see *Blomefield*, v, pp. 223-5, 431-2.

⁸⁴ Above, p. 143.

⁸⁵ Above, p. 146.

⁸⁶ Hingeston-Randolph ed., *Register of Edmund Stafford*, pp. 213, 370.

In general, the marriages which took place between urban and gentry families exhibit characteristics and motives which seem very similar to those identified by historians of the gentry. Matches were made to secure land and to create and strengthen alliances, particularly between neighbours. In all of these cases, the townsmen were those rare few who became involved in the socio-political life of the county surrounding their home borough: those who restricted their interests to their town probably had nothing to offer prospective suitors from the countryside, and would themselves have likely gained little from such a match. As only the wealthiest citizens of our towns invested in rural land, this naturally restricted examples of transmural marriage to the most prominent and affluent citizens. By contrast, the gentle parties were almost exclusively from the lowest ranks of the aristocracy, notably lawyers and administrators. When more eminent families took part in such a match, there was generally a factor which reduced the bride's status: William Wilford's wife, for instance, was the daughter of a knight and county MP, but she was also a widow. Robert Toppes married into the Knyvett family before they became important figures in Norfolk (through the Clifton inheritance) and at a time when they were close to financial ruin. The heiress of William Chamberlain of Southampton married two substantial Hampshire esquires in turn, but Chamberlain was a well-connected lawyer as well as being a burgess of Southampton.⁸⁷ More commonly, these marriages were devices by which minor members of rural political society (a grouping which included these townsmen) strengthened themselves, supported each other and demonstrated their alliances, in much the same way as the greater gentry did by marrying amongst themselves. In some cases, it is possible to discern traces of wider political allegiances in these matches, such as William Wilford's marriage into a family which shared his magnate connections, and perhaps also William Appleyard's multiple linkages to other feudal tenants of the Mowbray dukes of Norfolk.

⁸⁷ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 512-14. *CIPM (Hen VII)*, i, #1255.

IV – Feoffees and Witnesses

Acting as a feoffee or a witness is almost universally accepted by historians as a demonstration of a connection between that person and one of the main parties to the transaction.⁸⁸ This was a relationship based on two principles: belief that the feoffee or witness, if called upon, would be able to defend the owner's interests, and trust that he would actually do so. Both of these make land transactions of great interest to the historian: trust was often the attendant of a wider relationship, while the selection of a feoffee or witness on account of their authority can allow access to contemporary perceptions of the origins and possession of power. As such, the employment of townsmen as feoffees and witnesses by other citizens and by aristocrats is a profitable angle of inquiry: under what circumstances did these men believe that townsmen were suitable feoffees, co-parties and witnesses? Following the twofold pattern mentioned above, this section first discusses the nature of the bonds of trust between townsmen and those who included them in their landed affairs. In addition, it identifies a number of examples of transactions which suggest the existence of connections for which we have no other evidence. Finally, it considers the power and authority which such townsmen possessed (or were perceived to possess) which made them suitable persons: did this issue from their power and authority in towns, or from the activities and possessions outside the town walls?

In a number of cases, land transactions provide us with further knowledge of a connection between two men which we have already encountered in other settings. One particularly common theme is the involvement of townsmen in the landed affairs of gentlemen to whom they were linked by marriage, a phenomenon which invokes immediate parallels with such

⁸⁸ Indeed, such evidence has often been used by itself to identify the social and political loyalties of certain gentlemen, e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 295-312, 317-18; Wright, *Derbyshire*, appendix 6; Payling, *Political Society*, pp. 83-5.

relationships within the gentry. Several such townsmen were encountered in the previous section: William Appleyard acted as both feoffee and witness for the families of both his wives, while Gregory Draper took part in his son-in-law's purchase of Norfolk manors.⁸⁹ Robert Toppes was included amongst his brother-in-law John Knyvett's feoffees when Knyvett finally secured the Clifton inheritance.⁹⁰ These cases once again illustrate that marriages between urban and gentle families were not simple, one-off exchanges of money and status. Instead, they could be the foundation or confirmation of a sustained relationship or alliance, analogous with those created between members of the established gentry.

Although these examples provide important additional texture to our existing knowledge of links between inhabitants of town and country, they do not break new ground. Can other land transactions unearth connections which we have not previously encountered? Some further examples from Norwich suggest that this is indeed the case. It seems likely, for instance, that an otherwise-unknown relationship existed between Sir Edmund Thorpe and the Danyell brothers, John and Walter, who between them served in the highest Norwich civic offices twelve times.⁹¹ In 1406, the Danyells (along with Sir Thomas Erpingham and William Rees esq.) presented to the advowson of Little Wreningham as Thorpe's trustees of the manor of Wreningham, while in 1395-96, John Danyell was involved with Sir Edmund in a transfer of land in several villages near Norwich and a portion of the advowson of Little Poringland.⁹² Together with another Norwich citizen, Roger Blickling (who, as mentioned above, was himself a servant of the duchess of Norfolk), the brothers were also Thorpe's feoffees in the manor of North Creake.⁹³ Apart from these fragments, the only other

⁸⁹ Appleyard: e.g. *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 446; *1405-8*, p. 472; *1416-22*, p. 65. Draper: *NFF*, p. 423.

⁹⁰ *CPR 1461-7*, p. 323.

⁹¹ For brief biographies of the Danyells, see Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, pp. 15-16. For Thorpe, *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 598-600.

⁹² Blomefield, v, pp. 115-16. *NFF*, p. 387.

⁹³ NRO, PHI 542, 578x2.

intimation of any connection between Thorpe and the Danyells is that the brothers were originally from Fundenhall, another Thorpe manor, and were benefactors to the church there.⁹⁴ Taken together, however, we are presented with a persuasive case for the existence of a wider relationship between these three men which crossed the boundary between Norfolk and Norwich. One possibility for Sir Edmund's employment of the Danyells as feoffees is that the property was collateral for a loan (or, given the timescale, more than one loan), but there is nothing else to suggest that this was the case. Alternatively, it is equally possible that a truly socio-political association existed between Thorpe and the Danyells. This would be surprising, given Thorpe's eminence: unlike the lawyers and minor officials we have mostly encountered throughout this and previous chapters, Thorpe was a member of the highest tier of county society, who was retained by both Richard II and Henry IV and sat twice for the county in Parliament.⁹⁵ Without further evidence it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions about the nature and origins of this association, but it does not seem unreasonable to again liken it to the more traditionally-recognised connections which existed between members of the gentry.

Although none match the Danyell-Thorpe connection in terms of the eminence of one party, there are a number of further examples of otherwise-unknown links between townsmen and aristocrats which are hinted at by transactions involving men from Norwich and our other cities. In almost all of these cases, the nature of any wider relationship and the associated bond of trust is probably irrecoverable. What inspired John Brewse and his wife Margery Nerford to entrust the manors of her inheritance to trustees who included Clement

⁹⁴ Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *Mayors of Norwich*, pp. 15-16.

⁹⁵ For his career, see *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 598-600. It may be relevant that Thorpe was a career soldier (and, indeed, was to die in France in 1417) but, conversely, this did not otherwise prevent him playing a reasonably active role in domestic affairs.

Hereward (bailiff of Norwich in 1385), for example, would seem to be entirely lost to time.⁹⁶ In some cases, there were probably indirect connections through another townsman, such as when John Gerard (mayor of Norwich in 1434-5) acted alongside Gregory Draper for Draper's son-in-law, the royal servant John Norman.⁹⁷ In others, we can perhaps detect the origins of the relationship through the occupations of the participants: Nicholas Blakeney's involvement in the acquisition of a manor in Ketteringham by a London mercer could perhaps be the result of an existing business relationship, for example.⁹⁸ One striking feature is the number of these transactions which include more than one townsman, including some cases where the majority or even entirety of the list of trustees or witnesses were townsmen. In 1392, for instance, Sir Robert Berney purchased the manor of 'Middletons' in Bressingham (near the Suffolk border) and land in the surrounding area.⁹⁹ He was joined in this transaction by eight other men, of whom at least six were Norwich citizens.¹⁰⁰ Five years earlier, Berney had been employed by Hugh Curson as a trustee in the manor of East Carleton: alongside him as trustees were at least five Norwich men.¹⁰¹ This pattern also occurs in our other example towns. In Southampton in 1420, Nicholas Banaster (originally a citizen of London, but later a Hampshire gentleman-official, heavily involved in the naval and commercial activities of the port) purchased property in Shirley and Totton; among his co-parties was one senior Southampton burgess, Thomas Armourer, while his witness list was almost exclusively comprised of Armourer's urban peers.¹⁰² A 1463 deed transferring property in

⁹⁶ *NFF*, pp. 374-5. Blomefield, v, p. 305; vi, pp. 231-2. NB that Blomefield only mentions the chief feoffee (Sir John Cobham), but he is evidently referring to the same transactions.

⁹⁷ *NFF*, p. 423.

⁹⁸ *CCR 1402-5*, pp. 183-4, 511. Blomefield, v, p. 96.

⁹⁹ *NFF*, p. 384.

¹⁰⁰ William Appleyard, Nicholas Blakeney, John Danyell, Walter Danyell, Robert Popinjay and Robert Castle. A seventh, John Ocle, shared a surname with a number of Norwich citizens, while the eighth, Master John de Thorp, was a clerk.

¹⁰¹ *NFF*, p. 380. Blomefield, v, p. 101. The definite Norwich citizens were Roger Blickling, Nicholas Blakeney, Thomas Spynk, Thomas Hart and William Eton, but three others (Robert Hereward, Thomas Blickling and Hugh atte Fen) were quite probably also citizens, based on their surnames.

¹⁰² *CCR 1419-22*, p. 65.

Laverstock between two groups of Wiltshire gentlemen (the ultimate benefactor is unclear) was witnessed by three Salisbury citizens.¹⁰³ These examples suggest that bonds of trust could develop between individual aristocrats and the collective ruling groups of towns. It is worth noting here that both Berney and Banaster were connected to the corporate urban elite in other theatres: Berney frequently assisted Norwich's government in its dealings with the king and others, while Banaster was involved in the Southampton customs administration.¹⁰⁴ Alternatively, these examples may suggest that the main parties sought to create a sense that the city-corporate itself had borne witness to their transaction, something which is discussed further below.

The relationships which persuaded aristocrats to trust townsmen in their landed affairs thus had their origins in a wide variety of circumstances, and this variety would surely only increase if more examples and detail survived. What, however, can be said in response to our second question, concerning the perception, implicit in their employment as trustees and witnesses, that townsmen possessed the ability to defend aristocrats' landed interests? In discussions of the landed affairs of the gentry, this is a question intimately bound up in the wider topic of the sources of local political power. For our purposes, these sources can be roughly reduced to two categories: firstly, what might be termed 'personal' power, acquired through possession of land and lordship (and thus, ultimately, the ability to produce armed force), and secondly 'received' authority, by which men were empowered by their relationships with and employment by social superiors, including the crown.¹⁰⁵ Amongst the examples of townsmen discussed above, both of these categories are represented. William Appleyard, Gregory Draper and Robert Toppes, for example, each possessed manors in Norfolk, and it seems most likely that their employment as feoffees was based upon the power that this

¹⁰³ Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, pp. 60-1.

¹⁰⁴ For Berney, see below pp. 200, 202, 251-2. For Banaster, see Rose ed., *Navy of the Lancastrian Kings*, p. 230.

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 65-79; Wright, *Derbyshire*, pp. 1-11.

lordship gave them in the locality. However, it is important to note a difference in scale represented by these three men. Appleyard was a substantial landholder, with a sizable cluster of manors immediately south of Norwich, while Draper and Toppes invested far less heavily in rural land. This distinction is reflected in their roles as feoffees: Draper, for instance, was limited to acting in the same parish as he himself held land.¹⁰⁶ Toppes was involved in manors some fifteen miles distant from his own, but he only acted as a very junior feoffee, behind such men as the duke of Clarence and George Neville, bishop of Exeter, as well as significant local gentlemen like Sir John Howard.¹⁰⁷ Appleyard, by contrast, was employed as a feoffee in property as far away as Runham (~30 miles east of Norwich) and even in parts of Cambridgeshire.¹⁰⁸ The explanation for this is almost certainly that Appleyard's greater base afforded him the ability to project power further than either Draper or Toppes. By contrast, the example of William Soper suggests that a townsman could also be a suitable feoffee solely on account of his 'received' authority, acquired through his connections with more powerful figures. Soper was involved with a citizen of London in the purchase of land in Huntingdonshire, a county far removed from Soper's native Hampshire (where, in any event, his landed possessions were minimal).¹⁰⁹ As such, his utility as a feoffee must have stemmed from his service in royal government (through his various roles in the royal naval administration): the level his connections reached is illustrated by the fact that one petitioner for his favour believed that no less a person than Humphrey of Gloucester made for a suitable intermediary.¹¹⁰

Whether it was based on their land or on their political influence, these townsmen's involvement in land transactions was predicated on precisely those activities which were least

¹⁰⁶ Helmingham and Morton, a few miles north-west of Norwich. *NFF*, p. 423.

¹⁰⁷ *CPR 1461-7*, p. 323.

¹⁰⁸ *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 446; *1405-8*, p. 472; *1408-13*, p. 352; *1416-22*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ *CCR 1435-41*, p. 438.

¹¹⁰ Rose ed., *Navy of the Lancastrian Kings*, p. 27.

related to their urbanity. As such, rather than demonstrating that townsmen were sometimes considered appropriate feoffees and witnesses, these examples instead reinforce the argument that some townsmen became minor gentlemen, and thereby took part in a variety of typical gentry activities. However, in many cases we find townsmen with no known extramural activities also being employed in transactions of rural land. Some of these are undoubtedly men who also possessed some link to the countryside, but for which evidence does not survive. Others, however, may on occasion have been used as feoffees and witnesses as a direct consequence of their status within towns. These are the examples mentioned above where sizable groups of citizens acted together as feoffees and witnesses for gentlemen: in many of these cases, most or all of the townsmen involved lacked any known connections outside the city walls. In these circumstances, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the gentlemen who were transferring the land in question believed that these townsmen (collectively, perhaps, rather than individually) were useful due to their authority within the town, or even because, as a group, they represented the town. A clue to the reasons behind this is provided by the geographical location of the property being transferred, which was almost exclusively located in the immediate environs of the town. In Southampton, examples include the transfer of land in Shirley, Totton and South Stoneham, all within a few miles of Southampton itself (and, in modern times, components of the Southampton conurbation). The situation in Salisbury was very similar, with transactions in Laverstock, Old Sarum, Stratford-sub-Castle, Fisherton Anger and a few other nearby settlements all involving or being witnessed by groups of Salisbury citizens.

Exeter and Norwich, however, provide contrasting pictures. In Exeter, comparable examples are completely lacking, almost certainly because the manors immediately surrounding the city were almost exclusively in the hands of major secular and ecclesiastical lords, notably the

earls of Devon, the bishops of Exeter and Exeter cathedral.¹¹¹ This meant that there was very little movement in the immediately-local land market, and that which did take place was at a social level far above that of Exeter's ruling elite: unlike Salisbury and Southampton, there was no real 'suburban' hinterland. In Norwich, by contrast, the involvement of citizens in gentry land transactions extended beyond the city's immediate environs, but only in certain directions. In particular, the broad strip of Norfolk between Norwich and Diss (on the Suffolk border) was the setting for the majority of citizens' involvement in land transactions: this was, as mentioned above, a favourite area for urban investment in rural property.¹¹² The Danyell brothers acted for Sir Edmund Thorpe, for example, at Wreningham, a parish which, although some ten miles distant from Norwich, was surrounded by manors and other land which was in the possession of the Danyells' urban peers.¹¹³ The land bought by Sir Robert Berney with the assistance of six or seven Norwich citizens was even further removed from the city, centring on the manor of 'Middletons' in Bressingham, near Diss.¹¹⁴ Yet even here we have examples (albeit of a slightly later date) of fellow citizens holding significant local property, such as manors in Garboldisham and Blo' Norton (a few miles to the west) and land around Dickleburgh and Gissing (a few miles north-east).¹¹⁵ This does not hold true for all examples, however. The Danyells, for instance, were also feoffees for Sir Edmund Thorpe in the manor of North Creake, about thirty miles north-west from Norwich and twenty-five miles from any substantial concentration of urban-owned property. Similarly, the involvement of three Norwich citizens (apparently as trustees) in manors in Illington (near Thetford) placed them in a location with no ties to Norwich, although their presence may be

¹¹¹ For the possessions of these, see *CIPM*, xxi, pp. 101-5. *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, ii, pp. 290-3.

¹¹² Above, pp. 67-9.

¹¹³ Notably the ubiquitous William Appleyard and his manors in Hethel, Bracon Ash, Newton Flotman and Wymondham. For the Danyells and Thorpe, above, pp. 158-9.

¹¹⁴ *NFF*, p. 384.

¹¹⁵ *NFF*, pp. 399, 401. Roger Blickling's position at nearby Lopham Park (above, p. 142) was another connection in this area of the county.

explained by the fact that the same transaction also included property along the more usual Norwich-Diss axis.¹¹⁶

The implication raised by these examples is that these major towns possessed a politico-social sphere of influence to complement their economic ambit, albeit that the former was far smaller and patchier than the latter. The small settlements which surrounded Norwich, Salisbury and Southampton were naturally drawn into the orbit of their larger neighbour and this was exaggerated by the frequent purchase of property in these villages by citizens. In Chapter 1, the idea was floated that such concentrations of urban ownership had the effect of fracturing structures of lordship in these settlements, producing a pattern of subdivided or ‘reputed’ manors, and numerous small parcels of freehold land. The evidence reviewed here suggests a secondary impact of this gravity, namely that the central town could extend its own authority into these areas on an unofficial, *de facto* basis, exercised through its ruling elite. The contrasting examples presented here, especially that of Norwich, suggest that the shape and size of this sphere of influence was determined by the pattern of rural landholding on the part of the citizens: just as Norwich’s citizens owned property further from the city than in the other examples, so the city’s (or the citizens’) authority seems to have reached further beyond the city walls. In practice, this authority was exercised by members of the governing elite rather than by the city government itself, but the presence of sizable groups of citizens acting together as witnesses (particularly the involvement of those who had no rural possessions of their own) suggest that they were, in principle, acting as the current representatives of the corporate city, rather than in a personal capacity.

¹¹⁶ *NFE*, p. 384.

This suggestion that cities possessed some authority or cachet in their immediate hinterlands receives some additional support from an examination of two related phenomena which can be identified mostly in transactions of rural land which involved townsmen. The first of these is the reasonably common practice of employing urban officers as witnesses to transactions, explicitly noting their office. On some occasions this was limited to the mayor alone, such as a pair of deeds concerning property held by Salisbury citizens in Fisherton Anger which were witnessed respectively by William Walter and John Needler as mayors of Salisbury (and, in the first case, by John Gowayn as the episcopal bailiff).¹¹⁷ In other cases, however, a whole host of urban officers are listed, including a particularly extreme example from Southampton where the mayor, three aldermen, two bailiffs and the steward were called upon to witness three deeds concerning the the manor of South Stoneham (just north of Southampton) and other property.¹¹⁸ As mentioned above, almost all of the transactions which take this form involve the purchase of rural land by townsmen, and this is probably responsible for the style of the witness lists, which very closely resembles that used in deeds concerning *urban* property.¹¹⁹ A grant of the manor of ‘Tolthorpehall’ to trustees in February 1410 is a rare example of a townsman-witness being explicitly listed as an officer in a transaction amongst the gentry, but this is probably explained by the fact that parts of this manor were, unusually, within Norwich itself.¹²⁰ However, even if these townsmen were simply following a pattern which was familiar, it still suggests that they believed their title was in some way strengthened by the presence of urban officers as witnesses. It is particularly significant that in some of these examples, mayors were listed alongside (and, indeed, given precedence to) members of

¹¹⁷ Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, p. 174.

¹¹⁸ *CCR 1435-41*, pp. 32, 40.

¹¹⁹ For examples of these urban deeds, see e.g. Wallis-Chapman ed., *Black Book*; and the ‘Domesday Books’ of Salisbury (WSHC, G23/1/212-215). This includes deeds which concern the urban property of the rural gentry, such as a conveyance of a hostel in Exeter within a cadet branch of the Courtenay family in 1441 which was witnessed by the mayor. *CAD*, ii, B.3770.

¹²⁰ *CCR 1409-13*, p. 110.

the local gentry, such as one transaction of land in Fisherton Anger which named the mayor of Salisbury before three local gentlemen, Thomas Bonham (thrice MP, thrice escheator and thrice sheriff for Wiltshire), John Bergh (once escheator) and Oliver Cervington (member of a substantial local family).¹²¹ If the mayor could provide additional security as a witness beyond that provided by a man of Bonham's rank, it seems indisputable that Salisbury possessed some form of influence in its immediate surroundings, and that this was recognised by contemporaries.

The second phenomenon is closely linked to the first. A number of transactions were sealed using the mayoral seal, together with a typical formula which recorded that the seal was used either for 'greater security' or because the grantor's own seal was insufficiently well-known. As in the case of the explicit listing of officers as witnesses, use of the mayoral or common seal was very common when transferring urban property, and the concept seems to have migrated outwards when townsmen bought rural property. As such, the majority of examples are found in transactions involving townsmen, but there are some interesting exceptions. In 1425, John Milborne (a relatively minor local gentleman) quitclaimed the manor of Barford St. Martin (a few miles west of Salisbury) and a bailiwick in the royal forest of Groveley to Thomas Blanchard (another minor, even parish, gentleman); two prominent Salisbury citizens (including William Warwick as mayor) headed the witness list, and the mayoral seal was attached.¹²² Also among the witnesses was Milborne's brother, Richard, an intimate of Sir Walter Hungerford who had sat for Wiltshire in parliament three times in the preceding four years.¹²³ Again, it is instructive that the engagement of the mayor of Salisbury as a witness

¹²¹ Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, pp. 174-5. For Bonham, see *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 280-1. For Bergh, *CFR 1413-22*, p. 136.

¹²² *CCR 1422-9*, pp. 266-7. Milbourne had probably not actually held the manor since 1389, when he was outlawed for murder. He had previously held it for life from Blanchard's father. *CPR 1405-8*, pp. 356-7. *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, p. 735.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 735-6.

and the physical presence of the mayoral seal on the deed were believed to confer authority or security which complemented that provided by a man like Richard Milborne. Another example, also from Salisbury, suggests that procuring the mayoral seal was believed to give some veneer of authenticity and authority even to documents which transferred titles which were the subject of controversy. The manor of Great Chalfield (on the other side of Wiltshire from Salisbury, near Bath) was the subject of a complicated series of disputes throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹²⁴ In 1454, one of the claimants, Thomas Beverley (the great-grandson of a knight, but himself only described as a yeoman), released his alleged right in the manor to another claimant, Thomas Tropenell (a substantial Wiltshire lawyer), by means of a deed of grant and a separate quitclaim, along with letters of attorney empowering others to deliver up the property to Tropenell.¹²⁵ Each of these documents was authenticated by Beverley's own seal, along with those of Lord Hungerford, the dean of Salisbury Cathedral, and William Swayne, the mayor of Salisbury, allegedly because Beverley's own seal was 'unknown to many'. In reality, it seems likely that Tropenell demanded the additional security provided by the three extra seals: if this was the case, his caution was to prove wise, as in 1459 Beverley renewed his claim in the court of Common Pleas.¹²⁶ Here, he was immediately defeated by Tropenell, who simply produced the deed.

Tropenell used this method of authentication a number of other times, with the mayoral seal being placed alongside, for example, that of Margaret, lady Botreaux and Hungerford.¹²⁷ In addition to acquiring the seals of people of baronial rank, Tropenell was able to employ similar men as feoffees and witnesses, and yet on a number of occasions (and involving property in places like Great Chalfield and Chicklade, which were some distance from

¹²⁴ The details of the case are not relevant here, but see *VCH Wilts*, vii, pp. 59-66.

¹²⁵ Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, i, pp. 341-3. *CPR, 1461-7*, p. 506.

¹²⁶ TNA, CP 40/794, rr. 368-368d.

¹²⁷ Davies ed., *Tropenell Cartulary*, ii, p. 81.

Salisbury) he believed it to be in his interests to request that the mayoral seal be appended to his instruments, and presumably to pay for the privilege. On one occasion, the mayor explicitly recorded the reasoning on the deed itself: ‘in maiorem fidem et testimonium omnium premissorum’.¹²⁸ The employment of the mayoral or common seal was certainly considered a powerful display of authority and authenticity *within towns*, which often led to its use being strictly controlled.¹²⁹ However, its use outside the city boundaries, by both townsmen and aristocrats, and alongside witnesses of significant local importance (and other appended seals belonging to people of baronial rank) once again suggests that the prestige (and perhaps institutional memory) of towns and town governments was acknowledged and respected in a wider area than we might initially expect.

This examination has identified two distinct themes within the subject of townsmen’s involvement in land transactions. The first is a further continuation of a thread which runs throughout this chapter and the two preceding: that a small minority of citizens apparently sought to become gentlemen and engaged in a number of typical gentry activities. Their involvement as feoffees and witnesses was, however, predicated on their pre-existing links outside of their home boroughs, and thus tells us very little about townsmen’s ability to act politically outside their borough, apart from in those circumstances where they were, in practice, acting as gentlemen who happened to also be townsmen. Secondly, there is a suggestion that cities possessed a sphere of influence, within which the city’s authority and institutional memory had some weight, and therefore the city and its elite was able to provide useful additional security to land transactions. This authority could be invoked through the use of the city’s own symbols (notably the city’s seals and the officers of the city’s

¹²⁸ Ibid., ii, p. 254.

¹²⁹ In Salisbury, for instance, all documents sealed with the mayor’s seal were to be immediately enrolled in the ‘Domesday Books’, which appear to have been the bishops’ records of land ownership within the city. LB2, f. 37. In Southampton, the common seal was not to be used except in the presence of the mayor, the bailiffs and six of the council of twelve. Studer ed., *Oak Book*, i, p. 128.

government) or through the employment of a sizable group of the city's leading figures as witnesses. The shape and size of the area into which the city's influence extended, meanwhile, seems to have been determined by the pattern of the citizens' own rural landholding, with the result that Norwich's was substantially larger than those of our other towns.

V – Debt and Credit

The previous sections have discussed three theatres in which townsmen and the aristocracy interacted but which were, for the most part, the 'natural' domain of the aristocracy. Indeed, in many of the cases discussed above, the involvement of townsmen was dependent on the men in question being those who possessed the trappings of gentility, notably manorial lordship. This section instead examines a possible theatre of urban-aristocratic interaction which was far closer to the typically-urban: credit and moneylending. Did townsmen, for example, extend loans and informal credit to the aristocracy and, if so, on what terms? If this did take place, were there any political considerations, or were these simple business transactions? These are not questions which have previously attracted much attention. The importance of credit to the landed aristocracy has been regularly remarked upon by historians, who note that reliance on delayed payment or loaned capital was almost inescapable for members of a class which relied heavily on income which was regular but infrequent (i.e. from annual or quarterly rents and from the returns of seasonal agriculture), and who often lived 'hand-to-mouth'.¹³⁰ However, the topic of who lent money to them has been mostly passed over: the examples just cited, for example, emphasise the importance of credit, and suggest the existence of credit networks *among* the aristocracy, but do not consider the subject in detail. Christine Carpenter offers the example of a Warwickshire gentleman indebted to Londoners and of another whose plate was pledged to merchants, but a

¹³⁰ E.g. Wright, *Derbyshire*, pp. 23-5; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 206.

comprehensive examination of this theme of townsmen lending to gentlemen is outside the focus of her work.¹³¹ From the opposite perspective, that of urban historians, the question has also received little attention. Debt and credit are mostly considered in purely economic terms: when the provision of credit by townsmen to outsiders is considered at all, it is generally used as a means of identifying a town's economic hinterland.¹³² Kowaleski goes so far as to identify a number of aristocrats who were involved as either creditors or debtors (including the earl of Devon), but she does not consider the details or circumstances of these debts.¹³³ Can examples from our four towns provide any insight on this issue?

Two important caveats concerning the evidence available to us must, however, be recognised. The first relates to the content of the material. Debts themselves were not documented in the types of public administrative records which have survived best: instead, these records relate to *disputes* over debts and credit. This means that the debts we have knowledge of are generally only those where a debtor failed to pay and, equally importantly, where the creditor chose to pursue them by recourse to the law, rather than negotiating or writing off the debt. A debt secured under the statute merchant, for example, is generally only accessible to historians when a creditor was forced to initiate proceedings to confiscate a defaulting debtor's property.¹³⁴ In the case of a bond, evidence often only remains in court proceedings (both in the Common Pleas and in borough courts), the bond itself having been kept in private papers long since lost.¹³⁵ As such, debts which were repaid on time are often

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 205, 210.

¹³² E.g. Britnell, *Growth and Decline*, pp. 68, 81, 106-7, 172-3, 248-9; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 202-3, 213-15, 279, 281-3, 286-93; Yates, *Town and Countryside*, pp. 119-23.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 291.

¹³⁴ This process produced a number of documents through the royal chancery, notably certification of the debt (TNA, C 241) and extents of the debtor's property (C 131). P. Nightingale, 'Monetary Contraction and Mercantile Credit in Later Medieval England', *EcHR*, New Series, 43:4 (1990), p. 565.

¹³⁵ Debtors who failed to appear to defend themselves were outlawed, and some examples can therefore be recovered through pardons, e.g. *CPR 1392-6*, p. 673; *1396-9*, p. 130.

completely irrecoverable for historical study, as are those where a creditor chose to forgive a defaulting debtor, or pursue him by means other than legal proceedings.

In the case of debts owed by the aristocracy, the necessity of prosecution at law takes on particular importance: it seems likely that creditors would have been less willing to pursue debtors who were aristocrats for a number of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned by Carpenter in the case of noble debtors, merchants would probably have been unwilling to alienate important customers to whom they had lent money or granted credit for merchandise (especially, for example, if the aristocrats involved were customers for expensive luxuries) by suing them when any other option was available.¹³⁶ Secondly, pursuing the gentry or nobility at law was probably more complex (and thus expensive) than suing another townsman or a minor trader. In almost all circumstances, the debt would have had to be prosecuted in London, whether in the court of Common Pleas or through the chancery-centred process of the statute merchant, whereas suits against other townsmen could generally be pursued in borough or staple courts.¹³⁷ This necessity raises the possibility of the expense being greater than the value of the debt itself.

The second caveat concerning our evidence is that its sheer bulk has made it impractical to consider it here in full, and so this section should be considered as a preliminary investigation only. To comprehensively examine this subject would involve a thorough consultation of the records of both the Court of Common Pleas and the borough courts of our four towns, which would be a prohibitively time-consuming undertaking.¹³⁸ However, several classes of

¹³⁶ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 256.

¹³⁷ For an examination of the relationship between the status/wealth of debtors and the court chosen by a prosecuting creditor, see Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 286-90.

¹³⁸ The Common Pleas cases digitised by the Centre for Metropolitan History (accessed online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/common-pleas/1399-1500>, 2014-6) have been consulted, but these exclusively relate to cases involving Londoners and to debts contracted in London.

material relating to the statute merchant and statute staple system have been calendared by the National Archives, and we can also find passing references to debts in sources such as the patent rolls (which contain pardons for debtors who failed to appear in court): together, these materials give us a limited but meaningful evidence base.¹³⁹ What insights can these debts provide concerning the subject of urban-aristocratic moneylending?

Some (perhaps even most) of these actions concerning debt were the result of purchases of goods on credit. A typical example is that of Sir Nicholas Carew, whose widow was sued in the Common Pleas in Michaelmas 1449 by the Exeter merchant John Clerk, who claimed that Carew had bought a large quantity of pitch and tar on credit.¹⁴⁰ Two points can be developed from this example. Firstly, Clerk waited over two years before initiating legal proceedings to enforce the bond, which had fallen due at Pentecost 1447. This may fit the pattern suggested above, in which traders were hesitant to needlessly antagonise wealthy customers if other options were available.¹⁴¹ Indeed, it may be the case that Clerk only chose to proceed in 1449 because Carew had died. Secondly, the sum owed by Carew was £6 8s: significant, but not a princely sum. It is worth considering how much of this money (if, indeed, it was ever recovered) would have been consumed by Clerk's legal costs, especially when Carew's widow was given licence to defer proceedings at least six times. In general, however, this type of example (of a simple sale of goods) tells us little. It is, after all, hardly surprising that merchants sold goods or that gentlemen bought them, and it is impossible to read socio-political implications into such contacts when we have no evidence that they were anything more than business transactions.

¹³⁹ The TNA classes which have been calendared are C 241 (certifications for debt) and C 131 (extents for debt). The early chancery proceedings (TNA C1) have also been consulted here, as they include pleas for the chancellor to dispense equity justice concerning debts.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, CP 40/755, r. 599d.

¹⁴¹ One such method was the bond in question itself, as it appears that it was made at a later date, rather than at the time of the actual sale and grant of credit: perhaps this was an earlier, unsuccessful attempt by Clerk to expedite payment.

Frustratingly, the examples of what appear to be actual loans extended by townsmen to aristocrats suffer from a similar problem: in none of these instances is there any other evidence of a relationship between the men involved. Without such evidence, it becomes difficult to ascertain the reasons why the aristocrat in question chose to borrow from that particular townsman, and why the townsman chose to lend to that aristocrat. In some instances, these ‘debts’ were almost certainly a legal fiction intended to secure some other form of transaction, which further complicates the picture.¹⁴² Again, however, all of these arrangements were therefore quite possibly predicated on the purely economic logic of a man who needed money and a man who sought to invest his spare capital: it is by no means clear that any wider relationship is implied.

There are a few patterns which we can identify from these sources, but these are ultimately dwarfed by the differences between them. We can deduce very little in common, for instance, between a loan made by John Hall of Salisbury to Robert Bodenham (secured on two of Bodenham’s manors) and another loan made by Thomas Wetherby of Norwich to Robert, lord Morley, aside from the fact that an aristocrat in need of cash had apparently borrowed from a townsman: there may have been more important similarities, but they cannot be recovered from this evidence.¹⁴³ One pattern which can be identified is that almost all of the creditors, including Hall and Wetherby, were sometime-mayors of their home boroughs, although the sample is evenly split between those who lent money before becoming mayor and those who did so afterwards. It is difficult, however, to prove that this pattern is anything more than a reflection of the fact that rich and successful townsmen became mayors, and also had the resources to lend significant sums. By contrast, the list of debtors is so varied as

¹⁴² For example, a pair of ‘debts’ registered under the statute merchant in Exeter in 1479 on the same day, for the same amount and between the same people, only with the parties reversed in the second document, suggests that something more complex than a simple extension of credit was taking place. TNA, C 241/258/58, 60.

¹⁴³ For Hall and Bodenham: TNA, C1/25/128-131. For Wetherby and Morley: C 241/230/63; C 1/15/31.

to defy categorisation: it included the nobility (the aforementioned lord Morley), knights, esquires, gentlemen (including those with no record of participation in government and thus, presumably, of rather doubtful status) and a widow. The only similarity is that they were overwhelmingly from the county which surrounded each city: a rare exception was the £50 of merchandise sold on credit by Thomas Calwodeley to a gentleman from Dorset.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, perhaps the most important pattern which can be identified from these debts is the sheer paucity of examples. Did our townsmen only infrequently lend to aristocrats in general, or is there a more complex reason, such as that their debts were recorded in a different forum, or that townsmen were indeed reluctant to sue them for unpaid debts?

One method which may shed some light on this mystery is to compare the number of such examples with the number of debts contracted between local aristocrats and citizens of London. Thus, if we take all of the certifications of debts under the statute merchant in which the defaulting debtor was a man described as holding the rank of gentleman or above, resident in the four counties in which our four cities were located, and then count those where the creditor was a citizen of the four cities and those where the creditor was a Londoner, we can produce the figures shown in Table 3.¹⁴⁵ It is often impossible to distinguish statute merchant debts which were loans from those which were commercial credit, and indeed from those ‘debts’ which were contrivances to protect more complicated transactions and contracts.¹⁴⁶ For that reason, these figures include *all* statute merchant debts, to ensure that we are comparing like with like; the table therefore presents a picture of wider commercial engagements, rather than just credit and moneylending.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, C 241/237/11. For Calwodeley, see above, pp. 124-6.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, C 241.

¹⁴⁶ Nightingale, ‘Knights and Merchants’, p. 46. Confirming which examples fall into which category is effectively impossible.

	Devon	Hampshire	Norfolk	Wiltshire
Debts to local citizens ¹⁴⁷	5	0	13	1
Debts to Londoners	20	11	37	13

Table 3 – Outstanding debts certified under the statute merchant, owed by men of gentle rank and above in these four counties, 1377-1509, arranged by county and the origin of the creditor

The pattern here is obvious enough to require little comment: aristocrats in these four counties were overwhelmingly more likely to be pursued for an unpaid debt under the statute merchant by a Londoner than by a citizen of our four towns. There are several possible reasons for this pattern. It may be, for instance, that Londoners were, in general, more likely to use the system offered by statute merchant debts than our townsmen, although there is no obvious reason why this would be the case. Certainly, our townsmen took full advantage of the same system when contracting debts with other merchants. Secondly, and more convincingly, Londoners may have been more willing to prosecute defaulting aristocrats for such debts, perhaps because of the proximity of Chancery, or the distance of the debtors.

We also cannot discount the possibility that provincial aristocrats, even in distant Devon, were in general more commercially involved with citizens of London than they were with the merchants and traders of more local towns and cities. This would fit the pattern presented by, for instance, Sir John Fastolf, whose financial affairs were conducted through citizens of London rather than Norwich.¹⁴⁸ The evidence presented here is insufficient to draw any confident conclusions, but it does produce the suspicion that when the aristocracy needed to borrow money from merchants or to purchase goods on credit, they often turned to Londoners rather than locals. It may be useful to explore whether this pattern changed across the period, in light of Jenny Kermode's persuasive argument that Londoners became

¹⁴⁷ That is, those where the creditor (or one of the creditors) was a citizen of the four example towns (excluding urban lawyers who took no part in urban government).

¹⁴⁸ McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 178-83.

increasingly important sources of credit in Yorkshire across the fifteenth century, as the capital's 'commercial tentacles were lengthening'.¹⁴⁹

	1377-1400	1400-1425	1425-1450	1450-1475	1475-1509
Debts to local citizens	4	2	6	5	2
Debts to Londoners	12	9	5	24	31

Table 4 – Outstanding debts certified under the statute merchant, owed by men of gentle rank and above in Devon, Hampshire, Norfolk and Wiltshire, 1377-1509, arranged by date and the origin of the creditor.

There are too few examples from our counties to conduct a chronological analysis for each, but, combined together, they produce a pattern of aristocrats being far more likely to be sued for unpaid statute merchant debts by Londoners after 1450 than before (see Table 4). This pattern is not necessarily indicative of Londoners *replacing* local lenders as sources of credit to the aristocracy, however. Instead, we might interpret these figures as suggesting a significant increase in aristocratic borrowing after 1450 which was overwhelmingly financed by Londoners. Alternatively, the pattern may reflect an increase in the popularity of the statute merchant system for debts of this kind. This possibility would, however, still imply that London creditors became more important to aristocrats after 1450, as there seems little reason to suspect that Londoners took greater advantage of the statute merchant after this date, but provincial lenders did not.

Although it is perhaps not technically a *direct* connection between two men, there is one additional area within the theatre of moneylending and credit in which the local aristocracy and the urban elite might have interacted. Again, this was within the statute merchant and staple system, but in this case concerns those debts where the aristocrats were creditors or

¹⁴⁹ J.I. Kermodé, 'Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century: Some Lessons from Yorkshire', *Business History Review*, 65:3 (1991), pp. 496-500, quotation from p. 497. Eadem, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 246-7, 252-3.

debtors to non-townsmen. The system by which these debts were registered and enforced was based in each town. Each debt, for instance, was registered before the mayor of the local staple town (a category which included each of our towns), while the first stage of ‘certifying’ an unpaid debt was for Chancery to direct a writ to the mayor to confirm the original registration.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Exeter’s staple court transacted business involving the earl of Devon, Lord Bonville, the bishop of Exeter and the abbots of Tavistock, Dunkeswell and Torre as creditors, as well as a number of gentlemen as both creditors and debtors.¹⁵¹ It may well be that these cases involved no actual interaction between citizens and aristocrats at all (with proceedings taking place through attorneys), but it nonetheless involved aristocrats in a system which was organised around towns, and in which townsmen held positions of significant responsibility. It thus provides a rare example of a theatre in which aristocrats used a system designed for and run by townsmen, in contrast to the many examples where the opposite occurred.

VI – Guilds and Citizenship

Guilds are generally recognised as being among the most important formal means of social organisation in late-medieval England.¹⁵² This is particularly true for townsmen, whose involvement in craft guilds has been subject to much discussion by historians.¹⁵³ Attention has also been paid to the fraternities which bound together social groups within towns,

¹⁵⁰ As well as the mayor, there was also a clerk of each staple, an office which was occasionally held by an important citizen, although more frequently by a professional administrator or royal servant.

¹⁵¹ E.g. TNA, C 241/171/66, 176/106, 182/24, 184/18, 184/21, 184/22, 184/71, 190/83, 192/114, 193/89, 211/3, 231/5, 244/15.

¹⁵² See, for instance, Rubin, ‘Small Groups’; S. Brigden, ‘Religion and Social Obligation in early Sixteenth-Century London’, *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), pp. 67-112; A.G. Rosser, ‘Communities of Parish and Guild’, in S.J. Wright ed., *Parish, Church and People* (London, 1988); idem, ‘Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations’, *Journal of British Studies*, 33:4 (1994), pp. 430-46. A particularly extensive recent treatment is idem, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford, 2015).

¹⁵³ E.g. Green, *Town Life*, ii, pp. 110-67; Reynolds, *Introduction*, p. 167; Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 99-117. H. Swanson, ‘The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in late Medieval English Towns’, *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), pp. 29-48.

especially those which were the preserve of the ruling elite.¹⁵⁴ It has often been argued that fraternities were crucial instruments in establishing a sense of civic unity and demonstrating the hierarchy of status within the city. This role was particularly evident during guild processions, but, according to this argument, the wider activities which these bodies undertook (particularly their involvement in funerary and memorial arrangements for deceased members) also served to promote a sense of community within towns. The involvement of the gentry and nobility in guilds has, by contrast, attracted very little attention: there is no suggestion that gentlemen formed their own gentry fraternities, and there is generally also little examination of whether they joined guilds associated with other social groups.¹⁵⁵ As mentioned in the Introduction, however, Rosemary Horrox has suggested that urban guilds were an important meeting place for landed society and prominent townsmen.¹⁵⁶ She cites examples of a number of urban guilds which included gentlemen and even noblemen among their members, and also gives evidence that at least some took an active part in the guild's activities, including attending feasts and plays. Christine Carpenter goes perhaps further than this in her discussion of the Holy Cross guild at Stratford, which, although an urban guild, also 'operated as a meeting-point for local landowners on a large scale'.¹⁵⁷ Were there any similar fraternities in our four towns?

¹⁵⁴ E.g. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen'; James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body'; A.G. Rosser, 'The Essence of Medieval Urban Communities: The Vill of Westminster 1200-1540', *TRHS*, 5th series, 34 (1984), pp. 103-10; idem, 'Myth, Image and Social Process'; Mills, 'Chester Ceremonial'; B.A. Hanawalt & B.R. McRee, 'The Guilds of *Homo Prudens* in late Medieval England', *Continuity and Change*, 7:2 (1992), pp. 163-79.

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Brown, for instance, found no evidence of gentry involvement in parish fraternities, but does note their membership of some urban guilds: A.D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 135, 177.

¹⁵⁶ Horrox, 'Urban Patrons', p. 156.

¹⁵⁷ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 339. Elsewhere, Carpenter also notes that the minor gentry of Warwickshire joined guilds and fraternities as a means of ensuring that prayers were said for their souls, while avoiding the significant cost of establishing a personal or family chantry. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 229.

The closest comparable example was undoubtedly the guild of St. George, Norwich. This fraternity was supposedly the preserve of Norwich's citizen elite: certainly, the overwhelming majority of the members were Norwich citizens, and the guild's officers were generally drawn from the same group of men who held power in the city government.¹⁵⁸ However, as McRee notes, the guild did not count all of the leading citizens amongst its members: indeed, he speculates that only around a half of the 'governing class' were members in the decades before 1452.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, the guild's membership did include a significant number of Norfolk gentlemen and even a few noblemen. One membership list included the earl of Suffolk, lord Morley, ten knights and four other gentlemen, as well as the titular archbishop of Smyrna, two bishops of Norwich and two other (probably suffragan) bishops.¹⁶⁰ Other lists cited by the antiquarian Francis Blomefield include a wide range of similar figures, from several dates throughout the fifteenth century.¹⁶¹ In 1452, moreover, the inclusion of aristocrats was formally recognised in the guild's constitution, as membership was allowed to all city dwellers as well as any knight, esquire, gentleman or man of 'gret worschip' from outside the city.¹⁶² Intriguingly, the ecclesiastical and landed elite were placed at the head of the guild's membership lists, ranking above the mayor and former mayors (who were themselves placed above priests, and citizens who had not been mayor): although this ordering was an echo of contemporary perceptions of status, it is still significant that this was imported into the documents of a primarily urban institution, which we might expect to operate on urban concepts of rank.

¹⁵⁸ B.R. McRee, 'Religious Gilds and Civic Order: The Case of Norwich in the Late Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 67:1 (1992), pp. 69-70, 74-83.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁰ Printed in J. & L. Toulmin Smith eds., *English Gilds: The Original Ordinances of more than one hundred early English Gilds* (London, 1892), pp. 443-60. The date of this list is unknown, but it includes members from a number of different years as made clear by the inclusion of two different bishops of Norwich, Henry Despenser (1370-1406) and John Wakering (1416-25). As such, it is unclear which particular earl of Suffolk and which lord Morley are referred to here.

¹⁶¹ Blomefield, iv, pp. 349-50.

¹⁶² M. Grace ed., *Records of the Gild of St. George in Norwich 1389-1547* (Norwich, 1937), p. 41.

The example of the St. George's guild suggests that guilds might have been a very significant theatre in which the urban and landed elite might have interacted on a social level and, moreover, might have represented a means by which the local aristocracy became involved in urban affairs. Other towns seem to have hosted similar fraternities, such as the Holy Trinity guild in Coventry and the Corpus Christi guild in York, both of which had a significant membership drawn from the local aristocracy.¹⁶³ However, references to urban guilds in our other three towns are scarce: the equivalent Salisbury guild (which was also dedicated to St. George), for instance, has left records concerning the annual expense of maintaining its chapel, chaplain and obits, but little else other than the tantalising mention of Sir Walter Hungerford being amongst its members.¹⁶⁴ If a membership list had survived, would we find other aristocratic members? Exeter, meanwhile, does not appear to have had a comparable guild. The closest parallel was the 'Kalendar Brethren', a group of important citizens dedicated to charitable deeds, but this was absorbed by the vicars-choral of the cathedral by the fourteenth century.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, although Southampton had parish fraternities, there is no evidence that any one became the chosen guild for the civic elite.¹⁶⁶ It is worth noting that the two towns with a history of government which was weak (Salisbury) or historically under-developed (Norwich) possessed such guilds, whereas those with well-defined and well-developed structures (Exeter and Southampton) apparently did not. Indeed, Kowaleski cites the strength of Exeter's governmental system as a reason for the weakness of craft guilds in the city.¹⁶⁷ Perhaps the most salient point here, however, is that although guilds for the civic elite were not a feature of all towns, those which did exist

¹⁶³ M.D. Harris ed., *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St Mary, St John the Baptist and St Katherine of Coventry* (London, 1935), pp. 1-100. D. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Guilds in late medieval Yorkshire, 1389-1547* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 160-195.

¹⁶⁴ LB1, #140. For the guild's activities, see Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp. 160, 162-9, 171-2. Brown states that no 'local lords of the manor' were among the guild's members: unless he discounts Sir Walter because his manors were not immediately local to the city, this is incorrect. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁶⁵ N. Orme, 'The Kalendar Brethren of the City of Exeter', *TDA*, 109 (1977), pp. 153-69.

¹⁶⁶ Platt, *Medieval Southampton*, p. 186.

¹⁶⁷ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 99-101.

tended to have local aristocrats among their members. Why would aristocrats have chosen to join these guilds?

One way to approach this question might be to consider the identities of the men concerned. Here, the membership of the Norwich St. George's guild is particularly interesting because, taken together, its aristocratic members represented a comprehensive cross-section of the upper echelons of Norfolk's landed society. They were not, for instance, members of a single political faction: of the early fifteenth-century members, Sir Simon Felbrigg had been Richard II's standard bearer, Sir Thomas Gerberge had been in the service of Edmund of Langley, and Sir Thomas Erpingham was a prominent servant of John of Gaunt, and later of both Henry IV and Henry V.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, the aristocratic members were drawn from across Norfolk, rather than only from Norwich's immediate surroundings. Felbrigg and Erpingham, for instance, were from the far north of the county, while Sir Brian and Sir Miles Stapleton were generally described as 'of Ingham', a manor in the east of Norfolk.¹⁶⁹ William Phelip, lord Bardolf, had particular interests in the north and west of Norfolk, as well as in Lincolnshire and Suffolk.¹⁷⁰ Several other members (including the Stapletons, Sir Thomas Kerdeston, Sir Thomas Tuddenham and Sir John Heveningham) also possessed significant holdings in Suffolk.¹⁷¹ In short, the only thing which connected all of these men was their position as part of Norfolk's landed elite, suggesting that it was this part of their identity which was responsible for their decision to join the St. George's guild.

Why would Norfolk's landed elite have joined a society which was otherwise the domain of townsmen? The evidence from the guild's archive suggests that it was generally their own

¹⁶⁸ *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 179-80. Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 186, 188, 193-4, 269. Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 64-6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67. For the Stapleton lands, see *CIPM*, xxv, #206-11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xxv, #481-90. Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 88-90.

¹⁷¹ *CIPM*, xxv, #208. *CIPM (Old)*, iv, pp. 249, 253, 332.

decision to join, rather than being at the invitation of the citizens. We know, for instance, that many aristocratic members paid entrance fines to join the guild (as did the bishop of Norwich), and the guild's inventories also indicate that some of them left legacies to the guild's chapel: in 1468, the guild possessed a silver and gilt angel which it had been given by Sir John Fastolf, and a black chasuble (the outermost vestment of a priest celebrating Mass) left by Lord Bardolf.¹⁷² These bequests would certainly indicate that membership of the guild was meaningful to these men, but this does not necessarily imply that they chose to join because it would bring them into contact with Norwich's urban elite. Indeed, there must be a suspicion that these aristocrats saw the guild as a way to network with each other, rather than with the citizens.

Here, we are frustrated by the limitations of the evidence available to us. Most guilds, for instance, have left few records other than the ordinances, constitutions and lists of property which were collected by Richard II's government in 1388-9.¹⁷³ Although some of these include hints at aristocratic involvement (such as provision for members living more than a certain distance from the town), they do not help us explore why aristocrats joined. Similarly, membership lists such as those preserved for the St. George's guild may explicitly confirm that aristocrats joined guilds, but they too are silent concerning aristocratic motivations. Even on those rare occasions when we can demonstrate an aristocrat's attendance at a guild event (such as those in Ludlow and Beverley cited by Horrox), we cannot infer the reasons for their participation.¹⁷⁴ It seems fair to conclude that aristocrats attending guild events would have mixed and conversed with townsmen, but we cannot demonstrate that this was a motivating factor in their decision to join guilds, nor that any such interaction (deliberate or accidental) had any wider social or political consequences. Without being able to determine

¹⁷² NRO, NCR, Case 8e, Guild Surveyors' Accounts. Blomefield, iv, p. 349.

¹⁷³ Toulmin Smith eds., *English Guilds*, pp. xxiv-xxvi.

¹⁷⁴ Horrox, 'Urban Patrons', p. 156.

why aristocrats joined urban fraternities, or investigate the nature of the contact they established with their new brothers from the urban elite, it is very difficult to make firm conclusions about how important guilds might have been as a theatre for urban-aristocratic interaction.

There was, however, at least one occasion when landed aristocrats joined an urban guild with the apparent intention of influencing urban politics. This was part of the factional disputes which dominated Norwich's affairs during the late 1430s and 1440s.¹⁷⁵ One of the factions (the supporters of former mayor Thomas Wetherby) enjoyed significant support from county figures, notably John Heydon, Sir Thomas Tuddenham and, ultimately, the earl of Suffolk.¹⁷⁶ As such, the fact that Heydon and Tuddenham were inducted into the guild of St. George at a time when Wetherby's faction controlled the guild (but not the city government) indicates that Wetherby believed that the presence of his aristocratic allies in the guild strengthened his position in the city.¹⁷⁷ It is unclear what precise impact this development had on city politics, but it seems that the presence of these aristocrats rendered the guild a destabilising influence in Norwich, as in 1452 the royal justice Sir William Yelverton was tasked with mediating a new constitution.¹⁷⁸ In essence, this agreement drew the guild firmly under the control of the city government, including provisions for the outgoing city mayor to serve as the guild's master for the following year, and for the city aldermen to automatically become members of the guild. Although the new arrangements explicitly allowed for aristocratic membership (albeit requiring the approval of the guild master), the changes drastically limited the possibility that the guild might be used as a channel for aristocratic infiltration of city politics.

¹⁷⁵ This period is discussed in greater detail below, pp. 254-60.

¹⁷⁶ Below, pp. 257-9.

¹⁷⁷ NRO, NCR, Case 8e, Guild Surveyor's Account 1430-7.

¹⁷⁸ Grace, *Records of the Guild of St George*, pp. 39-43. See also B.R. McRee, 'After 1452: The Evolution of the Guild of St George in the Wake of Yelverton's Mediation', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 45:1 (2006), pp. 28-40.

It may be worthwhile also considering another institution which was in some respects similar to these guilds: the citizenship or liberty of a city. This was, after all, a grouping of the urban elite within an urban context, much like fraternities such as the St. George's guild, although it lacked the religious elements and instead played a far more formal political role. Citizenship lists for Exeter and Norwich have survived, and both of these contain a number of examples of gentlemen and others who were not 'true' citizens.¹⁷⁹ In general, the Exeter lists are more useful for our purposes, as they regularly include the circumstances in which a new citizen joined the franchise. For most 'normal' citizens, the freedom was purchased through a fine, inherited from a father who had been a freeman, or else earned through an apprenticeship to a citizen.¹⁸⁰ Aristocrats, by contrast, were often simply granted the freedom by the city government: lawyers, for instance, were regularly admitted as citizens on account of the counsel they had provided.¹⁸¹ Gentlemen were rewarded in similar fashion for other services. Sir Robert Vere, for instance, was granted the freedom in 1459, almost certainly in recognition of the help he had provided the city over the preceding years, particularly as a link to the duke of Exeter.¹⁸² Similarly, Sir Hugh Courtenay of Boconnoc was admitted to the freedom without fine in 1470, presumably in recognition of the way he had assisted the city in adjusting to the Readeption of Henry VI.¹⁸³ Sir Hugh's son, Edward, was created earl of Devon upon Henry VII's usurpation, and in 1488-9 he was admitted to the liberty of Exeter by inheritance from his father.¹⁸⁴ Richard Holland esquire was admitted in 1429, almost certainly as part of a wider attempt by the city to secure the favour of his relative, the earl of Huntingdon.¹⁸⁵ There are a number of other examples of gentlemen becoming citizens of both Exeter and Norwich, but the circumstances in which they joined the freedom are

¹⁷⁹ Printed as Rowe and Jackson eds., *Exeter Freeman* and Rye ed., *Freemen of Norwich*. These lists are not comprehensive and may therefore underestimate the number of such aristocratic citizens.

¹⁸⁰ This is discussed at length in the introduction of Rowe and Jackson eds., *Exeter Freeman*.

¹⁸¹ E.g. William Hyndeston in 1442 and Nicholas Radford in 1449. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 51.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 53. For Vere, below, p. 281.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 56. Below, p. 293.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47. For Exeter and John Holland, earl of Huntingdon, below, pp. 272-3.

not so clear. It is interesting, for instance, to know that John Paston esq. and the son of Sir William Yelverton both acquired the freedom of Norwich (both apparently as mercers, in 1483 and 1455-6 respectively), or that Sir William Bonville became a citizen of Exeter in 1406, but without knowing whether this was by fine or as a gift of the city government it is difficult to discuss what the implications might be.¹⁸⁶

Overall, however, an examination of guilds and citizenship reveals a pattern of gentlemen and noblemen joining institutions which were distinctly, even definitively, urban. The grant of citizenship to aristocrats is probably the less significant of the two, as this was essentially a reward given to men who were already involved in urban affairs by virtue of having assisted the city in some way. However, it is still worth noting that being admitted to the freedom of a provincial town was apparently seen as a meaningful reward for a significant landed gentleman. This is rather surprising: the traditional perception of the relationship between gentility and urbanity would suggest that being a citizen would more easily be seen by a gentleman as a cause for shame, rather than pride. There were, of course, practical benefits to being a citizen (notably freedom from tolls), but presumably even this would not have compensated a gentleman if his honour, status and prestige would indeed have been damaged by accepting the liberty.

It is unfortunate that substantial evidence of aristocratic involvement in guilds only survives from one of our towns, especially as the tantalising reference from Salisbury suggests that it may have housed a fraternity similar to the Norwich St. George's guild. When taken together with the examples provided by Carpenter, Horrox and others, however, we are presented with a picture of urban guilds as an important theatre both in aristocratic life and in terms of

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39. Rye ed., *Norwich Freeman*, pp. 106, 154.

urban-aristocratic contact. The implications of the widespread aristocratic membership of these guilds are manifold. As previously discussed, there was no such thing as a ‘gentry’ or ‘county guild’: on a social basis, the lives of the gentry were structured around friendship, marriage and politics. The informality and fluidity of these arrangements and their deeply personal nature has led to scepticism about the existence of a wider gentry community (or ‘county community’) in this period.¹⁸⁷ That an urban fraternity contained, for instance, a significant cross section of Norfolk’s political society, that it did so throughout the fifteenth century and that these aristocrats had seemingly chosen to join (and indeed paid to do so) suggests that the St. George’s guild played some meaningful part in their lives, but the suspicion must be that it was related to the presence of other aristocrats in the guild, rather than to its urbanity. Did the St. George’s guild play some role in fostering a sense of community amongst Norfolk’s landed society, as well as among the Norwich elite? Was there, moreover, any crossover between these two groups within the guild, other than the exceptional circumstances of the 1430s and 1440s? Without more detailed evidence of the guild’s activities this is impossible to answer, but the continued and explicit constitution of the guild as a body whose membership spanned the city walls suggests that both groups saw some benefit from the arrangement.

VII - Conclusions

Any investigation into direct, personal connections between individuals in the late middle ages will unavoidably be hampered by lack of evidence, given that our knowledge of the period is so overwhelmingly reliant on official, administrative and governmental records whose creators mostly had little interest in such interpersonal arrangements. The evidence presented by the guilds just discussed, for instance, gives us scarce insight into whether the urban and aristocratic members actually crossed paths and, if they did so, whether this had

¹⁸⁷ See e.g. Carpenter, ‘Gentry and Community’; eadem, *Locality and Polity*, chapter 9, especially pp. 340-6.

any meaningful outcomes. Similarly, government records of debts tell us little about whether the extension of credit was a purely commercial action or whether it formed part of a wider relationship between the parties. As mentioned in the first section, firm evidence of direct connections (and indeed friendships and alliances) between aristocrats and townsmen is very rare, but also highly suggestive that this rarity is the result of poor documentary survival. Had more personal correspondence, livery rolls or even household accounts survived from this period, our ability to discern such connections would have been significantly enhanced, and we might have additional solid examples to complement those of Roger Blickling and the Exeter citizens retained by the earl of Devon. However, by considering more oblique evidence, we can produce a persuasive case for the existence of a few more significant transmural relationships, and also a number of hints that further connections did, in fact, exist, but have left too little mark on the historical record to be confidently reconstructed. It seems clear, for example, that there was a close and meaningful relationship between William Appleyard of Norwich and the Clere family, given that Appleyard married into the family and took part in a number of their land transactions. The marriage patterns of Appleyard's own family also hint at some connection between Appleyard and the duchy of Norfolk, as each of his daughters married one of the duchy's feudal tenants, as (for his second wife) did Appleyard himself. Another relationship which can be discerned with some confidence from this evidence is that between Sir Edmund Thorpe and the Danyell brothers of Norwich, who repeatedly acted as Thorpe's feoffees.

Beyond these, however, we are left with only solitary, stray references to connections which, in reality, may have been component parts of much wider relationships: an isolated marriage, or single land transaction does not necessarily provide much information, but both imply some pre-existing connection between the men involved. This wider relationship may itself be irrecoverable, but the general context in which each such connection developed can

perhaps be reconstructed. It is notable, for instance, that these scattered references can be divided into broad categories: those in which a townsman was acting as a townsman, and those in which he was essentially a minor gentleman. In the latter case (which includes all the examples of urban-gentry marriages and many of the examples of urban involvement in land transactions) we can be reasonably confident that any wider relationship was of a similar kind to those which existed amongst the minor gentry. The better-evidenced example presented by William Appleyard provides support to this view: while Appleyard's urban peers with rural land were perhaps not as eminent or successful, it seems reasonable to assume that their own relationships with landed society were configured on similar lines. The second category (which includes debts, the land transactions witnessed by groups of townsmen without rural land, and the possibility of some form of urban-rural connection through urban guilds) is more challenging, perhaps because there is no convenient analogue like that presented by the minor gentry for the examples in the first category. There is also a sense that some of the relationships suggested by these examples were between an aristocrat and the corporate city, rather than between individuals, something which is perhaps also perceptible in the case of the Exeter men retained by the earl of Devon.

Conclusions to Part 1

The preceding chapters have discussed a range of theatres in which members of urban and aristocratic society had interests. However, the overriding impression is that although both groups played a role in each theatre, they rarely did so in ways which brought them into meaningful social or political contact with one another, or in a fashion which combined 'urban' and 'aristocratic'. Townsmen bought land in the countryside, but most of their purchases were connected with their urban lives, rather than indicating a desire to broaden their interests or their identity. Similarly, most townsmen who took up royal office outside of their home towns occupied roles which were intimately connected with their occupation as businessmen. On the other side of the divide, those aristocrats who owned property in towns did so as an extension of their rural interests: townhouses, for instance, were a convenience linked to the fact that events of importance to the aristocracy took place in towns, rather than indications of a desire to become more urban or to engage with urban society. The aristocrats who held offices with power over towns were similarly acting in a way which did not lead them to assume any form of urbanity, or to bring the two societies into meaningful contact, especially as their interactions with townsmen did not extend beyond the competencies of their office or the term for which they discharged it. The way townsmen and town governments sought the favour of aristocrats who held royal office, particularly in cases where they needed assistance with matters outside the town walls, is a powerful reminder that towns were not self-contained islands, but it would be incorrect to suggest that such assistance brought the men involved or the societies they represented any closer together.

In some instances, this situation is complicated by the fact that a few men were simultaneously part of both urban and aristocratic society, and therefore might appear to have bridged the divide between them. In particular, this includes the small group of

townsmen (especially those with legal training) who demonstrably sought to become landed gentlemen, notably through the purchase of manorial lordships and personal engagement with landed society through marriage, service or acting as a feoffee. However, for the most part, the urban and rural activities of these men did not overlap, and there is little evidence that they even affected one another. When a townsman sought to join landed society by buying manors, marrying into the gentry and acting as a feoffee for his new friends and neighbours, he was acting as an aspiring gentleman, and in particular as a member of that familiar group of ambitious, cash-rich and socially-mobile men which also included successful lawyers, estate administrators and royal servants. It is difficult to identify any ways in which the fact that such a man was also a townsman had any bearing on his rural activities, apart from in setting a ceiling on the status to which he and his connections could rise.¹ Conversely, there were occasions when their rural connections became important factors in their urban activities, but these were rare. Indeed, it is generally difficult to identify any meaningful difference between the urban careers of men like William Appleyard or Roger Blickling, and those of their contemporaries whose interests remained solely urban. On a few occasions, urban politics and society were affected by a citizen's rural connections, such as the situation in Exeter in the 1380s and 90s discussed above, or the links between Thomas Wetherby and the earl of Suffolk's affinity discussed in a later chapter: these are important and interesting events, but their simple rarity is perhaps equally significant.²

For the most part, the connections which formed across the town walls were instead between townsmen and a group of lower-ranking aristocrats, particularly lawyers, royal servants and professional administrators. These men may have often claimed gentility, but they nonetheless lacked the status of the established landed gentry. Similarly, many of them also

¹ This was especially true in the case of the lawyers with urban backgrounds, as their profession meant that they were detached from the essentially-mercantile nature of the urban elite.

² Below, pp. 257-9.

lacked meaningful connections with local landed society or with the aristocracy more widely, and therefore could not even act as a bridge between townsmen and their social superiors. The examples discussed above, however, suggest it was precisely this position on the boundary of gentility which encouraged these men to take part in urban government and to acquire urban property. They did not consider urban office or urban society to be beneath them, and they were willing to invest their time, money and prestige more broadly than the landed gentry, something which in the case of lawyers was further encouraged by their profession. In addition, it is likely that their lower status explains why city governments were, in turn, willing to admit these men into their ranks, as they lacked the independent power bases which might have made them a threat to the city's independence, or allowed them to import external conflict into the city.

In general, the picture presented in the preceding chapters is of two groups, townsmen and aristocrats, who rarely interacted on a social or political level, even though there was a substantial degree of contact between them in certain spheres of government, and the two groups often owned property in close proximity to one another. When contact *did* take place, it was almost exclusively initiated by men who were marginal figures or who were dissatisfied with their position: that is by townsmen who sought to become gentlemen, and by aristocrats who had a tenuous grip on gentility (especially lawyers and royal servants). The reasons for this social split were probably manifold, but the difference in status between the two groups must have been a substantial component. Even if merchants were recorded as the social superiors of gentlemen in courtesy books, the greatest townsmen evidently ranked far below the knights, esquires and other county gentry in the context of county administration.³ Another possible contribution may have come from the outlook of merchants and other

³ I.e. 'mere' gentlemen, as opposed to esquires and knights. Horrox, 'Urban Gentry', p. 33.

townsmen. It is notable, for instance, how the behaviour of a lawyer from an urban background differed from that of his merchant forebears: his profession brought him into meaningful contact with landed society, and this would appear to have encouraged him to acquire manorial lordship, take part in extramural royal government and to engage socially with the landed gentry. The enhanced status such men enjoyed on account of their profession was, of course, critical (especially in securing their appointment to royal offices), but it is still important to note that the fact that such men were more likely to purchase manors or become involved with the landed gentry may indicate a greater desire, as well as a greater capability. The difference in outlook between a merchant father and his lawyer son may be an indication of a wider theme in which leading townsmen associated their *private* interests exclusively with their home town and its trade and politics, even if their sense of *public* interest could nonetheless expand to include other parts of the national fabric. As such, interaction with landed society (except on a business basis) or employment in county administration would probably have appeared to be a wasted effort, apart from for those few townsmen who, for unknown reasons, coveted a place in county society for themselves. It seems possible that many townsmen viewed landed society as alien (but not actually antagonistic) to their everyday lives and concerns, apart from in those circumstances when aristocratic skills or influence could be turned to the benefit of the town: it is to this theme that we now turn in the second part of this study.

Part 2 - Politics and 'Patronage'

The 'City-Corporate' and the *Aristocracy*

4 – City Politics

I - Introduction

The first half of this study considered several ways in which individual townsmen from our four towns came into contact with the aristocracy, as well as the theatres in which these interactions took place. In this second section our attention will turn to how landed society and other aristocrats engaged with the corporate, public structures of these four towns: their governments, officers and representatives. In particular, this chapter investigates the involvement of aristocrats in urban affairs: how, when and why did they become actors on the urban stage, and how could city governments benefit or suffer as a result? Who invited aristocrats to become involved and to whose (intended) benefit? Two related questions, those of which aristocrats took part in city politics and of why they themselves chose to become involved, will also be touched upon, to set the ground for a later consideration of these themes. This chapter is divided into three sections, each of which examines an urban context in which aristocrats often became involved: the expansion of urban liberties, the defence of existing privileges, and the resolution of urban factionalism. In each case, a number of detailed case studies are offered, alongside more general observations.

II – Expanding Urban Liberties

The acquisition of new liberties is widely recognised as an important theme in the history of late-medieval towns. As such rights were in the gift of the crown, this subject has mostly been addressed by historians studying the relationship between towns and the monarchy, although Lorraine Attreed and Rosemary Horrox in particular have also considered the role of aristocrats as intermediaries.¹ As Horrox notes, only London enjoyed a near-permanent, personal relationship with the king: provincial boroughs generally only came into contact

¹ Above, pp. 10-12.

with monarchs during their infrequent progresses, or when the citizens sought a royal grant.² The support of aristocrats at these moments could be invaluable for towns, and this section will detail a number of examples, while examining the patterns and themes which emerge.

II (a) – Norwich, 1377-1410

The reigns of Richard II and Henry IV were a period of extraordinary change in the structure of Norwich's government. In 1377, the city possessed a remarkably crude constitution, whereby authority was held by four bailiffs and a poorly-defined assembly. Within thirty years, this had been replaced by a more typical structure of a mayor, sheriffs, aldermen and council, while the city itself had been granted county status.³ The corporation simultaneously communalised much of the city's economic infrastructure, notably the staithe along the river, a substantial quantity of residential property, and the entire marketplace, giving them a substantial income as well as a firm grip on the city's commercial life.⁴ These developments required royal assent, and this period saw Norwich acquire four new charters and several other royal grants: in each case, help from aristocrats formed part of the corporation's strategy.

For most of this period, the city's key aristocratic supporter was John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, uncle of Richard II, and the greatest Norfolk landowner at that time.⁵ Both Gaunt and his Norfolk affinity provided important assistance to the city government, and this relationship proved successful enough that the citizens rarely approached any other aristocrats. The duke himself received regular gifts, some of which are of interest due to their

² Horrox, 'Urban Patrons', p. 147.

³ These developments are discussed at length in *RCN*, i, pp. xxxviii-lxiii.

⁴ For a summary of these economic developments, see P. Dunn, 'Financial Reform in Late Medieval Norwich: Evidence from an Urban Cartulary', in C. Harper-Bill ed., *Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 105.

⁵ Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 183-4.

timing. At some point between Michaelmas 1378 and the same feast in 1379, for instance, the duke was evidently in Norwich, as the city paid for minstrels to play upon his arrival and may have given him a gift of £10.⁶ Although impossible to prove, it seems plausible that this largesse was related to a contemporary development in the city's favour: a successful petition to the king in the 1378 parliament (which sat in October and November, and for which Gaunt was a trier of petitions) concerning the modification of the city's customs, which underpinned the citizens' campaign of reform.⁷ A similar pattern occurs in 1389-1391, when the citizens sought the establishment of a staple in Norwich: the duke received a large sum of money and two worsted cloths, while his wife was given a bridle.⁸ In 1391-2 the duke received almost £4 of cloth and £3 of silver: this was the period when the citizens petitioned for a royal licence for their communal property, as boroughs had been made subject to the statute of mortmain.⁹ Individually, these could be coincidences, but together a pattern develops of the citizens approaching Gaunt at times when they were seeking grants from the crown. Blomefield records a more explicit example, seemingly sourced from the now-lost assembly rolls for the late 1390s.¹⁰ On this occasion, shortly before his death in early 1399, the citizens apparently called upon Gaunt to assist them in acquiring a charter to reform the city government through the introduction of a mayor, but the duke replied that the king's disposition made success unlikely.

Members of the duke's affinity also assisted the corporation. Sir Thomas Morieux, who married Gaunt's illegitimate daughter and later died in his service in Spain, received a number of payments from the city, including one of 100 marks in 1375-6: this sum is so great that it

⁶ RCN, ii, p. 45. Blomefield alone records the gift to the duke, but does not give the source of this information. Blomefield, iii, p. 103.

⁷ For the petition, RCN, i, pp. 64-6. *RP*, iii, p. 34.

⁸ Blomefield, iii, p. 113. CAB, ff. 17d-19.

⁹ CAB, f. 22. *CPR 1391-6*, p. 121.

¹⁰ Blomefield, iii, pp. 114-15.

implies that the citizens were paying for some particular benefit (perhaps with Morieux paying the money to someone on the city's behalf) although it is unknown what this might be.¹¹ Sir Robert Berney, who served in Gaunt's retinue in Scotland and Spain, received £2 in 1390-1 for his part in the corporation's campaign to establish a staple.¹² The city's legal contacts also overlapped with the personnel employed by Gaunt's Norfolk administration.¹³ For example, the city's counsellors in the late 1370s, Edmund Clippesby and Edmund Gournay, were the duke's joint-stewards in Norfolk, an office later occupied by Robert Cayley, Norwich's London attorney.¹⁴ As discussed earlier, this may reflect a shared desire to retain the best local lawyers, but in the context of the city's wider relationship with Gaunt, the employment of the same lawyers appears more deliberate.¹⁵ As well as assisting the city themselves, ducal retainers perhaps also acted as intermediaries between the corporation and Gaunt: although there are no explicit examples of this here, the other case studies discussed in this chapter suggest that retainers and servants were often employed to induce their lord to act on the city's behalf.¹⁶

Gaunt provides a clear example of the benefits an aristocratic supporter could offer during a campaign to expand the city government's authority. His influence in national politics made him well-placed to assist Norwich, and it is notable that the two periods when the citizens made particular headway (1377-1380 and 1390-92) were times when the duke enjoyed an especially prominent position.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the evidence is insufficient to determine what

¹¹ NRO, NCR, Case 7 a&b, Account Roll 1375-6 and Account of Diverse Citizens, 1381-4. For Morieux and Gaunt, see Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 13, 203.

¹² CAB, f. 19. For Berney and Gaunt, see Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 186, 191. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 208-10. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Berney employed a group of Norwich citizens as feoffees in 1392-3, indicating that he had established a meaningful personal connection with the Norwich elite. Above, p. 160.

¹³ This overlap is summarised by Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 191-2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2. NRO, NCR, Case 7 a&b: Account Rolls 1375-6, 1378-9; CAB, f. 7d.

¹⁵ Above, pp. 120-3.

¹⁶ E.g. below, pp. 273, 286.

¹⁷ S. Walker, 'John [John of Gaunt], duke of Aquitaine and duke of Lancaster, styled king of Castile and León (1340-1399)', *ODNB*.

precise part the duke played: did he ‘prepare the ground’ for a forthcoming petition by conferring with the king and royal officers, or did his intervention come afterwards? What is clear, however, is that he was not the sole channel by which the corporation connected with royal government. Whenever the duke or his retainers assisted the city, they did so by acting alongside delegations of citizens who themselves presented their case to the king, royal council or parliament.¹⁸ This suggests that townsmen were themselves able to gain access to the royal government, but also that aristocrats could help in some way. There are a number of possibilities, notably that men like Gaunt ensured that the city’s case was heard by senior figures (such as the council, the chancellor or the king himself) rather than becoming mired in the lower rungs of royal bureaucracy. Additionally, such figures no doubt added weight to a city’s case, and might even have been able to secure some grants by simply requesting them at their own ‘instance’. Another possibility is that magnates were more in-touch with events in London: the example provided by Blomefield, for instance, suggests that magnates could provide advice and information about the mood of the king, the state of the wider polity and the impact this might have on the citizens’ likelihood of success. All of these possibilities, however, suggest that the term ‘intermediaries’ does not truly describe the role that these figures played. Perhaps we might instead describe them as ‘sponsors’ of the city’s cause.

The final components in the expansion of Norwich’s liberties came after Gaunt’s death: this later period reinforces the perception that aristocratic support was important for a corporation seeking additional liberties, but also that it was one part of a wider strategy. The void left by Gaunt was swiftly filled by Sir Thomas Erpingham, a former Lancastrian retainer and subsequently an intimate of Henry of Bolingbroke.¹⁹ Erpingham had followed Henry into exile and, upon his lord’s usurpation, was appointed royal chamberlain. Although his

¹⁸ E.g. NRO, NCR, Case 7 a&b, Account Rolls 1384-5, 1385-6; CAB, ff. 10, 19d.

¹⁹ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 58-9, 64-8.

landed possessions were insubstantial, Erpingham's intimacy with Henry IV (and later Henry V) allowed him to become the leading figure in early-Lancastrian Norfolk, mostly as a result of his position as *de facto* leader of the 'crown-Duchy' network in the county.²⁰ Almost immediately after Henry's usurpation, Norwich's government paid twenty marks to Erpingham to recommend the city to Henry and to provide them with advice.²¹ This advice may be related to the charter the city secured in February 1400, which confirmed its previous liberties: according to Blomefield, this charter was sent to the citizens by Erpingham.²² Evidently the corporation considered Erpingham's favour a sound investment, as they continued to pay for gifts of coin and foodstuffs until c.1421, when he seems to have retired from active political life.²³ The benefits that an influential contact could provide are further illustrated by an example from 1408-11, when the city petitioned the king to order that the measurement and sealing of all worsted cloths made in Norfolk should take place in Norwich. Alongside payments for delegations of citizens and lawyers, the city's accounts record that Erpingham received a reward of ten marks for his part in the successful campaign.²⁴ In addition, Erpingham put his own resources at the corporation's disposal: he loaned ten marks to their representatives in London, and his clerk, William Oxonford, was twice rewarded for his work on the city's case.²⁵ Two other Norfolk gentlemen, Sir Robert Berney and Oliver Groos were also paid for assisting the city.²⁶ Both were members of the crown-Duchy network and both had been retainers of John of Gaunt: although it is probably inappropriate to describe Erpingham as their lord, he was nonetheless the leader of the network of which they were a part.²⁷

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-8, 70-1.

²¹ NRO, NCR, Case 7a&b, Account Roll 1399-1400.

²² Blomefield, iii, p. 118. This is presumably again based on the now-lost assembly rolls.

²³ Although he was not to die until 1428, he is almost entirely absent from the crown records after 1421.

²⁴ NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Roll 1409-10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Account Rolls 1408-9, 1409-10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Account Roll 1410-11.

²⁷ Berney was also Erpingham's neighbour and friend. *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 208-10. For Groos, *ibid.*, iii, pp. 250-2.

If the citizens' acquisition of the right to seal *worstedes* was a demonstration of the value of aristocratic contacts, then the city's struggle to acquire a new charter in 1399-1404 was a lesson in their limitations. We are uncomfortably reliant on Blomefield's interpretation of the now-lost city assembly rolls for this period, but the surviving city records tend to concur with the antiquarian's narrative.²⁸ According to this reading, the citizens declared themselves for Henry of Bolingbroke in 1399, explicitly in exchange for the charter which Gaunt believed that Richard II would not grant.²⁹ However, the citizens overreached themselves by agreeing (at Erpingham's request) to seal a bill accusing the bishop of Norwich, Henry Despenser, of sharing the Ricardian loyalties of his nephew, the earl of Gloucester, a leader of the Epiphany Rising.³⁰ To their misfortune, the bishop persuaded the king of his innocence and, according to Blomefield, took revenge by successfully arguing against the grant of any new liberties.³¹ Three prominent citizens and the city's recorder were apparently then forced to petition the bishop at his residence at North Elmham in 1402.³² Without the assembly rolls, Blomefield's story is difficult to confirm, but it is certainly the case that the city presented the bishop with an unusual number of gifts in 1400-3.³³ However, the corporation had to provide further service before Henry IV was persuaded to grant them their new charter in January 1404: the citizens effectively bought this grant by lending Henry the vast sum of a thousand marks.³⁴

These examples from the reign of Henry IV again illustrate the usefulness of aristocrats to cities seeking to expand their liberties, but also demonstrate that aristocratic intercession was not always sufficient to secure royal grants. The corporation actively sought aristocratic

²⁸ Blomefield, iii, pp. 115, 117-20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 115.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 118.

³¹ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 118-19. Blomefield also suggests that the bishop excommunicated the citizens responsible for the accusations.

³² *Ibid.*, iii, p. 119.

³³ NRO, NCR, Case 7a&b, Account Rolls 1400-1, 1402-3.

³⁴ Blomefield, iii, pp. 119-20.

assistance, suggesting that they considered such support to be beneficial or even essential, but in each case they also had to proceed by other means, such as the loan offered to the crown in 1403. In the matter of the sealing of worsteds, they dispatched cloth to London, presumably to demonstrate the harm that could come to the industry and the realm on account of substandard merchandise.³⁵ The corporation would not have taken such steps if they could have secured these grants through aristocratic intervention alone, suggesting that the support of men like Erpingham was not always enough to secure royal grace or the agreement of the royal council. The case of Bishop Despenser, meanwhile, suggests that a hostile aristocrat (even one who, like Despenser, did not have the king's ear) could be a significant obstacle. Henry IV's apparent reluctance to grant the citizens their charter makes it difficult to argue that Despenser alone was responsible for the delay in its acquisition, but the effort the corporation apparently made to placate him indicates that his objections were a significant factor.

II (b) – Exeter, 1463-1500

Unlike Norwich, Exeter's liberties were not greatly expanded during this period. By 1377, Exeter had already developed a typical late-medieval constitutional structure and the city government held enough property to provide a comfortable income: there was no need for the sort of developments sought by Norwich.³⁶ On three occasions, however, the city was granted privileges and these provide insights into the support offered by aristocrats. The first was the city's charter of 1463, which granted the forfeited goods of criminals to the corporation, as well as an additional fair.³⁷ As well as being unusual because it granted new rights, this was unlike other Exeter charters in that it took much longer to acquire. The

³⁵ NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Roll 1409-10.

³⁶ As mentioned above, there were changes to the city council in this period, but these did not require royal warrant. Above, p. 25.

³⁷ DHC, ECA, Charter of 1463.

inspeximus charters of Henry VI and Henry VII, for instance, are both dated fourteen months after the accession of the new king, while Richard II's took eighteen months.³⁸ By contrast, Edward IV's took twenty-eight months, and this cannot be explained by the chaos of the usurpation, as other towns secured their own confirmations far earlier: Southampton in December 1461, Norwich in February 1462, for example, compared to Exeter in July 1463.³⁹ There is also no evidence that this delay was caused by royal reluctance to grant the new liberties, or indeed that the corporation was even involved in negotiations to secure a new charter at all. No payments, for instance, were made by the city for men to travel to London: in other years, such payments are a clear sign that the citizens were in dialogue with central government.

Instead, the corporation's focus in the intervening months was on establishing a relationship with Humphrey, lord Stafford of Southwick, who in February 1462 was granted the forfeited estates of the earls of Devon and became, in effect, Edward IV's lieutenant in the far south-west.⁴⁰ From this date onwards, Stafford received frequent gifts of wine from the citizens, including on at least ten occasions between Easter 1462 and Michaelmas 1463, far more than was given to any other aristocrat.⁴¹ During this period, the citizens also outfitted twenty soldiers to assist the king's campaigns against the Lancastrian rebels in the north, costing them over £13.⁴² These men were accompanied by the mayor as far as Taunton, where they were placed under Stafford's command.⁴³ Shortly after this, ten shillings was paid to a man to take the city charter to London 'pro ratific' et amplific" and one of the city's MPs was paid

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Charters of 1378, 1423 and 1486.

³⁹ SRO, Charter of 1461. NRO, NCR, Case 26a/17.

⁴⁰ *CPR 1461-7*, p. 116. For Stafford and Edward IV, see Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 78-9; C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England c.1437-1509* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 159, 174-5. For Stafford in the south-west, Stansfield, *Political Elites*, chapter 6.

⁴¹ DHC, ECA, CRA 1461-2, 1462-3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1462-3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1462-3.

almost £6 for purchasing ‘le Nucharter’.⁴⁴ Although basing arguments on suggestive timing is dangerous, this series of events can be plausibly read as indicating that the citizens delayed acquiring a new charter until they had both an aristocratic supporter and a grateful king on their side. If true, this interpretation suggests that Exeter gained its new charter by using the same three actors as Norwich: an aristocratic supporter, a delegation of leading citizens, and a king who was either in the city’s debt or could be persuaded of the wider benefits of the grant.

The second grant which Exeter received concerned a moiety of the manor of Awliscombe (near Honiton), which was bequeathed to the city by a former mayor, Thomas Calwodeley, just prior to his death in 1492.⁴⁵ Formalising the city’s possession was complicated by the need to acquire both a royal licence and that of the prince of Wales (or rather his council), as Awliscombe was held of the honour of Bradninch, part of the duchy of Cornwall.⁴⁶ The latter permission was uncontroversial, as in 1491-2 the corporation approached the prince’s feodary in Devon and satisfied him of fines and feudal relief.⁴⁷ However, the city government does not appear to have realised that it required royal licence until 1494-5, when William Frost, a valet of the crown, was given £10 to seek out a licence and royal pardon.⁴⁸ The following year, Frost was again paid to sue for a pardon and one of the city’s lawyers, John Burgoyne, was paid half a mark for his ‘arduous’ work on the matter.⁴⁹ Eventually, in October 1496, the citizens secured royal letters patent pardoning them and licensing their continued

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1462-3.

⁴⁵ *CPR 1494-1509*, p. 74. Calwodeley granted the manor to feoffees who were to hold it to the city’s use. As the first reference to the manor in the city archives dates from 1490-1, this must have occurred before Calwodeley’s death. DHC, ECA, CRA 1490-1.

⁴⁶ For Bradninch as part of the duchy of Cornwall, see e.g. *CPR 1476-85*, p. 386; *1485-94*, p. 21. For Awliscombe as part of the honour of Bradninch, *Feudal Aids*, i, p. 430.

⁴⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA 1491-2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1494-5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1495-6.

possession of Awliscombe.⁵⁰ As well as paying a fine of £24 to the king, their expenses also included the purchase of the favour and advice of certain men.⁵¹

Some of these were straightforward: the serjeant-at-law Thomas Keble, for instance, received 3s 4d of silver and 2d of wine, almost certainly for legal advice.⁵² However, the citizens also gave 6s 8d of salmon and 3s of wine to the bishop of Chester (as the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield was sometimes called) and ‘others of the prince of Wales’s council’.⁵³ By this date, the citizens had been rendering services to the prince’s honour court at Bradninch for some years without incident.⁵⁴ As such, this gift to the prince’s council was probably related to the acquisition of royal letters patent, rather than to any separate dispute concerning Awliscombe. Perhaps the king required the council’s consent before issuing his letters, or else the corporation sought to use the council to support their case: without other evidence, it is impossible to be conclusive. However, the citizens’ decision to concentrate on the bishop, John Arundell, deserves discussion, as he was well known to them. Arundell was a member of an important Cornish gentry family and had served as dean of Exeter cathedral for over a decade (during one of the rare periods when the city and cathedral were not at law with each other).⁵⁵ He had also been implicated in Buckingham’s rebellion of 1483, which in Devon had centred on Exeter and counted the then-bishop, Peter Courtenay, amongst its most prominent supporters.⁵⁶ Although Arundell did not flee to Brittany, he nonetheless enjoyed Henry VII’s favour: amongst other grants, Henry appointed him as chancellor to Prince Arthur at some point before June 1493, while Arundell was still dean of Exeter.⁵⁷ A

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1496-7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1496-7.

⁵² Ibid., 1496-7. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 508-9.

⁵³ DHC, ECA, CRA 1496-7. For the Chester/Coventry and Lichfield overlap, see e.g. *CPR 1494-1509*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ DHC, ECA, CRA for 1491-2 onwards.

⁵⁵ N. Orme, ‘Arundell, John (c.1435–1504)’, *ODNB*.

⁵⁶ Ibid. For Buckingham’s revolt in Exeter, see Gill, *Richard III*, pp. 73-5.

⁵⁷ Orme, ‘Arundell, John’. *CPR 1485-94*, pp. 487-8.

combination of familiarity with the city and a favourable relationship with the king probably explains why it was Arundell who was apparently at the centre of the citizens' endeavours, rather than the other members of the prince's household and council.⁵⁸

Exeter's third royal grant in this period followed the defeat of Perkin Warbeck's second Cornish rising in September 1497, which was in part due to Exeter's endurance of a siege.⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards, Warbeck's army collapsed, and Henry VII arrived in Exeter in early October to dispense justice.⁶⁰ Having spent almost £22 on provisioning the earl of Devon's garrison during the siege, the citizens were driven to further expense by the royal visit, with the king alone receiving almost £12 of wine, cattle and sheep.⁶¹ Various members of the royal entourage were paid significant sums, such as the mark paid to the king's footmen and 6s 8d to the royal trumpeters.⁶² In return for their service and hospitality, the citizens received the right to appoint a sword-bearer, outfitted with a cap and a sword, who would precede the mayor within the city.⁶³ The city also paid 23s 4d for royal letters patent to be written confirming various city ordinances, but it is unclear if these were actually granted, as neither the letters nor any enrolment survives.⁶⁴ Even with the king present in person, the corporation still engaged with influential figures, probably both to manage the royal visit and to turn the king's gratitude into useful benefits. Unlike in the previous examples, however, rather than employing an intermediary from amongst the landed or ecclesiastical aristocracy, they instead concentrated on gaining the favour of royal servants. William Frost, the valet of the crown who had assisted them in acquiring the licence for Awliscombe, was elected as

⁵⁸ A commission of February 1495 provides a contemporary listing of the aristocratic members of the prince's household: *CPR 1494-1509*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ I. Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy 1491-1499* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 185-6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-1.

⁶¹ DHC, ECA, CRA 1496-7, 1497-8.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1497-8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1496-7.

mayor of the city: unlike in Salisbury and Southampton, this is the sole example of such a figure holding office in Exeter, and the timing makes it clear that this was related to the king's presence.⁶⁵ In addition, the city approached Robert Rydon, the clerk of the royal council, who was paid two rewards of £1 each, as well as a mark for securing an unspecified pardon.⁶⁶ This expense was evidently considered worthwhile, as the corporation later retained Rydon with an annual pension.⁶⁷

Two points can be made about Exeter's employment of Frost and Rydon: firstly, it underlines the fact that city governments' need for aristocratic sponsors did not arise because they themselves were unable to present their case to the royal government. Henry VII, his ministers and officers resided in Exeter for almost a month, during which time it is inconceivable that the corporation would have been unable to gain an audience.⁶⁸ This again suggests that the role of aristocratic supporters was to advise the corporation on the appropriate way to present their case, and also to support the city by deploying their own influence (notably their personal access to and relationship with the king and his ministers) to bring matters to the attention of senior figures, or even to request that a grant be made on their own personal cachet. Secondly, the choice of Frost and Rydon indicates that men of this sort – royal servants and bureaucrats – were more suitable supporters in the late fifteenth-century than they had been in earlier decades. Such men had occasionally received gifts from city governments in previous years, but these were related to their administrative functions. In 1465-6, for instance, Exeter had sought the favour of the then-clerk of the council, but it took the form of a modest gift of two shillings, paid with the intention that

⁶⁵ DHC, ECA, CRA 1497-8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1496-7 and 1497-8. The pardon could perhaps be related to the citizens' conduct in the first Cornish rising of 1497, when, caught unprepared, they had allowed the rebels to enter Exeter. Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, p. 163.

⁶⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA 1503-4 until 1508-9.

⁶⁸ Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck*, pp. 190-1.

the clerk should record the presence of a certain citizen before the council.⁶⁹ On this earlier occasion, advice and support were provided by Humphrey, lord Stafford of Southwick, whereas in 1497 there is little evidence for the involvement of landed aristocrats.⁷⁰ Similarly, previous royal visits had seen the city seek the favour of aristocrats (particularly noblemen) who were close to the king, rather than bureaucrats and royal servants. When Richard III visited Exeter in 1483, it was to John, lord Scrope of Bolton, that the citizens directed their efforts.⁷¹ As such, it is important to note that a valet of the crown and the clerk of the royal council were performing a role which had previously been the preserve of the landed aristocracy. Of course, the increasing influence of royal functionaries under Henry VII is well known, but this example suggests that it may have enabled such men to assist provincial towns seeking royal favour, formerly a preserve of the landed aristocracy.⁷²

These Exeter examples confirm some of the points identified in Norwich: we find, for instance, the same trifold pattern of aristocratic sponsors, delegations of citizens and lawyers, and a monarch's gratitude for services rendered. On other points, however, Exeter presents a different picture, such as the fact that Exeter's government sought out a different aristocrat for each occasion, rather than establishing a longer partnership. However, this difference is the result of circumstance, rather than deliberate design. Firstly, unlike Norwich, these grants to Exeter were not part of a prolonged and concerted campaign to expand the city's liberties. What provoked the grant of new chartered rights of 1463 is unknown, but the grants of 1496 and 1497 were the results of unexpected events. In addition, the grants of 1463 and 1497 did

⁶⁹ DHC, ECA, CRA 1465-6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1465-6, 1496-7 and 1497-8

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1483-4.

⁷² See e.g. S.J. Gunn, "'New Men' and 'New Monarchy' in England, 1485-1524", in R. Stein ed., *Powerbrokers in the late Middle Ages: The Burgundian Low Countries in a European Context* (Turnhout, 2001), pp. 153-63, which notes that such men 'above all ... were important because they managed the king's relationship with the wider political nation', including towns. Quotation from p. 157.

involve aristocrats with whom the city developed a longstanding relationship, but they marked the *beginnings* of these relationships. As mentioned above, Lord Stafford of Southwick was approached by the corporation again in 1465-6 and he frequently received hospitality from the city throughout the 1460s: had he not been murdered in 1469, the connection might have lasted longer.⁷³ Similarly, Robert Rydon's assistance in 1497 did not mark the end of his association with Exeter, as the corporation chose to retain him until his death. One rather more convincing point of difference is in the nature of these aristocrats: Frost and Rydon were radically different figures from Gaunt or Erpingham, reflecting the changing nature of power and influence in the late fifteenth century.⁷⁴ Lord Stafford of Southwick, however, was cut from a remarkably similar cloth to Erpingham: he also relied entirely on crown patronage for his influence and on royal grants for his local authority.

II (c) – Salisbury, 1406-12 and 1450-77

Salisbury's government was hampered by poor finances and constitutional restraints but, unlike Norwich, the citizens could not directly petition the king for new liberties, as Salisbury was an episcopal borough: any new rights were either in the gift of the bishop, or needed his approval. In 1406, Henry IV granted a mortmain licence authorising the acquisition of a hundred marks of property by the citizens.⁷⁵ This licence had to be confirmed by the bishop and the cathedral chapter, a process which took six years and limited the maximum value to £40.⁷⁶ Unlike Norwich and Exeter, however, these permissions were acquired without the assistance of landed aristocrats: the citizens relied solely on their own labour and that of their lawyers. The mortmain licence, for instance, was acquired by Thomas Ringwood, a local lawyer, and William Boyton *alias* Bower *alias* Bourer, a legally-trained member of a city

⁷³ DHC, ECA, CRA for throughout the 1460s.

⁷⁴ Below, pp. 295-301.

⁷⁵ *CPR 1405-8*, p. 153.

⁷⁶ LB1, #108.

family.⁷⁷ Ringwood was rewarded with £20 for his efforts, while both he and Boyton received payments for their expenses.⁷⁸ There is no indication of any attempt to induce any landed aristocrat to assist the citizens in this matter: the only contemporary expense on men of rank was the pipe of wine which the citizens customarily gave to the incoming sheriff of Wiltshire.⁷⁹ Similarly, when the citizens sought episcopal confirmation, they approached the bishop directly through gifts and a delegation of leading citizens, without any mention of aristocratic support.⁸⁰

This pattern was repeated later in the century, when the citizens sought to escape the bishop's overlordship through direct appeals to the crown.⁸¹ The impetus towards this confrontation was probably the election of Bishop Richard Beauchamp following the murder of William Aiscough in 1450. Beauchamp was a very different figure to his predecessors. Aiscough (bishop 1438-1450) had been much involved in royal government and, although 'never a negligent diocesan', there is no sign that he was particularly interested in the *temporal* affairs of his diocese.⁸² His predecessor, Robert Neville (1427-38), was 'usually an inactive [bishop]'.⁸³ By contrast, Beauchamp seems to have taken greater interest in the diocesan estates, particularly in enforcing rights which had lapsed under his predecessors. Within a few years, he had ordered the creation of the 'Black Book', a rental and cartulary concerning many of the episcopal estates, including Salisbury, probably compiled to place his

⁷⁷ The *HoP 1386-1421* believes that William Boyton *alias* Bower and William Bourer were separate individuals (ii, pp. 314-15, 322-3). However, they both died at a similar time, and never appear together at a city assembly: given the similarity and various mutations of 'Bower', 'Bowyer' and 'Bourer', it is likely that this is a single man.

⁷⁸ LB1, #54.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, #54. Below, p. 266.

⁸⁰ LB1, #105.

⁸¹ For this struggle see Street, 'The Relations of the Bishops and Citizens of Salisbury', pp. 185-257.

⁸² R.G. Davies, 'The Episcopate in England and Wales, 1375-1443' (Manchester Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1974), appendix. I, pp. iii-iv.

⁸³ A.J. Pollard, 'Neville, Robert (1404-1457)', *ODNB*.

administration on surer financial and legal footing.⁸⁴ Within Salisbury, the bishop was almost certainly behind a renewed effort to enforce the use of the ‘Domesday Books’, volumes in which all deeds and wills which transferred property in the city were supposed to be enrolled.⁸⁵ In 1459, it was ordained that all future deeds should be recorded, and that all such documents from the previous seventeen years should also be presented for retrospective enrolment.⁸⁶ It also seems likely that Beauchamp was (indirectly) responsible for the unusual reeves and aldermen elected by the citizens in the 1450s, when a number of landed gentlemen and clerics were chosen to fill these offices, which were normally occupied by very minor citizens.⁸⁷ When the citizens eventually rebelled against the bishop’s authority in 1465, they abolished these offices, suggesting that they were part of the citizens’ grievances: the election of manifestly unsuitable figures (including the prior of Ivychurch Priory, who complained to the king) was probably an earlier demonstration of this discontent.⁸⁸ Perhaps part of Beauchamp’s drive to resurrect episcopal rights had been to demand that the reeves and aldermen (who were technically episcopal officers) should perform duties which they had ceased to do.

Between 1455 and c.1477, when an uneasy peace was reached, the citizens achieved a significant amount, although they remained the bishop’s tenants, and various rights and profits such as fairs and the proceeds of justice remained episcopal perquisites. In particular, the citizens secured the right of the mayor and other leading citizens to act as justices of the peace, as well as the abolition of the office of reeve. In addition, Beauchamp conceded that

⁸⁴ WSHC, D1/1/5.

⁸⁵ See S. Hobbs and J.H. Chandler ‘Salisbury Domesday Books’, *Sarum Chronicle*, 12 (2012), pp. 81-6.

⁸⁶ LB2, f. 37. The significance of the seventeen-year period is unclear.

⁸⁷ E.g. LB1, #456. LB2, ff. 6, 16, 35, 54d.

⁸⁸ For the prior of Ivychurch, LB2, ff. 20d-22d. For the abolition of the reeves and aldermen, see every city election between 1465 and 1474 (when the citizens submitted): LB2, ff. 78, 80d, 83d, 84, 88d, 95, 101d, 107, 112d.

the mayor should swear his oath before the bishop himself, rather than the episcopal bailiff.⁸⁹ However, there is again no evidence that the citizens sought to involve noble or gentry intermediaries: instead, the citizens negotiated directly with the king and bishop. In 1459, for instance, the mayor and four members of the city council were sent to discuss matters with the bishop in London.⁹⁰ In 1461, a similar responsibility was handed to two former mayors, William Swayne and William Hore.⁹¹ In 1465-6, with the matter being heard before the king and royal council, several groups of citizens were dispatched to London to act as attorneys, and a similar group were elected in 1474.⁹² As already noted, groups of representatives were a critical component of Norwich and Exeter's attempts to acquire liberties, but they acted alongside aristocrats. In Salisbury, there is no evidence that the citizens sought to persuade any such figure to support their own representatives. When landed aristocrats *did* become involved (as arbitrators, apparently appointed by the crown), the citizens were left to respond reactively through the provision of hospitality, such as the £8 11s lunch provided to the earl of Arundel, Lord Audley, Lord Stafford of Southwick, Lord Stourton and others in 1469.⁹³ When arbitrators were proposed by one of the parties, there was a stark difference in the men named. In 1468, the bishop proposed Lords Audley and Stafford of Southwick, whereas in 1474 the citizens presented the bishop with a list of lawyers, including John Morton (master of the rolls), Sir William Lakyn (a justice of the King's Bench) and Sir John Fortescue.⁹⁴

The absence of landed aristocrats from the strategies employed by Salisbury's citizens is of interest here because of the successes and failures which ensued. It is likely, for instance, that

⁸⁹ LB2, ff. 107d-8d, 119d, 126a.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 36d.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 56d.

⁹² E.g. *ibid.*, ff. 77, 78, 79d, 117-118d.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, f. 86d.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 83d, 115d.

had the city approached a figure like Gaunt or Rydon for advice on how to present their case, then the mayor would not have been incarcerated for offending the royal council with his conduct.⁹⁵ In addition, the citizens might not have been so foolish as to disobey repeated royal instructions to elect a new mayor, which cannot have improved royal opinion of the city.⁹⁶ Similarly, a figure with experience of arbitration and national politics might have been able to advise the citizens that presenting the king with a draft charter which, if granted, would have unilaterally transferred possession of the city from the bishop to the citizens, was a tactic unlikely to produce a useful response.⁹⁷ Conversely, the citizens did achieve real gains without aristocratic assistance, particularly in the early 1470s. It seems that the king himself was responsible for the bishop's concession that the mayor and other citizens should serve as JPs. In 1475, the bishop sent a letter to the citizens, noting the king's displeasure at misrule in the city, which he considered to be to 'our shaame and yourys both', and reminding the citizens that he had recently granted them the right to keep the peace in the city, something which the king 'in his owne person hath often tyme desyred us' to allow.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the reactive nature of the citizens' engagement with those aristocrats who did become involved does not seem to have left them at a disadvantage. There is no indication, for instance, that these aristocratic arbitrators favoured the bishop, let alone that they did so because the citizens had not (to our knowledge) previously sought their favour. Almost all of these arbitrations seem to have been inconclusive: on only one occasion do we have a record of some form of award, when a group including Lord Dynham, Lord Stourton, Sir Maurice Berkeley and Sir John Donne helped the city acquire royal letters instructing the bishop to

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 76d.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 76d.

⁹⁷ There are two such draft charters, one (incomplete, and not containing the clause concerning the possession of the city) in the city ledger book from c.1455-6 and the other in the Black Book of Bishop Beauchamp, dating to a mayoralty of John A'Port (probably 1458-9, but possibly 1466-70). Although it is not certain that this was ever actually presented to the king, the fact that it had come to the bishop's attention suggests that it may well have been. LB2, ff. 22-3. WSHC, D 1/1/5, ff. 46-48d.

⁹⁸ LB2, f. 126a.

receive the mayor's oath in person.⁹⁹ Even if this denies us a better perspective on the loyalties of the aristocrats to each party, it does at least indicate that they were sufficiently impartial that they did not dismiss the city's case out of hand.

II (d) – Themes

The preceding pages have identified a number of patterns in the ways that aristocrats helped and hindered cities seeking new liberties. Perhaps the most important observation is that although towns could petition the crown for grants without aristocratic support, they rarely chose to do so. Both Norwich and Exeter made repeated use of aristocratic 'sponsorship' and, moreover, delayed their approaches to the crown until they had secured support from a suitable figure. What part the sponsors actually played is unclear, but the examples demonstrate that they did not act alone, nor as the sole channel of communication between town and crown. Instead, they worked alongside delegations of citizens and lawyers, probably both advising them and using their own influence to support or expedite the citizens' request. In some cases, these men may have been able to secure a grant or other benefit simply by leveraging their own connections with the king or his ministers. However, the other strategies employed by town governments imply that this was often insufficient: why would Norwich or Exeter have gone to the expense of dispatching their own citizens or legal counsel to London (as well as relevant materials, such as the worsted cloths sent by Norwich in 1409-10) if their aristocratic contact could simply acquire what they needed? Similarly, there is a definite pattern in these examples of cities receiving royal grace after rendering some service to the crown, such as offering loans or soldiers. In summary, this suggests that aristocrats played a crucial role when towns sought royal grace, but that their 'sponsorship' was not always sufficient.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 109a.

It is also notable that most of the aristocrats who assisted towns were local magnates: men with significant authority in the locality, as well as close ties in London. Gaunt may not have been a regular visitor to Norfolk, but he was nonetheless an important figure in the county through his landed possessions and his affinity. Stafford and Erpingham, meanwhile, were effectively royal lieutenants in their respective regions. The practical importance of local authority is discussed in detail below, but it is worth noting here that magnates from the locality may have been more willing than distant figures to help townsmen, and also that the royal government may have paid more attention to the advice or requests of men whose word carried weight in the region concerned. In particular, aristocrats from outside the region had little incentive to help townsmen, whereas local magnates may have believed that assisting a major town in their ‘country’ would contribute to their worship.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, grants sought by townsmen had to be judged carefully to ensure that they did not cause economic damage, or lead to poor governance or discord. Many grants were necessarily at the expense of another interest group: when Norwich received the right to seal all worsteds produced in Norfolk, for instance, this was to the detriment of the smaller market towns in the county. Similarly, the powers acquired by Norwich’s ruling elite gave them significantly greater authority over the lives and businesses of the city’s lesser inhabitants, something which could (and did) lead to discord. If the royal council, chancellor or other officials were considering the implications of such a grant, they might give more weight to evidence presented by a local magnate than that offered by the townsmen.

Another pattern found in these examples is that townsmen often established long-term connections with magnates who assisted them. From 1377 until 1399, Norwich repeatedly approached Gaunt and members of his affinity, rather than employing different aristocrats

¹⁰⁰ For more on this theme, below, pp. 309-12.

to reflect changing political circumstances, or simply seeking out whoever happened to be nearby. This same pattern was demonstrated in the city's later relationship with Erpingham. The Exeter example is superficially different, with the citizens approaching several different figures, but this is because Exeter's acquisitions of new rights were spread out across the century. Moreover, Exeter's government maintained its connections with Stafford and Rydon after they had demonstrated their usefulness, again suggesting that, where possible, these towns invested in long-term connections, rather than reactively approaching aristocrats as they responded to events. As we shall see, this pattern fits into a wider theme of townsmen maintaining links with aristocrats who could help them, but cutting ties to those who failed or lost influence.

III – Defending Urban Liberties and Livelihoods

The defence of existing (or claimed) rights was even more important for townsmen than the acquisition of new ones. Liberties underpinned a town's self-governance, economy, and reputation, and were thus of critical importance to the town and its governing elite. Similarly, developments which threatened the city's wider wellbeing were treated with utmost seriousness. Urban liberties and livelihoods came under threat frequently and from a number of directions, including from religious institutions, landed aristocrats, other towns and the crown. This section will consider external threats to urban liberties and how the citizens responded by including aristocrats in their strategies to prevent or mitigate damage to the town. In these circumstances, aristocrats could provide assistance to townsmen in a number of ways, especially through acting as intermediaries and arbitrators, but they could also themselves be the party who threatened the town.

This section concentrates on three examples of long-term threats which town governments handled in different ways across a period of time. However, aristocrats also provided

assistance to cities on smaller, more immediate or more self-contained issues: these also provide important insights. As identified in the previous section, cities generally sought assistance from magnates with whom they had an established relationship. In 1411, for instance, Norwich approached Sir Thomas Erpingham to help quash royal letters appointing a city sword-bearer, in contravention of the city's charter.¹⁰¹ The approach to Erpingham was accompanied by the corporation's own actions: they paid their legal advisor William Paston a mark for advice, and then dispatched a man to London with a certification asserting the city's rights.¹⁰² In 1436, Salisbury turned to Walter, lord Hungerford, (one of the few aristocrats with whom the city engaged over an extended period) to persuade the royal council to excuse the city from a demand for 300 marks towards the defence of the realm.¹⁰³ Again, the city's own representative (the mayor) was present, but the city's account suggests that Hungerford's intervention was critical, as he informed the council of Salisbury's previous contributions to the country's defence.¹⁰⁴ In 1465-6, Exeter sought out Lord Stafford of Southwick for his advice on a privy seal writ which summoned a former mayor before the council.¹⁰⁵

On some occasions, however, cities turned to men other than established contacts: generally, this occurred at times when the citizens lacked a particular magnate ally, and sometimes these requests for aid were the starting point for a long-term association (as with the example of Robert Rydon, discussed above). Occasionally, the city's new contact was the political successor of their previous supporter, such as when Norwich turned to Thomas Beaufort,

¹⁰¹ *CPR 1408-13*, p. 293. NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Roll 1411-12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Account Roll 1411-12.

¹⁰³ LB1, #316. For Hungerford, below, pp. 267-9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, #316. Earlier that year, the city had contributed soldiers to the defence of Calais against the duke of Burgundy. *Ibid.*, #311, 313, 317.

¹⁰⁵ DHC, ECA, CRA 1465-6.

duke of Exeter, who had supplanted Erpingham at the head of the crown-Duchy network.¹⁰⁶ In 1416-17, the duke visited Norwich and was greeted with oats, wine and fish.¹⁰⁷ His secretary was paid 6s 8d to write a letter to Chancery, presumably concerning the contemporary dispute over whether Carrow (a suburb of Norwich) was part of the city's liberties.¹⁰⁸ This was to be the start of a wider relationship with the duke, who in 1423-4 (after he returned from service abroad in 1418-22) was called upon to help the city recover 1,000 marks it had lent to the king, while in 1424-5 the corporation requested he be their good lord in an unknown dispute with two Norfolk gentlemen.¹⁰⁹ On other occasions, threats to their liberties caused cities to seek out figures for some particular benefit they could provide, although again this was mostly during periods when the citizens lacked an established magnate contact. In 1434-5, for instance, Norwich engaged the bishop of Norwich and Henry Grey esq. to be 'boni medii' between the city and Lord Cromwell, who was supporting a suit made against the city by one John Hervy.¹¹⁰ Too little is known of Grey's loyalties to explain why the city chose him, but the bishop, William Alnwick, had served with Cromwell on Henry VI's minority council, and both men were associated with Cardinal Beaufort.¹¹¹ It should be noted that Norwich lacked a long-term magnate associate at this stage: if the corporation had found a suitable replacement for Beaufort (d.1426) and Erpingham (d.1428), it may well have turned to him instead.¹¹² Sometimes, cities' approaches to unfamiliar aristocrats appear to be desperate measures, caused by troubled national circumstances, such as when Exeter paid ten marks to Sir Philip Courtenay of Powderham for his 'friendship' at

¹⁰⁶ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 74-5.

¹⁰⁷ CAB, f. 121.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 121. For the case, see RCN, i, pp. lxxxi-lxxxiii.

¹⁰⁹ Castor, *Duchy*, p. 74. CAB, ff. 145d, 147.

¹¹⁰ CAB, ff. 197d, 203. Quotation from f. 203. The specifics of this case are unknown, but probably related to Hervy's complaint against two citizens who had acted as arbitrators between him and Richard Carleton. TNA, C 1/10/141.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Henry VI*, p. 156.

¹¹² For this dearth of lordship, below, pp. 238-42.

the height of the crisis of 1460-1.¹¹³ Indeed, some payments were little more than protection money, such as the forty marks given by Salisbury to Warwick and Clarence in September 1470 so the city could ‘have peace’, as it was unable to resist the rebels.¹¹⁴

These smaller examples again indicate that the citizens preferred to associate with magnates, that is aristocrats with authority in the immediate locality and influence in national politics. Erpingham, Beaufort and Hungerford, for instance, were all leading figures in their respective counties, but were also highly influential in central government.¹¹⁵ They also reinforce the perception that, where possible, corporations either sought the aid of an established magnate ally or, when they lacked such a contact, they instead identified someone who might become their long-term supporter. The citizens may have expected that the men they approached might come to fill this void, only for their judgement to prove incorrect or for the local situation to change substantially. Sir Philip Courtenay, for instance, was a sensible choice for Exeter’s government in 1460-1, as he was well placed to succeed the earl of Devon and Lord Bonville (who were both killed in the battles of those years) as the leader of Devon society. However, this vacuum was instead filled by Lord Stafford of Southwick, and the corporation, alert to shifts in the balance of power, sought his favour instead.¹¹⁶

III (a) – Exeter and the Courtenay Earls of Devon, c.1390-c.1509

Exeter faced two threats to its liberties and livelihood which were essentially permanent, and so required near-constant management. The first of these was the economic stranglehold on the city held by the Courtenay earls of Devon, whose possessions intruded into the city in a number of potentially-damaging ways (see Map 5). Most importantly, the city’s headport,

¹¹³ DHC, ECA, CRA 1460-1.

¹¹⁴ LB2, f. 92d.

¹¹⁵ Each of these men, for instance, held a senior office in central government or the household at least once: Erpingham as chamberlain, Beaufort as chancellor and Hungerford as treasurer.

¹¹⁶ Above, pp. 205-6.

Topsham, was a Courtenay manor: the earls exacted a number of dues, while also promoting Topsham's prosperity at Exeter's expense by establishing fairs and markets.¹¹⁷ The earls further strengthened their position by constructing several weirs across the river Exe below Exeter, between their manors of Topsham and Exminster. The citizens' belief that seagoing vessels had previously navigated this section of the river is probably incorrect, but the weirs did prevent smaller boats from ferrying goods between Exeter and ships in the estuary.¹¹⁸ The Courtenays also held the manor of Exe Island, immediately west of Exeter: in the early fourteenth century, the earls extended this manor eastwards by questionably-legal means until it reached the city walls, leaving the citizens with only a twelve-foot easement to make repairs.¹¹⁹ Within the city itself, the earls held a moiety of the Lammas (or 'Croiditch') fair, giving their bailiffs significant authority in Exeter for three days annually.¹²⁰

Many of these rights has been established by the first Courtenay earl, Hugh (I), in the early fourteenth century. This led to a number of legal cases between city and earl (all decided in the earl's favour) and also to the establishment of a great deal of civic myth, with Hugh as primary antagonist.¹²¹ Matters between city and earls improved after Hugh's death in 1340, as his successors did not attempt to extend their rights further, while the citizens were prevented from acting by the strength of the earldom's legal and social position.¹²² By the 1380s, relations had become so cordial that several leading citizens were retained by Earl Edward, and he regularly received gifts from the city.¹²³ However, whenever they perceived weakness, the corporation tried to reduce the earldom's grip on the city. The first opportunity

¹¹⁷ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 222-4.

¹¹⁸ A.M. Jackson, 'Medieval Exeter, the Exe and the Earldom of Devon', *TD4*, 104 (1972), pp. 70-1.

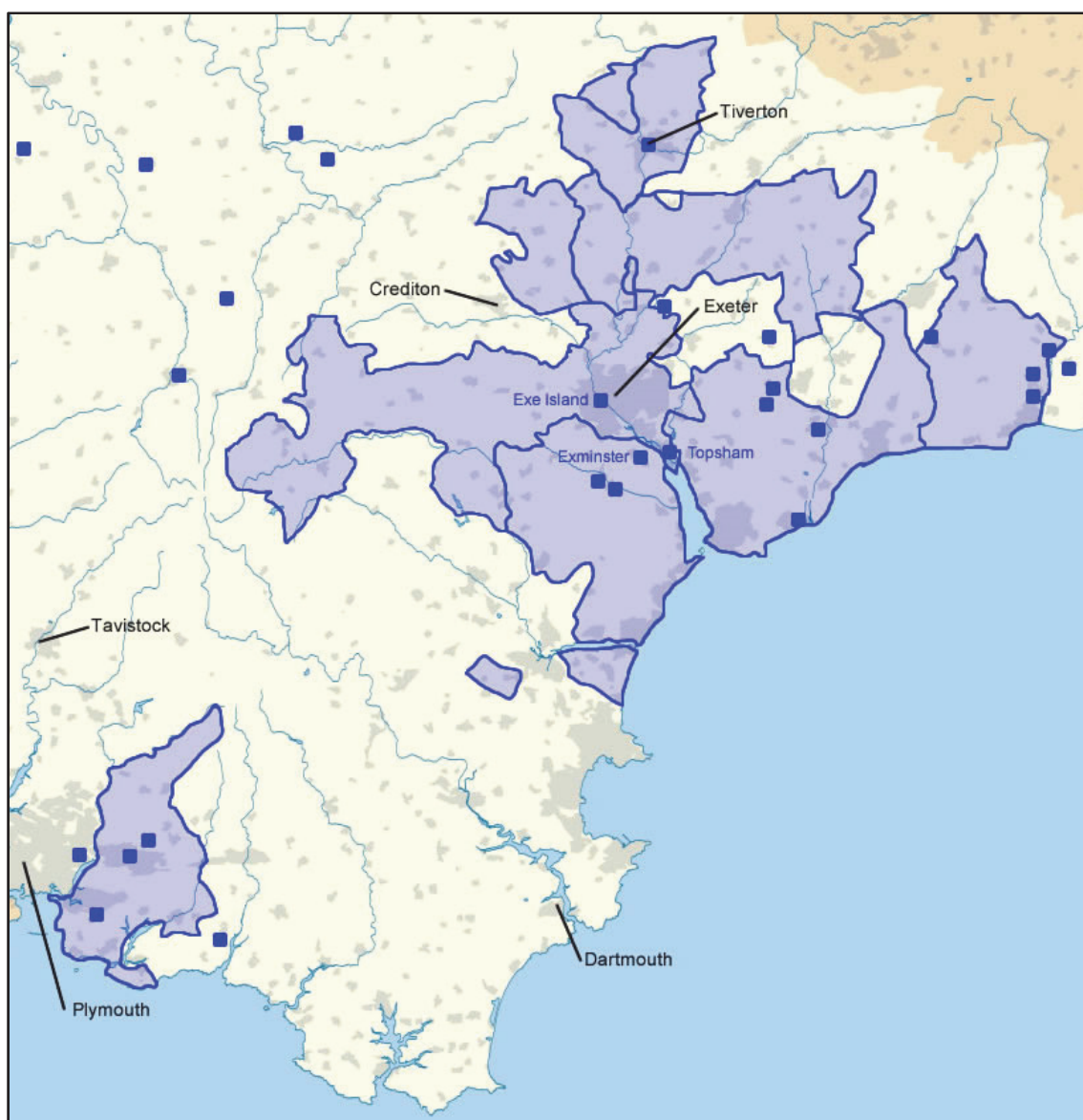
¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹²⁰ The other moiety was held by another city antagonist, the prior of St. Nicholas. Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 62-5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4. Jackson, 'Medieval Exeter', pp. 66-70.

¹²² For the political ascendancy of the Courtenays in this period, see Burls, 'The Courtenays', pp. 150-62.

¹²³ Above, pp. 143-4.



Map 5 – Manors and hundreds held by the earls of Devon

came in the 1390s, after the Courtenays' dominance was challenged by Richard II's establishment of his half-brother, John Holland, earl of Huntingdon and later duke of Exeter, as a major figure in Devon.¹²⁴ Just as this split political society in Devon, Exeter's elite also seems to have become divided between the two parties: as mentioned in Chapter 3, this could account for the election of a known Courtenay associate and a probable Holland supporter in alternating years between 1386-7 and 1394-5.¹²⁵ The city's gifts and hospitality were

¹²⁴ The wider conflict between Devon and Huntingdon is discussed in Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 90-2.

¹²⁵ Above, p. 146.

likewise split between the two lords but, as Holland's position strengthened after c.1392 (mirroring the king's own growing dominance), the corporation began to associate more with him than with Courtenay.¹²⁶ Small quantities of wine were presented to Holland and his wife on numerous occasions, but he also received far more impressive gifts: in c.1395, £42 was given to Holland and his 'familia', while in 1398-9 he received two tuns of wine and both his herald and his pipers received half a mark.¹²⁷ The citizens also actively sought him out. In 1397, the city paid £24 for cloth to create the liveries of citizens who were riding to Holland at Salisbury, while in 1398-9, wine and bread were provided to citizens in the guildhall who were writing a bill to send to him.¹²⁸ In this same period, Courtenay received only small gifts of wine.¹²⁹

In part, these gifts simply reflected Holland's emergence as a powerful force in the region. However, their scale suggests that the city government were hoping to establish him as their 'good lord', as does the fact that they sought him out at times when he was not in the city. One likely possibility is that they believed Holland would be a suitable ally in any attempt to strike at the Courtenay interests which threatened the city. It was almost certainly in the late-1390s that an inquisition was held concerning the weirs across the Exe above Topsham.¹³⁰ Only torn fragments and a later copy of this inquisition survive, and these omit the regnal year, but internal evidence dates it to 1394-9.¹³¹ The city receiver's account for 1397-8 records a payment to William Morhay, the city's attorney, concerning weirs, making the most likely date either 1397 or 1398, precisely the period when Exeter was most heavily investing in

¹²⁶ This is increasingly evident after the death of the earl's retainer, Robert Wilford, in 1395.

¹²⁷ The £42 was apparently paid by one Exeter citizen, Adam Scut, and then repaid by the city by instalments: it is unclear exactly when it was received by Huntingdon. DHC, ECA, CRA 1395-6, 1396-7, 1398-9. For smaller gifts of wine, see every account between 1392-3 and 1398-9.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1396-7 and 1398-9.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, for the 1390s.

¹³⁰ DHC, ECA, Book 51, ff. 47-8; Miscellaneous Roll #3, mm. 11-13.

¹³¹ Jackson, 'Medieval Exeter', p. 79 n. 84.

Holland's friendship.¹³² The choice of Morhay is also suggestive, as he had links to a member of Holland's affinity: in 1387-8, he was an officer of John Aston, the escheator that year.¹³³ Aston was a local lawyer and administrator, but one of his few known noble contacts was with Holland.¹³⁴ Unfortunately, the copies of this inquisition are incomplete and do not record the judgment. However, as the weirs remained a problem for over 150 years afterwards, we must conclude that either the Courtenays were victorious, or that their return to favour after Henry IV's usurpation allowed them to ignore an unfavourable verdict.

The city's next opportunity came when the earldom was left in the hands of a minor from 1422 until 1433. Again, the targets were the Exe weirs, but another reminder of how the earldom's interests competed with the city's may have proven a further spur to action. This was a dispute which arose over the Lammas fair just prior to Earl Hugh (III)'s death in 1422: the details are unknown, but the matter seems to have been settled over a pair of breakfasts attended by the earl's council and the city's representatives.¹³⁵ Some gifts of wine were also given to Sir Hugh Luttrell, a substantial figure from Somerset and very close associate of the Courtenays, suggesting that the corporation believed his favour would be particularly beneficial.¹³⁶ However, it also suggests that this engagement was mostly a defensive measure, perhaps to resolve a point of contention peacefully and without incurring damage to the city: a man with Luttrell's links to the earl (including receiving the earl's licence to adopt Courtenay arms, on account of Luttrell's own familial ties to the Courtenays) was very unlikely to support any attack on Courtenay interests.¹³⁷ Much the same could be said for some of the

¹³² The account roll is damaged and reads as following: 'It[em] William Morhay ad [2 words illegible] de gurgitib[us]'. The first of the two missing words is almost completely destroyed while the second could conceivably be 'vered[i]c[tu]m', as Jackson suggests. *Ibid.*, p. 79 note 85. DHC, ECA, CRA 1397-8.

¹³³ Morhay and Aston were presented for unjustly disseising the parson of Shobrooke of land in West Raddon, but pleaded that Aston's actions were as the king's escheator. TNA, JUST 1/1502, rr. 110-110d.

¹³⁴ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 79-80. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', p. 160.

¹³⁵ DHC, ECA, CRA 1421-2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* For Luttrell, *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 655-60; Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 215-16.

¹³⁷ For this licence, *ibid.*, p. 216.

city's salaried lawyers, including John Selman (a feudal tenant, trustee and feoffee of the Courtenays, and five times MP for their borough of Plympton Earl) and John (II) Copleston (whose father had been the earl's steward and who himself was soon to be closely engaged in the earldom's minority administration).¹³⁸

Shortly after this incident, the earl died, leaving an eight year-old heir in the custody of his mother and her brother, John, lord Talbot.¹³⁹ Evidently, the corporation believed that this weakened the earldom and gave them a chance to try to regain some of the city's lost rights, as within three years a royal commission was appointed to investigate the destruction of fish on the river Exe by 'diverse structures newly erected'.¹⁴⁰ The city's accounts for 1424-5, meanwhile, record numerous payments to the city's legal counsel, and for breakfasts at which city representatives discussed the Exe with the dowager's council.¹⁴¹ Four pence was paid to an old man to describe how the river used to flow, perhaps to the commissioners or to the countess's council.¹⁴² From the timing, it seems likely that the royal commission brought the countess to the negotiation table, but how had the corporation secured it?

The city accounts record two aristocratic connections which might have assisted them. The first was Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, the protector of England in 1422-29. The occasion for this contact seems to have been that Gloucester was somewhere close to Exeter in 1422-3. There is no record of the corporation providing a gift to the duke, which suggests that he did not visit the city, but the citizens did pay for a man to locate him.¹⁴³ The citizens also

¹³⁸ For Copleston, *ibid.*, p. 376 and *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 651-3 (Cherry mistakenly cites *CCR 1422-9*, p. 39 as indicating that Copleston himself was steward in 1421, when the *CCR* actually refers to John Fortescue). For Selman, *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, p. 335.

¹³⁹ Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', p. 218. *CFR 1422-30*, p. 58.

¹⁴⁰ *CPR 1422-9*, p. 278.

¹⁴¹ DHC, ECA, CRA 1424-5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1422-3.

prepared their recorder to meet the duke, providing him with 15s 6d worth of red and black cloth: as these are the city's colours, this was presumably for the recorder's livery.¹⁴⁴ The mayor and his fellows also dined with the recorder at this time, presumably in connection with Gloucester.¹⁴⁵ After this, nothing more is recorded concerning the duke until the next city accounting year, Michaelmas 1423-4, when half a mark was paid to his messenger, who brought letters to the city.¹⁴⁶ Just as the purpose of the previous year's contact is unknown, so too is the content of these letters. However, these are the only contacts between Exeter and Gloucester until 1437-8, when 40s was offered to him and money was also given to some of his officers.¹⁴⁷ This was a far more typical example of the courtesy offered by cities to passing aristocrats, whose status required a token of respect but with whom the city government did not expect to form any meaningful relationship. By contrast, outfitting the recorder with livery and later receiving letters suggests that the corporation sought some specific support from the duke: one definite possibility is that they sought his advice or assistance concerning the river Exe. The choice of the recorder suggests a legal matter, and Gloucester was certainly in a position to procure something like the 1425 royal commission.

Although plausible, there are objections to this reading, notably the significant delay between Gloucester's letters (sometime between Michaelmas 1423 and the same feast in 1424) and the issuing of the commission in February 1425. In addition, Gloucester was campaigning in the Low Countries between October 1424 and March 1425.¹⁴⁸ As such, it is unlikely that he was behind this commission, but it is certainly possible that the corporation sought his advice or support for a petition for redress which was probably written in 1422-4. This petition,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 1423-4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 1437-8.

¹⁴⁸ G.L. Harriss, 'Humphrey, duke of Gloucester (1390-1447)', *ODNB*.

which sets out a list of the city's grievances against the Courtenays, is undated, but is in English, of a fifteenth-century hand and was written in the first or second year of a king who had succeeded his father.¹⁴⁹ Of the royal candidates, Henry VI is the most convincing given these points and the contemporary evidence in the city archives (there is no sign of any such action in 1413-15, and there were no Courtenays to attack in 1483). The support of the king's uncle for such a petition would have been beneficial at any time, but 1422-4 was a period when Gloucester was particularly active and influential in national government.¹⁵⁰ Again, this connection is based on coincidence, but the city government certainly sought something from Gloucester in this period, and the most likely object was his support against the Courtenays.

How, then, did the corporation acquire the 1425 commission? Another possibility is that they sought the support of the lord admiral (Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter) through his deputy, the Cornish knight Sir John (II) Herle. In 1423-4, the citizens were summoned before the admiralty court, apparently concerning the 'passagium' at Exmouth: the definitions of 'passagium' are unhelpfully varied, so the exact issue is unclear.¹⁵¹ However, as part of the corporation's efforts to defend themselves, they sought the favour of Herle, who had previously served with the admiral in France and who was perhaps already his deputy.¹⁵² However, the case before the admiralty court was heard during the city account year for 1423-4, and yet Herle continued to receive gifts of wine until he passed through the city on his way to the 1425 parliament, presumably in late April, or during the prorogation in late

¹⁴⁹ DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Roll #3, m. 17. The petition refers to a proclamation ordered by the king's father in the 'last yere save on'.

¹⁵⁰ Harriss, 'Humphrey, duke of Gloucester'.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. For 'passagium', Latham, *Medieval Latin Wordlist*, p. 335. In this period, 'Exmouth' was used interchangeably for Topsham, Exmouth and generally for the Exe Estuary. Jackson, 'Medieval Exeter', p. 77 note 26; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, p. 224.

¹⁵² *44th Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1883), p. 602. Herle was certainly deputy the following year (1424-5) when he is recorded as such in the receiver's account.

May.¹⁵³ After this date, Herle does not feature in the city records again until 1433-4, while his predecessors and successors as deputy admiral very rarely received such gifts.¹⁵⁴ This implies that the corporation expected some particular benefit from Herle, and again this may have been related to the Courtenay weirs. Although Exeter was not a military port (Dartmouth provided many more vessels to the crown, while Plymouth was the preferred location for military embarkation), its own vessels were still of importance to the English navy and its wider prosperity helped underpin the merchant fleets of other ports in Devon.¹⁵⁵ As such, the admiral (or his deputy) made a natural ally if the city government could convince him that the weirs were hampering Exeter's trade, and thus the city's contribution to the war effort.¹⁵⁶ It is worth noting that the corporation turned to Herle, rather than to Beaufort directly: this is of interest regardless of whether the admiralty had some role in the 1425 commission. In many respects, Herle offered all of the advantages of Beaufort but without many of the drawbacks. Firstly, Herle was (based on his appointment as deputy) a trusted associate of Beaufort's and thus his opinions or requests would probably have been received more favourably by the duke than those of an unfamiliar representative of a provincial city. Secondly, gaining Herle's favour was almost certainly cheaper: not only did his lower rank mean that extravagant gifts of wine or coin were unnecessary, but he was personally present in the region. Despite the south-western claims implicit in his titles (earl of Dorset and duke of Exeter), Beaufort had little connection with the south-west, and courting his favour would thus have incurred significant travelling expenses.

¹⁵³ DHC, ECA, CRA 1424-5. *RP*, iv, pp. 261, 275.

¹⁵⁴ DHC, ECA, CRA 1433-4.

¹⁵⁵ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 28-33.

¹⁵⁶ For the wider context of towns providing military, and particularly naval, support to the English crown, see Liddy, *War, Politics and Finance*, pp. 19-20, 43-57. Attreed, *King's Towns*, chapter 6. The commissioners were, of course, ordered to investigate damage to fish, rather than shipping. However, whoever acquired this commission was probably aware that the statutes containing provisions relating to weirs (such as the second statute of Westminster) were particularly concerned with their impact on fish. Liddy, *War, Politics and Finance*, pp. 162-3.

Regardless of who helped acquire the 1425 commission, it did not result in a victory for the city. This was probably inevitable: the Courtenays' legal position as lords of both banks of the Exe was too strong to challenge, as were their claims to the Lammas fair and the manor of Exe Island. However, the local influence of the affinity left by Earl Hugh (III) should also be noted. The commission appointed in 1425 cannot have been sought out by anyone other than an enemy of the Courtenays, and yet its make-up necessarily reflected the political balance of the shire, which was weighted heavily in the Courtenays' favour until later in the 1420s.¹⁵⁷ The commission was led by the late earl's uncle (Sir Hugh Courtenay of Haccombe) and included Sir Hugh Luttrell (as mentioned above, a retainer of the late earl and himself the grandson of a Courtenay) and Sir Ralph Botreaux (the second husband of the dowager countess): these were men who were hardly likely to favour the city's interests over the earldom's, but the balance of power in the county left little alternative. Had this commission been issued ten or fifteen years later, when the county was dividing into opposing factions, then the situation may have been different.¹⁵⁸ However, by that date there was an adult earl, and this seems to have deterred the corporation from launching a further attempt to have the weirs removed.

At least one more attempt was made by Exeter's government to drive back the Courtenays' grip over the city, when they submitted another petition to the crown seeking redress.¹⁵⁹ The date of this petition is unknown, but as it refers to the earldom's estates being in the hands of the crown, it is probably from the reign of Edward IV, when this occurred three times.¹⁶⁰ The city records provide no clue to a more accurate date: without any further information,

¹⁵⁷ Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 211-21.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-57.

¹⁵⁹ DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Roll #3, m. 7.

¹⁶⁰ In 1461 (after the death and attainder of Thomas (II) Courtenay), 1469-71 (after the lynching of Lord Stafford of Southwick and the brief return of the Courtenays during the Readeption) and 1478 (after the attainder of the duke of Clarence).

this tells us little except that the corporation understandably saw the confiscation of the earldom's estates as an opportunity, and that they chose to proceed by petitioning the crown. A further document in the city archives (a list of articles of complaint against the Courtenays, apparently in draft form) can be tentatively dated from the palaeography to the reign of Henry VII.¹⁶¹ Nothing more is known of this document, but in light of the pattern shown above (whereby the city pursued this matter at times of Courtenay weakness) it is tempting to date it to c.1502, when the heir to the earldom was imprisoned for treasonous associations with Edmund de la Pole, earl of Suffolk.¹⁶²

This case study provides a number of important insights. Firstly, it suggests that town governments noticed political shifts in local landed society: Exeter identified when the Courtenays were weak, and chose those moments to go on the offensive. Secondly, as with Norwich's decision to replace Sir Thomas Erpingham with Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, the corporation were not afraid of 'trading up' when a new figure emerged who they viewed as a (potentially) superior ally: an established connection with Edward Courtenay did not prevent them replacing him with John Holland.¹⁶³ Similarly, when a contact proved unable to help, the corporation wasted no time in cutting ties: towns may have considered long-term connections to be the ideal, but they did not place loyalty above efficacy. A third, related point is that aristocratic sponsors needed both local authority and national influence to assist towns. Like the magnates discussed in the previous section, Holland possessed both, with his ascendancy in London acting as a significant buttress to his local possessions. The commission of 1425, however, demonstrates that aristocrats needed this local authority even if they possessed significant influence nationally: regardless of who was responsible for this

¹⁶¹ DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Roll #92.

¹⁶² S.J. Gunn, 'Courtenay, Edward, first earl of Devon (d. 1509), magnate', *ODNB*.

¹⁶³ Above, pp. 222-5.

commission, it failed because the commissioners had to be drawn from a local political society which strongly favoured the Courtenays.

III (b) – Exeter and Religious Institutions, 1430-48

As well as the Courtenays, Exeter co-existed uneasily with three liberties belonging to religious institutions: St. Stephen's fee (the bishop), St. Sidwell's fee (the cathedral chapter), and St. Nicholas's fee (St. Nicholas Priory, a Benedictine house in the city). These liberties were poorly defined, both in their geographical extent and the rights which their holders possessed. St. Stephen's fee, for instance, contained all property in the city owned by the bishop, regardless of location, creating pockets scattered around Exeter where, for example, the city's officers did not have the right to make arrests under the assizes of bread and ale.¹⁶⁴ St. Sidwell's was more geographically concentrated, but various rights within the fee were repeatedly contested between the citizens and the chapter.¹⁶⁵ An agreement dating to the late thirteenth century recorded the rights of each side, but, as Muriel Curtis notes, its complicated provisions on various matters (especially the appointment of a shared bailiff and the requirement that the chapter inform the citizens of courts held in the fee) could only work in a situation of friendly co-operation.¹⁶⁶ The friction between the city and the prior of St. Nicholas is less well-documented than the others, but almost certainly centred on similar issues (notably the right to distrain, and to enforce the assizes of bread and ale).¹⁶⁷ As with similar situations of competing liberties in other towns, this was a recipe for a near-constant stream of minor disputes.¹⁶⁸ In general, these were resolved quickly, with the city's legal

¹⁶⁴ Curtis, *Some Disputes*, pp. 14-17.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶⁷ These are contained in the Replication made by the prior to unknown articles of complaint submitted by the mayor, c.1501. DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Roll #50, m. 2.

¹⁶⁸ For the wider context of urban-ecclesiastical disputes, see H. Carrel, 'Disputing Legal Privilege: Civic Relations with the Church in late Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009), pp. 279-96.

counsel examining the city's evidences and negotiating with the opposing party.¹⁶⁹ Sometimes a love-day was arranged between the mayor and the religious institution in question.¹⁷⁰ On two occasions, however, these incidents evolved into serious confrontations: with the dean and chapter in 1434-6 and with the bishop in 1445-8. In both cases, aristocrats were called upon to support the city or to mediate the dispute.

The dispute between the city and the cathedral chapter was an escalation of an almost-permanent conflict between the two over the preceding decade. In both 1428-9 and 1429-30, agreements had been drawn up by local lawyers (John Copleston and John Boeff respectively), while in 1430-1 Copleston and two other lawyers, Nicholas Radford and John Mulys, were appointed to arbitrate.¹⁷¹ In late 1432 or early 1433, a love-day was held under Copleston's supervision at which yet another composition was drawn up, but by the summer of 1433 the corporation's representatives were in London, again engaged in the 'defence of our liberties' against the chapter.¹⁷² In May 1434, however, the dean sued out a commission of *oyer et terminer*, after the citizens allegedly broke the chapter's pound in St. Sidwell's fee, assaulted their steward and imprisoned a juryman.¹⁷³ Among the commissioners appointed were substantial local gentlemen (Sir William Bonville, Sir Philip Courtenay¹⁷⁴ and Sir John Dynham), local lawyers (John Mulys, Henry Fortescue and John Boeff) and four judges (Sir John Juyn, John Hals, William Westbury and John Cottesmore).¹⁷⁵ Whether this commission ever sat is unclear, as the matter instead appears to have been brought before the assizes, albeit without conclusion.¹⁷⁶ The landed aristocrats were not bystanders, however: in July,

¹⁶⁹ E.g. DHC, ECA, CRA 1408-9, 1409-10, 1412-13, 1415-16, 1496-7.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. *ibid.*, 1378-9, 1403-4, 1409-10, 1416-17.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1428-9, 1429-30, 1430-1.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 1431-2.

¹⁷³ *CPR 1429-36*, pp. 358-9.

¹⁷⁴ This Courtenay was the leader of a cadet branch which became increasingly hostile to the interests of the earldom in this period. Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 95-7.

¹⁷⁵ *CPR 1429-36*, pp. 358-9.

¹⁷⁶ Curtis, *Some Disputes*, pp. 21-2.

Bonville and Courtenay were twice provided with bread and wine in the cathedral chapter house, where they were present ‘pro concordia facienda’.¹⁷⁷ The corporation sought out Bonville shortly afterwards at his home manor of Shute, although he himself was absent.¹⁷⁸ In addition, they paid Courtenay’s minstrel John Trumpet to find the mayor, presumably for discussions with his master.¹⁷⁹ However, the matter was soon returned to arbitration by lawyers, with the citizens agreeing to obey the award of John Copleston in October 1436.¹⁸⁰ It was probably this arbitration which led to a parliamentary petition by the chapter, requesting royal confirmation of the boundaries of St. Sidwell’s fee and the rights held by each party within the liberty.¹⁸¹ This marked a return to the *status quo ante* and thus the complete defeat of the city’s claims, but it is likely that it was only accepted by the citizens because of Copleston’s arbitration, as it is otherwise difficult to explain why the chapter did not appeal for royal and parliamentary intervention earlier.

The later dispute between the city and the bishop also saw the involvement of lawyers and landed aristocrats, but is particularly interesting because of how the parties’ responses to aristocratic intervention changed over the course of the confrontation. Again, the crisis of 1445-8 was an escalation of friction over preceding years, when the city’s legal counsel had been repeatedly employed to ‘pacify’ the matters between the city and the bishop.¹⁸² However, in November 1445 Bishop Edmund Lacy acquired a royal charter specifying his rights in St. Stephen’s fee and these were confirmed by letters patent in the following July, which justified the grant by alleging that city officers had disrupted divine service.¹⁸³ The

¹⁷⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA 1433-4.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Exeter Cathedral Archive, Chapter MS 2312.

¹⁸¹ *CPR 1461-7*, pp. 146-7. This is a confirmation of the petition by Edward IV: the original is lost.

¹⁸² DHC, ECA, CRA 1443-4 and 1444-5. Quotation from 1443-4.

¹⁸³ *CCbR 1427-1516*, p. 60. Exeter Cathedral Archive, Chapter MS 2333. The rights granted in these are discussed in Curtis, *Some Disputes*, pp. 25-7.

royal grants did not, however, end the matter, for at some point before July 1447 the bishop acquired a privy seal writ, ordering that the dispute be referred to the arbitration of the Lord Chancellor (John Stafford, archbishop of Canterbury) and the chief justices.¹⁸⁴ The corporation evidently considered this to be contrary to the city's interests, as they petitioned both the chancellor and the king (the latter in very strong terms, accusing Henry VI of acting contrary to Magna Carta) to be allowed to proceed instead at common law.¹⁸⁵ However, the events that followed suggest that it was the bishop's party whose case was damaged by the arbitration, as it was Lacy who instead turned to the courts in early 1448.¹⁸⁶

In stark contrast to their demands the previous year to be allowed to seek a judgment at common law, the city government now petitioned the chancellor to persuade the bishop to withdraw his suit and return to the arbitration.¹⁸⁷ Evidently they now considered the arbitration to be a better solution: perhaps their confidence in their legal case had been shaken, or perhaps they believed they had found a sympathetic judge in Archbishop Stafford. Certainly, the mayor, John Shillingford, seems to have impressed the chancellor, both through gifts of fish and through his own character: when the bishop's party included personal attacks against Shillingford in their submissions to the arbitration, the chancellor 'rased [i.e. erased] hit as hit pleased hym wt his owne handys'.¹⁸⁸ Stafford does seem to have persuaded the bishop to delay his legal action, as it was postponed in Easter, Trinity and Michaelmas terms in 1448, but his arbitration itself stalled, and instead direct negotiations took place directly between the parties in Exeter and at the bishop's residence at Crediton.¹⁸⁹ Eventually, however, the corporation seem to have decided that outside arbitration was

¹⁸⁴ *Shillingford Letters*, p. 133.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3, 133-5.

¹⁸⁶ Curtis, *Some Disputes*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁷ *Shillingford Letters*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-70.

necessary, and that local landed aristocrats were the appropriate men. As such they appealed to one of the chief justices, Richard Newton, at the assizes in the summer of 1448, requesting that he decide the matter alongside Sir William Bonville and Sir Philip Courtenay.¹⁹⁰ The corporation also petitioned these two men and the earl of Devon ‘to procede and make an ende as lawe, right, reson and conscience requyreth’.¹⁹¹ The involvement of landed aristocrats did, in fact, bring the matter to a close. The terms, however, effectively enforced the *status quo ante*: the only concessions to the city were the agreement to cancel the 1445 charter granted to the bishop and that, although the bishop should gain a judgment in his case at common law, he should remit any damages.¹⁹²

This award was said to be made by ‘mene and mediation’ of the earl of Devon and Sir William Bonville, but Exeter’s records suggest that the earl probably favoured the bishop’s party, while Bonville backed the city.¹⁹³ Originally, it would appear that mediation was entrusted to the earl alone. Payments had been made by the corporation for men to ride to Tiverton (the earl’s main residence) throughout the period 1445-8, and these became particularly frequent from March 1448 onwards, when the city and bishop were engaged in direct negotiations.¹⁹⁴ On at least one occasion the earl attended or even hosted a love-day: although not specified, it is extremely likely that this was related to the dispute between Exeter and the bishop.¹⁹⁵ Bonville, by contrast, was not explicitly sought out by the city government until 1448 (although he had previously received small gifts of wine): men were sent to his residence at Shute, while both he and his ally Sir Philip Courtenay received significant payments for their

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 70-1.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 71-2.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 136-40. Curtis, *Some Disputes*, pp. 41-2.

¹⁹³ *Shillingford Letters*, p. 136.

¹⁹⁴ DHC, ECA, CRA 1445-6, 1446-7, 1447-8.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., for 1447-8.

expenses in Exeter during the negotiations between city and bishop in that year.¹⁹⁶ However, when Bonville and the earl produced their award in December 1448, it was to Bonville alone that the corporation showed gratitude: he received over £5 as a reward and for expenses incurred during ‘his great labours’.¹⁹⁷ The earl, by contrast, received nothing at all. There are several explanations for the corporation’s failure to reward him, the most likely of which is that they had come to believe that he favoured the bishop’s party, something which is also suggested by his omission from the corporation’s petition to Richard Newton earlier in the year. As such, it seems likely that the city turned to Bonville in the hope that he might act as a counterweight. This is interesting on a number of levels, particularly the fact that when faced with arbitration by a landed aristocrat who was believed to favour the other party, the corporation responded by introducing another landed aristocrat. In the circumstances, Bonville was the natural choice, given that he was the only active Devon figure with comparable power to the earl. We should also note, however, that Bonville was willing to become involved in urban affairs at a time when he was locked in a bitter struggle with the earl for dominance in the county. Helping Exeter’s government against the bishop might therefore appear to have been a distraction for Bonville, but we should consider the possibility that arbitrating between two significant members of local political (if not landed) society might have been a way to demonstrate his authority in the region and, conversely, that allowing the earl alone to produce an award might have damaged Bonville’s claims.

What can be taken from these two examples? Perhaps the most significant, if obvious, point is that aristocratic mediation was an important part of both of these confrontations. While lawyers were entrusted with the responsibility of handling the frequent minor incidents of friction, landed aristocrats became involved as mediators on both occasions when a more

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, for 1447-8. Sir Philip Courtenay received 31s 5d at the same time for his expenses in the same matter.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, for 1447-8.

intractable dispute arose. This was a recognition of the fact that although these confrontations were of a legal nature, the underlying issues were too complex to be comprehended by the binary outcomes of a legal case. Of course, the employment of arbitrators to find a ‘middle way’ is a common feature of late-medieval society, but it is important to note that it was to lawyers and then to landed aristocrats that Exeter turned for mediation.¹⁹⁸ This indicates that landed aristocrats were thought to have the authority to enforce the acceptance of an award by both a city and a substantial ecclesiastical figure. It is intriguing that the parliamentary petition of 1436 was thought necessary to buttress the award of John Copleston, whereas the arbitration of 1448 stood by itself. Copleston was a significant local lawyer, but perhaps his authority was considered insufficient to render his award secure. The involvement of magnates like Bonville in these arbitrations also suggests that they were expected to have the knowledge required to understand a dispute between a town and a religious institution, and to propose a workable solution which took account of the various technical issues in contention. Even if this knowledge was in practice only possessed by their advisors, it still implies that magnates were able to contribute to politics in spheres other than county and national affairs.

III (c) - Norwich, the Cathedral Priory and the Earl of Suffolk, 1426-31

The years between 1426 and 1431 were the prelude to the famous period when Norwich twice lost its liberties between 1437 and 1447. This later period is discussed elsewhere, but the earlier years also deserve consideration, as they allow us to examine the actions of a city threatened soon after it had lost its established magnate allies, Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, and Sir Thomas Erpingham.¹⁹⁹ The threat in question was the city’s dispute with the

¹⁹⁸ See e.g. E. Powell, ‘Settlement of Disputes by Arbitration in Fifteenth-Century England’, *Law and History Review*, 2 (1984), pp. 21-43.

¹⁹⁹ Above, pp. 201-4, 219-20.

cathedral priory: the prior claimed ancient rights within certain parts of the city, which the corporation believed had been erased by the city's charter of 1404, which granted all of the city and its suburbs to the citizens.²⁰⁰ This inconsistency does not seem to have led to open conflict until 1426, when the corporation appointed six leading citizens to treat with the prior.²⁰¹ It is difficult to explain this timing, but perhaps the priory began taking a stricter line (possibly as a result of new monks taking on the responsibilities of the aging prior, who was to die the following year).²⁰² The critical task for the city government was to quash an inquisition held in 1417 by the escheator, Edmund Oldhall, during which a jury had testified that the city's suburbs were part of the county of Norfolk, rather than Norwich.²⁰³ This verdict destroyed the city's claim to exercise jurisdiction in its suburbs, and indeed the inquisition found that the city's officers had acted illegally in doing so. However, Oldhall died soon after the inquisition, at a time when he was intestate and his heir was abroad.²⁰⁴ To complicate matters further, the administrator appointed by the probate court, William Shelton, attempted to seize control of Oldhall's possessions through deception, and then himself died in 1421.²⁰⁵ What happened to the inquisition records in the interim is unknown, but in 1428 the crown issued a writ demanding the return of all documents concerned with Oldhall's verdict.²⁰⁶ This was almost certainly initiated by the priory, and was precisely the outcome the corporation sought to avoid.

However, the timing of this conflict made it difficult for the city government to acquire magnate support to arbitrate the dispute or to intercede, on account of the death of Beaufort

²⁰⁰ *CPR 1434-41*, p. 552-3. *RCN*, i, pp. lxxix-lxxxviii. Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 177-83. For the charter, *CCbR 1341-1417*, p. 421.

²⁰¹ NRO, NCA, Case 8d, Assembly Roll 1425-6.

²⁰² Blomefield, iii, p. 603.

²⁰³ *RCN*, i, pp. 320-4.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, i, p. 324. *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 870-2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 870-2; iv, p. 356.

²⁰⁶ NRO, NCR, Case 17b, 'Liber Placitorum', f. 30d

in 1426 and the near-simultaneous retirement of Sir Thomas Erpingham from active political life.²⁰⁷ In previous years, these men had been repeatedly called upon to assist the city, but there was a significant delay between their departure and the emergence of a figure who could replace them, both as leader of the crown-Duchy network and as Norwich's aristocratic contact.²⁰⁸ Without an obvious magnate to turn to, the corporation instead spent the years between 1426 and 1430 diversifying their contacts with the nobility and gentry, in an apparently fruitless search for effective lordship. The men they turned to can be divided into three groups: national figures with little connection to Norfolk (the duke of Gloucester, Lord Cromwell),²⁰⁹ men with only marginal interests in the county, or whose local influence was limited by other factors (the earl of Oxford,²¹⁰ Lord FitzWalter,²¹¹ Lord Willoughby of Eresby²¹²); and junior members of the leaderless crown-Duchy network (Sir Henry Inglose, Oliver Groos).²¹³

This list is strikingly long, and also lacks the coherence of the city's previous strategy of working almost exclusively with members of the crown-Duchy network: removed from the Norwich context, this list is an almost arbitrary collection of English aristocrats, few of whom

²⁰⁷ Castor, *Duchy*, p. 80. Erpingham lived until 1428, but seems to have become far less active after the death of Henry V. Although he remained a JP until his death (his last appointment being in 1424), he received no commissions from the crown after 1423. *CPR 1422-9*, pp. 90, 566.

²⁰⁸ Above, pp. 201-4, 219-20.

²⁰⁹ For Gloucester: NRO, NCR, Case 7d, 'View of the account of the Treasurers of Norwich, 1429-30', m. 2. For Cromwell: *ibid.* and Case 7d, Account Roll 1429-30. Cromwell did hold estates in nearby counties and served on local commissions in Norfolk (including as a JP) from 1424 into the 1440s but there is no evidence of him developing substantial connections with the political society in Norfolk. *CPR 1422-9*, p. 566; *1429-36*, p. 621; *1436-41*, p. 586; *1441-6*, p. 474.

²¹⁰ CAB, f. 154d. Oxford was a young man who would only establish himself in the following decade (and even then his authority in Norfolk was limited by his lack of property in the county). H. Castor, 'Vere, John de, twelfth earl of Oxford (1408-1462)', *ODNB*.

²¹¹ CAB, f. 154d. The FitzWalter lands were mostly outside of Norfolk (mainly in Essex) and the baron in this period was a rather anonymous figure. C. Starr, 'Fitzwalter family (per. c.1200-c.1500)', *ODNB*.

²¹² CAB, f. 169. Although marriages in previous generations had brought them a number of Norfolk and East Anglian properties, the Willoughby barons of Eresby remained a mainly Lincolnshire-centric family: Lord Robert had served on the Norfolk peace commission in the 1410s, but this did not continue into the 1420s. M. Hicks, 'Willoughby family (per. c.1300-1523)', *ODNB*. *CPR 1413-16*, p. 421; *1416-22*, p. 456.

²¹³ NRO, NCR, Case 7d, Account Roll 1429-30; CAB, ff. 147, 154d.

had any links to one another. None of these connections developed into a sustained relationship: indeed, most did not extend beyond a single interaction. The duke of Gloucester, for instance, visited the city in 1426 and was greeted at staggering expense, including a gift of £40, a further gift of £8 in a gold and silver cup and a reward of ten marks.²¹⁴ A further £2 was expended on worsted cloth as a gift to Sir William Babington, chief justice of the common pleas, for his ‘good words’ at the sessions he held in the guildhall before the duke.²¹⁵ This level of expense was normally reserved for a royal visit (by comparison, the duke of Bedford received a gold cup with £2 in it in 1418-19), but its inclusion in an account specifically recording expenditure against the priory makes it clear that the citizens sought the duke’s favour in that matter. However, Gloucester is never mentioned again, indicating that his assistance was ineffective: if he had successfully aided the corporation, they would surely have sought his aid again, given that the priory conflict continued until 1429.

Although on a smaller scale, the city’s contacts with most of the other aristocrats listed above was of a similar character. Lord FitzWalter received 12s of wine in 1424-5 and a further 16s worth in 1425-6, but is never mentioned again in the city accounts.²¹⁶ In 1425-6, the earl of Oxford received a similar gift of wine, but is then absent from the city records until 1431-2.²¹⁷ Lord Willoughby of Eresby was present in the city in 1428-9, when the corporation paid 14s for his stay at the ‘Prince’s Inn’. This was also probably the time that they approached him concerning letters they were sending to William Oldhall, son of Edmund, presumably concerning the documents associated with his father’s inquisition.²¹⁸ As with the duke of Gloucester, these cases appear to represent the corporation grasping the opportunity

²¹⁴ NRO, NCR, Case 7d, ‘View of the Treasurers of Norwich, 1429-30’, m. 2.

²¹⁵ NRO, NCR, Case 7d, Account Roll 1426-7.

²¹⁶ CAB, ff. 147, 154d.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 154d, 182d.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 169; NRO, NCR, Case 7d, ‘View of the Treasurers of Norwich, 1429-30’, m. 3d.

presented by visiting noblemen but, in each case, no prolonged relationship developed, probably because the lords were unable or unwilling to help. The same conclusion probably applies to the gift of £15 given to the new bishop, William Alnwick, on his arrival in the city in 1426: again, this is recorded in an account concerning the priory dispute, but there is no indication that the city government turned to Alnwick again, suggesting he was unwilling to support them against his own cathedral.²¹⁹

The only aristocratic connection which was sustained by the corporation was, tellingly, with the only one of these men who lived locally and possessed substantial authority within the county: the duke of Norfolk. In 1427-8, the city government staged a torch-lit entry for the duke and presented him with a pipe of wine and 23s 4d of oats, while the following year he received hospitality worth over £8 while on pilgrimage.²²⁰ In addition, the corporation retained the duke's esquire, William Thornham, in 1428-9 and 1430-1 and also gave rewards to Thornham, Edmund Wynter (a lawyer associated with the duke, as well as the crown-Duchy network), and twice to the duke's confessor for presenting the city's case to the duke, on one occasion specifically concerning the 'traversing' of the 1417 inquisition.²²¹ When the corporation sought out Lord Willoughby concerning the letters to be sent to William Oldhall, they also approached the duke, perhaps in the hope that he would endorse their request.²²² It is notable that this longer, more sustained relationship was established with a man who was himself a local figure and, perhaps equally importantly, who possessed a local affinity. However, subsequent events suggest that the corporation nonetheless believed that Norfolk was ultimately not an ideal replacement for Erpingham or Beaufort.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, m. 3.

²²⁰ NRO, NCR, Case 7d, Account Rolls 1427-8, 1428-9.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, Account Rolls 1428-9, 1430-1. 'View of the Treasurers of Norwich', mm. 2d, 3d. For Wynter and the duke, *HoP 1436-1421*, iv, p. 928.

²²² NRO, NCR, Case 7d, 'View of the Treasurers of Norwich', m. 3d.

In December 1429, the mayor and prior sealed an indenture by which the citizens acknowledged the prior's rights in the city and the suburbs, including the humiliating provision that they should pay the prior 4s per annum for grazing rights, effectively making the city the priory's tenant.²²³ However, although the dispute with the priory was settled (at least publicly: as discussed below, this indenture caused much discontent in the city), the city government almost immediately found itself embroiled in a confrontation with another religious institution, the abbey of St. Benet's at Hulme.²²⁴ The abbot claimed that mills rebuilt by the citizens in 1430 caused flooding in his manor of Heigham (immediately upstream from the city) and that they obstructed boats travelling between the manor and the abbey.²²⁵ As with the previous dispute, the corporation sought aristocratic support, but rather than turning to the duke of Norfolk, they concentrated their efforts on gaining the favour of William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk, and his nascent affinity in the region. Returning to England after fifteen years in France, de la Pole was almost immediately appointed to the bench in Norfolk in November 1430, around the same time as he married Alice, heiress of Thomas Chaucer, the king's butler and a close ally of Cardinal Beaufort.²²⁶ Although Suffolk was not appointed to the royal council until November 1431, these links to key figures in the minority government almost certainly marked him as a rising figure in national politics. In East Anglia, Suffolk's own estates were complemented by the way he very quickly became associated with the figures who had previously surrounded Thomas Beaufort.²²⁷ Within only a few years, he had assumed the leadership of political society which had last been exercised by Beaufort and Erpingham.²²⁸

²²³ Maddern, *Violence*, p. 183.

²²⁴ For the internal discontent, below, pp. 254-5.

²²⁵ Blomefield, iii, p. 147.

²²⁶ J.L. Watts, 'Pole, William de la, first duke of Suffolk (1396-1450)', *ODNB. CPR 1429-36*, p. 621.

²²⁷ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 86-7.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-93.

Although the Suffolk of 1430-1 was not the near-hegemonic figure he became in the late 1430s and 1440s, he was still an influential aristocrat and was quite obviously in the ascendant. The corporation were evidently aware of this, as they invested heavily in gaining his favour against St. Benet's. Intriguingly, the city government's first approach to Suffolk may well have been at the suggestion of the bishop of Norwich, William Alnwick. Alnwick's later close association with Suffolk had yet to develop, but Alnwick and Suffolk's father-in-law, Chaucer, were both involved in the minority administration: perhaps Alnwick was aware of the earl through this connection.²²⁹ Payment is recorded for a visit by two high-ranking city men to the bishop at his palace at Terling in the city accounts for Michaelmas 1430-1.²³⁰ This visit was recorded as being concerned with the dispute with St. Benet's and it was followed by a letter sent to the earl of Suffolk on the same matters: although it is of course impossible to prove, it seems plausible that the bishop directed them to seek Suffolk's good lordship in their struggle against the abbot.²³¹

Regardless, the later part of that city financial year saw a sustained effort to induce the earl and his affinity to take an interest in the dispute. Sir John Shardelowe, for instance, received two rewards totalling fifteen marks for his 'bona amicitia' in the case with the abbot.²³² This may have been because Shardelowe was sheriff of Norfolk at this point, but he had also become associated with Suffolk: in October 1430 he acted as a feoffee when Suffolk established a jointure for his new wife, while in February 1431 he acted as a mainpernor when the farm of the honour of Wormegay was granted to the earl.²³³ More conclusively, Thomas Hoo was recorded by the city chamberlains as Suffolk's esquire when he was

²²⁹ For Alnwick and Suffolk, see Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 136, 150.

²³⁰ CAB, f. 178d.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*, f. 179d.

²³³ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 86-7, 87n.

presented with two rewards of 40s, explicitly for his assistance against the abbot.²³⁴ Hoo had acted alongside Shardelowe in both of the above transactions, and by Michaelmas 1432 was also the earl's steward at his manor of Costessey, about a mile north-west of Norwich.²³⁵ The most impressive gift by far was to the new countess, who received forty marks 'ad habend' bonum dominium domini comitis Suffolk': these gifts were undoubtedly a concerted attempt to draw the earl's attention to the city.²³⁶ The earl's growing national influence and local authority, including his nascent leadership of the crown-Duchy affinity, made him an obvious figure to whom the corporation would appeal, especially after the drought of suitable men in the preceding years.²³⁷ Although we cannot tell whether Suffolk or his affinity actually assisted the city, they were certainly in a position to do so. We might also consider why the corporation abandoned their relationship with the duke of Norfolk. One factor was almost certainly his absence in France during the coronation expedition of 1430-2, but it also seems possible that the corporation saw Suffolk as a more suitable source of lordship, in both the long and short term.²³⁸ Even at this stage in his career, Suffolk was a much more active and influential figure in national politics than Norfolk, especially through his links to Chaucer. In this respect, he resembled figures such as Erpingham, Thomas Beaufort and John of Gaunt far more than did Norfolk, whose biographer describes his efforts in central government as being 'at best routine, at worst half-hearted'.²³⁹

However, this promising start to Norwich's relationship with Suffolk was not to be maintained: indeed, contact between the city and earl was quickly and decisively severed. The city government instead returned to some of the men they had approached in the late 1420s,

²³⁴ CAB, f. 179d.

²³⁵ Castor, *Duchy*, p. 87n.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 82-93.

²³⁸ Archer, 'Mowbray, John (V)'.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

sending letters to the duke of Norfolk and wine to the earl of Oxford in 1431-2, and bread and wine to Oxford's wife in 1432-3.²⁴⁰ What had suddenly removed Suffolk so completely from the corporation's plans in a period when his standing was markedly on the increase? The most likely possibility is also, unfortunately, the vaguest: that something had blackened the relationship between the city and the earl. Perhaps the earl had refused to assist the city the previous year, or indeed had actively aided St. Benet's, as he was to do again in the following decade.²⁴¹ Perhaps the earl had made unreasonable demands on the corporation in exchange for his help, possibly in an effort to firmly include the city within his growing sphere of local influence.²⁴² Regardless of the cause, Suffolk was not to follow the example of his predecessors, Erpingham and Beaufort, in combining the leadership of the crown-Duchy network with providing 'good lordship' to Norwich. Indeed, his later interventions in the city's affairs, discussed below, were to prove deeply damaging to the citizens.²⁴³

This case study once again reinforces a number of points which have emerged throughout this chapter. In particular, the actions of Norwich's government support the suggestion that city governments especially appreciated aristocratic contacts who combined influence in central government with authority in the locality. When they lost the support of such a figure, they tried to locate a replacement, but the lack of an obvious candidate led them to instead approach and then quickly discard men who lacked power either at the centre or in the county. In addition, the example of Suffolk suggests that corporations were sensitive to changes in the make-up of political society, and also that they were willing to abandon an

²⁴⁰ CAB, ff. 182d, 187d.

²⁴¹ Suffolk's award of 1442 bound the city to remove the disputed mills on the Wensum. Maddern, *Violence*, p. 195.

²⁴² This was something he and his affinity were accused of later, with allegations that they had tried to create mayors and sheriffs according to their will, wishing 'to have as well the rewle of the cite of Norwich as they hadden in the shir of Norffolk.' NRO, NCR, Case 9c, item 2. This probably dates to the proceedings against Suffolk's associates after his murder in 1450.

²⁴³ Below, pp. 283-9.

existing aristocratic contact if the opportunity to engage with a better individual presented itself. Furthermore, this period saw Norwich's government repeatedly take advantage of members of affinities as part of their strategy to induce magnates to act on their behalf, something which mirrors Exeter's approaches to Sir John Herle and Sir Hugh Luttrell.²⁴⁴

III (d) – Themes

This second section confirms many of the patterns from the earlier discussion of how aristocrats assisted towns in expanding their liberties. Once again, these examples suggest that good lordship was considered highly desirable by city governments, but also that they believed that it was most effectively provided by men who combined local authority with influence in national affairs. When such a man existed, the corporation directed their requests almost exclusively to him and his men. Only when the city lacked such a 'good lord' and no obvious replacements existed did the city government turn to men who lacked one or other quality. On these occasions, they preferred men with only national influence over those with only local authority: the duke of Gloucester is a prime example, but also illustrates the limitations of such men, as he seems to have failed to help both Exeter and Norwich. The 1425 commission concerning the Exeter weirs particularly demonstrates the importance of local authority, as the tools available to figures with power in the centre, such as royal commissions, were in practice entirely dependent on local men to discharge. In addition, both Exeter and Norwich were sensitive to any changes in county society which could affect them, including both the emergence of new magnates who could assist them, and also any signs of weakness from aristocrats whose interests conflicted with the city's.

Another theme which emerges from the examples above is that the assistance which town governments sought from magnates was of a similar type to that sought by landed gentlemen.

²⁴⁴ Above, pp. 225, 228-9.

As in county society, the support magnates could provide to towns generally took the form of arbitration, or of the deployment of the magnate's influence to direct the attention and processes of royal government. However, the examples in this section also demonstrate that aristocratic influence was sometimes not enough: strong legal cases (such as those possessed by the cities' opponents in the examples discussed above) could not necessarily be overcome through magnate pressure. Indeed, this was arguably a greater problem when magnates sought to settle cases involving towns or religious institutions than it was when they intervened in disputes between members of landed society. Unlike ecclesiastical figures, gentlemen depended on their connections in landed society for their status, notably through structures such as magnate affinities, and because they relied on institutions which were staffed by their peers to protect their landed interests. This made incurring a local magnate's 'heavy lordship' more dangerous for a gentleman than for a religious institution, meaning that magnates could not deploy the same pressure to force a bishop, prior or abbot to accept a distasteful compromise.

These same arbitrations nonetheless suggest that aristocrats were considered legitimate actors in urban (and ecclesiastical) politics, and that their intervention was only resented by the citizens when they made a decision against the city's interests. In addition, the fact that town governments invited aristocratic mediation suggests that they believed that some aristocrats would be impartial or might even favour them, rather than automatically siding with higher-status opponents like the bishop of Exeter. The Exeter arbitrations also suggest that town governments believed that aristocrats had or could gain (perhaps through advisors) the knowledge necessary to propose a workable award which comprehended the technical complexities of the matters in contention. Finally, both examples from Exeter suggest that disputes involving towns could interact with concurrent events in county society, both because corporations sought to take advantage of magnate feuding to strike at an aristocratic

opponent, and because competing magnates saw urban affairs as another theatre in which to contend regional hegemony. Exeter's troubled history with the Courtenays allowed the corporation to make common cause with John Holland, duke of Exeter, in the 1390s, while the involvement of Sir William Bonville in the arbitration of 1448 indicates that a magnate could suffer damage to his worship if he allowed a rival to adjudicate a dispute between a city and a religious institution in his 'country'.

IV – Control of Factionalism

Factionalism posed a particular threat to urban government, and thus to a city's liberties: uncontrolled discord led to an ungovernable city, which drew the critical attention of the crown.²⁴⁵ As such, preventing the development of factions and reconciling or suppressing them if they emerged was an important duty for the rulers of medieval towns, and occasionally this persuaded them to seek aristocratic assistance. Sometimes, factions were small or weak enough that the corporation was able to take concerted action to eliminate them without much outside intervention. This was the case when Edward IV issued letters patent creating a tailors' guild in Exeter that was outside the control of the city government.²⁴⁶ The tailors were unable to gain a foothold in the government of the city (probably due to their lower status), meaning that although the city itself was divided, the urban elite remained united and was able to prosecute the matter, although it took them almost a decade and considerable expense.²⁴⁷ On other occasions, the governing elite became dangerously divided, but the situation was promptly brought under control by decisive or even pre-emptive action from the crown. An example of this was when Edward IV deposed the mayor

²⁴⁵ For the dangers associated with urban faction, see e.g. R. B. Dobson, 'The Risings in York, Beverley and Scarborough, 1380-1381', in R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston eds., *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 112-42; B.R. McRee, 'Peacemaking and its Limits in later Medieval Norwich', *EHR*, 109 (1994), pp. 831-66; Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 175-205.

²⁴⁶ *CPR 1461-7*, p. 543.

²⁴⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA between 1474-5 and 1482-3.

of Southampton in 1463 to put an end to a factional dispute concerning alien merchants.²⁴⁸ However, on two occasions, both in Norwich, it was aristocrats who tried to bring an end to discord, with markedly different results.

IV (a) – Norwich and the Crown-Duchy Network, 1410-15

Given the profound changes in Norwich's government between 1377 and 1404, it is unsurprising that some questioned the legitimacy of the new arrangements.²⁴⁹ In this instance, the council of twenty-four 'Prudhommes', the group who had driven the reforms, found itself opposed by a group describing themselves as the 'greater part of the citizens and commonalty'.²⁵⁰ These self-chosen titles suggest that the division was between the few men at the pinnacle of government and the remainder of the population, including the majority of the franchised elite. The matters in dispute support this suggestion, as they were chiefly related to the balance of power between the Prudhommes and the remainder of the citizenry: controversial points included the method of electing the mayor, and the right of the Prudhommes (granted by Richard II in 1380) to 'correct' city customs.²⁵¹ Although the first explicit record of this division dates to 1414, dissent had evidently been growing since at least 1406, when the two factions clashed over a disputed mayoral election.²⁵² At some point in 1414 the two parties submitted articles to Sir Thomas Erpingham who had been 'elected arbiter and judge' in all matters between them from before 3rd April that year.²⁵³

There is no evidence that anyone (such as the king, or Erpingham himself) imposed Erpingham's arbitration, and so there is little reason to doubt the citizens' own suggestion

²⁴⁸ Ruddock, *Italian Merchants*, pp. 179-80.

²⁴⁹ Above, pp. 198-204.

²⁵⁰ RCN, i, pp. 66-93.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., i, pp. 71-2, 84-8.

²⁵³ NRO, NCR, Case 8c, item 3. 'treshonourable seignor monsieur Thomas Erpingham Chivaler arbitrou et iuge eslu'.

that they ‘elected’ him to resolve the matter. He was also a natural choice for the citizens, given his pre-existing relationship with the city. Over the previous decade, as we have seen, Erpingham had repeatedly provided lordship to the citizens, assisted them with gaining charters and other royal grants, and had been called upon to defend the city’s rights.²⁵⁴ His contact with the city on these matters would, of course, have mostly been with the corporation and thus with the Prudhommes. However, it seems plausible that his reputation as a friend of the city would have spread lower down the city hierarchy and thus would have been known to the opposition, especially as this faction included men who, although not the Prudhommes’ equals, were still heavily involved in city government, such as members of the city assembly. The Prudhommes themselves sought to take advantage of Erpingham’s close relationship with Henry V, beseeching that by Erpingham’s ‘tresgraciose aide et socour’ the king might be persuaded to remove the word ‘commonalty’ from the city charter.²⁵⁵

An ambiguous section of the city records, however, suggests that Erpingham’s involvement may have followed an arbitration by lesser members of county society, who either failed to produce an acceptable award or else laid the groundwork for Erpingham. The dorse of the city account roll for 1412-13 contains expenses for hospitality and rewards given to a number of Norfolk gentlemen and lawyers at the time ‘when the accord was made between the venerable men and the commonalty of the city’.²⁵⁶ Hudson and Tingey believed that this could only be a reference to Erpingham’s arbitration, inexplicably entered on the wrong roll.²⁵⁷ However, an alternative reading is that it was enrolled correctly, and there had been an earlier arbitration by other aristocrats. The men chiefly involved at this time were Sir Robert Berney, John Lancaster and William Paston, who between them received over £7 of

²⁵⁴ Above, pp. 201-4, 219.

²⁵⁵ NRO, NCR, Case 8c, item 4.

²⁵⁶ NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Roll 1412-13.

²⁵⁷ RCN, ii, p. 59.

victuals over five days, while each also received a reward (Berney and Lancaster £1, Paston 1m).²⁵⁸ These three were important figures in political society in Norfolk, and each was included to some extent in the crown-Duchy network. Berney, for instance, had been a retainer of John of Gaunt, was a close friend of Erpingham and was also involved in the affairs of the strongly-Lancastrian Wynter family.²⁵⁹ Lancaster's magnate loyalties were to the Mowbrays, but he had also established relationships with a number of other Norfolk affinities (including the crown-Duchy network) through his associations with men like John Wynter and John Spenser.²⁶⁰ All three also had a prior association with Norwich, with Berney having provided assistance to the corporation on a range of issues dating back to at least 1387.²⁶¹ Lancaster and Paston were more recent acquaintances, being first mentioned in the city account for the previous year, 1411-12.²⁶² Both however, had rendered some service to the citizens, Paston particularly over the matter of the city swordbearer, after which the corporation retained him on an annual pension.²⁶³ As such, although these men were not leaders of political society, they were well-connected local figures who, like Erpingham, had pre-existing relationships with the city.

Implicit in this discussion is the wider question of why the citizens chose *any* landed aristocrat to arbitrate this dispute: this choice indicates that they believed that landed aristocrats understood how the city government functioned, and could therefore propose an acceptable and, crucially, workable solution. It also suggests that the citizens expected landed aristocrats to have sufficient authority within the town to compel both parties to honour their awards. This is sharply discordant with the perception of landed aristocrats as figures whose interests

²⁵⁸ NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Roll 1412-13.

²⁵⁹ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 208-10.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 548-51.

²⁶¹ NRO, NCR, Case 7a&b, Account Roll for 1397-8; Case 7b, Account Rolls for 1408-9, 1410-11. CAB, ff. 10, 19.

²⁶² NRO, NCR, Case 7c, Account Roll 1411-12.

²⁶³ Above, p. 219.

and knowledge were overwhelmingly rural, but, if this distinction is put aside, urban arbitration fits neatly with the pattern of dispute resolution within county society. If the reading of events offered above is correct (in which Erpingham became involved after lesser figures had failed), it would match the way that disputes between landed figures were put to the arbitration of increasingly senior figures within political society.²⁶⁴ It is also worth noting that Berney, among others, took part in Archbishop Arundel's adjudication of a dispute between the bishop of Norwich and the cathedral chapter in 1411.²⁶⁵ Like the city, these ecclesiastical figures evidently believed that the secular aristocracy could play a meaningful and legitimate role in their affairs.

Eventually, this dispute between the citizens of Norwich was settled by a 'Composition' which set out the correct procedure for, *inter alia*, the election of the city officers.²⁶⁶ As Philippa Maddern notes, its provisions were '[i]n many ways...well thought out and equitable': it concentrated on establishing a new system acceptable to both sides, rather than apportioning blame for previous incidents.²⁶⁷ The Composition does not, however, mention the arbitration of anyone save St. Valentine, on whose feast day it was drawn up in 1415. As such, it may well be that Erpingham failed to resolve matters and that the citizens instead came to accord amongst themselves, but in all likelihood the Composition reflects the award given by Erpingham the previous year. Even if this was not the case, however, the earlier stages of this example would still imply that landed aristocrats were considered suitable figures to arbitrate disputes *within* towns, as well as those discussed in the previous section which took place between towns and outside interests. In addition, the choice of Erpingham

²⁶⁴ E.g. Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 155-6. Wright, *Derbyshire*, pp. 123-7.

²⁶⁵ E.H. Carter, *Norwich Cathedral History* (Norwich, 1935), p. 58.

²⁶⁶ NRO, NCR, Case 8c, item 5.

²⁶⁷ Maddern, *Violence*, p. 180.

and Berney suggests that the citizens believed that a history of assisting in urban affairs gave these men a particular qualification to act as arbitrators.

IV (b) – Norwich and the Earl of Suffolk, 1433-1437

The factionalism and alleged violence which plagued Norwich in the 1430s and 1440s, culminating in two seizures of the city's liberties, is a well-known episode in the history of fifteenth-century England.²⁶⁸ At the heart of this division was the same dispute with the cathedral priory which had provoked the corporation's search for lordship in the late 1420s.²⁶⁹ The indenture of 1429 (which saw the citizens yield to the priory on every point) split the ruling class, as a faction emerged which saw the indenture as a betrayal and sought to challenge the priory again. The members of this faction were generally younger men who had not been involved in the earlier negotiations and who had only recently joined the city government. The opposition to this faction, conversely, was composed of men who were generally older and more experienced.²⁷⁰ The latter group have been accused by both contemporaries and historians of being partisans of the priory, but it is far more likely that the earlier negotiations had persuaded them that the priory's case was incontestable, and that to continue the struggle would have been pointless and expensive. This faction has become associated with the infamous Thomas Wetherby, whose reputation in posterity has been little short of diabolic: Hudson and Tingey place sole responsibility for the crisis on him and his 'unpatriotic conduct', while R.L. Storey's account constructs him as some form of nemesis for the city.²⁷¹ One of the chief allegations made against Wetherby was that he was responsible for the involvement of the earl of Suffolk in the city's affairs, and that thanks to Wetherby's influence the earl became hostile to Norwich. Certainly Suffolk played a

²⁶⁸ Detailed studies include *RCN*, i, pp. lxxix-xciii; Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 175-205; and Storey, *House of Lancaster*, pp. 217-25.

²⁶⁹ Above, pp. 239-42.

²⁷⁰ For this pattern, Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 200-1.

²⁷¹ *RCN*, i, p. lxxxiii. Storey, *House of Lancaster*, pp. 217-25.

significant role in these disturbances, culminating in a pair of awards: the latter, dating to 1442, was particularly damaging to the citizens, as it dismissed their case against the priory and other religious institutions.²⁷² However, the earlier arbitration (in 1437) will be discussed here, as it was an attempt to resolve the factionalism within the city government.

The background to this arbitration began in 1433, when the mayor, Wetherby, apparently sought to ensure the election of one of his own faction as his successor. The events surrounding this election are difficult to recover, as our evidence is entirely based on submissions made by each faction. The ultimate conclusion was the election of Richard Purdaunce as mayor, but this was probably only possible after the deadlock between the factions was broken by the intervention of the bishop of Norwich, who was perhaps responsible for Purdaunce's election as a 'compromise' candidate.²⁷³ Both sides then petitioned chancery for redress, leading to an agreement in February 1434 (apparently concluded before the chancellor and the earl of Suffolk) that the citizens would settle the matter amongst themselves.²⁷⁴ Suffolk's involvement at this stage is intriguing. Although he was a member of the royal council by this date, he was not yet a truly leading figure in national affairs: perhaps his presence was on account of his East Anglian connections and the lack of any other established magnate in the region.²⁷⁵ Given that Wetherby's enemies were in the ascendant at this point, it is hardly surprising that the outcome of the citizens' internal arbitration was his expulsion from the franchise.²⁷⁶ The men who had taken part in his attempt to secure the 1433 election were forced to submit, but they were later said to have been expelled too.²⁷⁷

²⁷² RCN, i, pp. lxxxviii-lxxxix. Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 194-5.

²⁷³ NRO, NCR, Case 17b, 'Liber Placitorum', f. 72.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 68.

²⁷⁵ For the lack of active magnates in East Anglia prior to Suffolk's emergence, above, pp. 239-42.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 70-1.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 67d, 70-1.

Between 1434 and 1436, Wetherby's faction regained ground, and in 1436 both the mayor and the alderman of the St. George's Guild were Wetherby's associates (Robert Chapeleyn and William Grey respectively).²⁷⁸ One of Wetherby's allies from 1433, John Hauke, was appointed undersheriff, but this led to complaints from the anti-Wetherby faction, as he had been barred from office in 1434. At this point, royal government intervened again, sending first Justice William Goderede and then the earl of Suffolk to resolve the situation in early 1437.²⁷⁹ These two men came to radically different conclusions. Goderede upheld the position of the anti-Wetherby faction, including that Wetherby and his allies had been responsible for the problems in 1433 and that they had been legitimately excluded from government.²⁸⁰ Suffolk, however, overturned this and dictated an award which turned the clock back to before the 1433 election: Wetherby and his allies were restored to their citizenship (and, in Wetherby's case, to his position as alderman) and all actions taken against them were declared void.²⁸¹ This award was either partisan or naive. Unlike the Composition of 1415, which addressed the *causes* of discord, Suffolk's award simply returned the city to the situation immediately before the moment when factionalism changed into outright conflict. Suffolk's award also displays a lack of understanding of the structure of city government: who, for instance, was to make way for Wetherby as alderman, given that their number was limited? In summary, it is difficult to imagine how this could lead to anything other than renewed hostilities between Wetherby and his opponents. The royal council themselves apparently recognised that this award did not resolve matters, as they commissioned the bishop of Carlisle and the judge John Cottesmore to oversee the mayoral election of 1437, which, nonetheless, descended into conflict.²⁸² The anti-Wetherby candidate

²⁷⁸ Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 186-7.

²⁷⁹ NRO, NCR, Case 17b, 'Liber Placitorum', ff. 67d-68.

²⁸⁰ Most accounts of these disputes have stressed how partial Suffolk's award was, but it should be noted that Goderede was not necessarily unbiased either: in 1433-4 he had advised the city government (then dominated by the anti-Wetherby faction) on how to counter Wetherby and his allies. CAB, f. 191d.

²⁸¹ NRO, NCR, Case 16d/1, f. 2.

²⁸² N.H. Nicolas ed., *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council* (7 vols., London, 1834-1837), v, pp. 17-18. CPR 1436-41, p. 86.

emerged victorious, Wetherby's faction made allegations of riot, and the commissioners suspended the city's liberties.

What caused Suffolk to produce such an award? One possibility was a failure to understand how embittered the situation in Norwich had become: perhaps he expected that returning the situation to the *status quo ante* might allow the citizens to overcome their differences, especially with his own weight standing behind the award. Another possibility, however, is bound up in the relationship between Suffolk and John Heydon. This was the period when Heydon and Suffolk began their infamous association, and Heydon had loyalties which may have affected Suffolk's arbitration. The first was with the cathedral itself, as Heydon was retained as counsel by the prior from at least 1436-7.²⁸³ The relevant priory expenditure rolls for the preceding years are lost, so it is unclear when Heydon was first retained, but if it pre-dated Suffolk's arbitration then this indirect relationship between the earl and the priory may well have influenced his decision to support the city faction which was not hostile towards the cathedral. However, there was also a link between Heydon and Wetherby: both were connected by marriage to the Wynnters, a family of lawyers and key members of the crown-Duchy network.²⁸⁴ One of Wetherby's daughters married John Wynter, the heir of the family, while Heydon married one of Wynter's sisters: the dates of these marriages are unknown, but Heydon's certainly pre-dates 1436.²⁸⁵ These marriages suggest that Heydon and Wetherby were moving in similar circles within Norfolk society, but the evidence from Norwich's archives also suggests that Wetherby repeatedly attempted to employ Heydon in civic affairs.

²⁸³ NRO, DCN 1/1/81.

²⁸⁴ For the Wynnters, see *HoP 1386-1421*, iv, pp. 927-31. Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 62-3, 66, 71-2.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

The first mention of Heydon in Norwich's archive is in the account prepared concerning the priory negotiations of the late 1420s, which records that Heydon was paid 40d for his advice.²⁸⁶ This payment is recorded in a section detailing lawyers employed explicitly by Wetherby or at his suggestion, perhaps during his mayoralty in 1427-8. Heydon's next appearance was also during a year when Wetherby was mayor (1432-3), when Heydon was retained on a pension of two marks.²⁸⁷ Although this continued in 1433-4 (after Wetherby's expulsion from the city), he was not pensioned in 1434-5, indicating the anti-Wetherby faction chose to remove him. In 1436, however, with Wetherby's faction on the rise, Heydon was suddenly appointed to become the city's recorder and both he and Sir Thomas Tuddenham were admitted to the St. George's Guild.²⁸⁸ Almost immediately, however, he was removed as recorder, for on 1st May 1437 William Yelverton was elected in his place: this was the same day as Wetherby's faction again lost the mayoral election.²⁸⁹ In the aftermath of this election, it was Heydon who pursued a number of suits against the anti-Wetherby faction.²⁹⁰ Taken together with their connections to the Wynters, this seems a strong case for the existence of a relationship between Heydon and Wetherby.

It is also worth noting that Wetherby was one of the last members of a generation of citizens who cultivated connections outside the city. Unlike the younger men who opposed him, he possessed manors (including Intwood, where, tellingly, he retreated after his defeat in 1433) and, as already mentioned, he married his daughters to members of the gentry.²⁹¹ Wetherby had entered city government (he joined the freedom in 1415-6) when this sort of connection was an uncommon but noticeable feature of the urban elite.²⁹² At this date, the corporation

²⁸⁶ NRO, NCR, Case 7d, 'View of the Treasurers of Norwich 1429-30', m. 2d.

²⁸⁷ CAB, f. 185.

²⁸⁸ CAB, f. 213d. NRO, NCR, Case 8e, Guild Surveyors' Account 1430-7.

²⁸⁹ Maddern, *Violence*, p. 191.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-1.

²⁹¹ Above, pp. 149-51. RCN, i, p. 332.

²⁹² Rye ed., *Freemen of Norwich*, p. 148.

still contained many of the figures who had driven the expansion of the city's liberties in the previous decades, such as William Appleyard (d.1419), John (d.1418) and Walter (d.1425) Danyell, Robert Dunston (d.1425) and William Sedman (d.1433). Many of these men possessed rural land or had connections with the gentry and, moreover, they were active during a period (c.1399-c.1425) when the crown-Duchy network included almost the entirety of Norfolk's landed society.²⁹³ As this group died, however, they were increasingly replaced by men who did not follow their example: Thomas Wetherby was one of the last who did. The leaders of the anti-Wetherby faction such as Robert Toppes and William Ashwell entered the freedom less than a decade after Wetherby, but this seems to have marked a watershed moment in the leading citizens' perceptions of the world outside the city walls.²⁹⁴ One intriguing possibility is that the grant of county status in 1404, combined with the increased prestige of the city's officers (including the advent of the mayoralty) and the city's focus on internal disputes after c.1406 may have narrowed the outlook of the new generation of leading citizens. Regardless of the cause, one result was that Wetherby possessed connections in landed society which his opponents did not, which may have enabled him to sue out Suffolk's lordship. Certainly, Wetherby did not lack friends in Norfolk. As well as his connection to Heydon, he also induced the duke of Norfolk to write to the mayor on two occasions, demanding that the corporation cease harassing him (this was presumably after Wetherby was effectively driven from the city after the 1437 election).²⁹⁵

The connection between Wetherby and Heydon (or Wetherby and landed society more generally) may explain Suffolk's decision to help Wetherby's faction. It does not, however,

²⁹³ Castor, *Duchy*, chapter 3.

²⁹⁴ Toppes, as mentioned above, did buy a rural manor and married into the gentry, but this came much later, in 1450 and c.1443-1451 respectively. Above, pp. 152-4. Toppes also married into a family opposed to the Suffolk affinity. Blomefield, v, p. 16.

²⁹⁵ NRO, NCR, Case 9c/10. As mentioned above, Wetherby's son-in-law's father, Edmund Wynter, was a Mowbray servant as well as being part of the crown-Duchy network. Above, p. 242.

explain his willingness to issue any award which favoured one party to such an extent: the aristocrats involved in the negotiations before the 1415 Composition, for instance, had far greater links with the Prudhommes faction than with their opponents, and yet the Composition is a document marked by compromise and the desire to move beyond factional dispute. We must also bear in mind the strange circumstances in which Suffolk's arbitration was introduced. Why did the royal council commission a judge to examine the matter but then, only a week after this investigation had concluded, dispatch the earl to arbitrate the matter and completely overturn Goderede's findings? It also seems unusual that the council then appointed another judge and a bishop to oversee the forthcoming election: why did they not send Suffolk?

One possibility is that Suffolk inserted himself into the affair, either at the urging of Wetherby's faction, or because it provided the opportunity to extend his lordship into the city. The latter cause would have been well served by re-establishing Wetherby within the city government, as it would have created a group who were indebted to Suffolk, and perhaps even entirely reliant on his backing. This interpretation receives some support from the reading presented above concerning the corporation's approach to Suffolk in 1430: if the sudden end to the city's contact with Suffolk in 1430 was in response to unacceptable demands for influence made by the earl, then his later support for Wetherby makes much more sense.²⁹⁶ Indeed, alongside Suffolk's role in Norwich's affairs in the early-1440s (when he again became involved in a political crisis in the city), we can perhaps discern a pattern of an aristocrat seeking to establish his influence in a city which was unwilling to accept his lordship.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Above, pp. 245-7.

²⁹⁷ For Suffolk's role in this later period, see Maddern, *Violence*, pp. 192-6; Storey, *House of Lancaster*, pp. 221-5; and below, pp. 283-9. This interpretation of Suffolk's relationship with Norwich would present a much more critical view of Suffolk's activities as a local magnate than those put forward by Helen Castor and John Watts,

IV (c) - Themes

These case studies present two very different pictures of aristocratic involvement in urban factionalism. These differences were, of course, caused by a multitude of factors, but the most important was the attitude of the aristocrats themselves. The Composition produced after Erpingham's arbitration was marked by a desire for compromise and an understanding of the minutiae of urban politics, indicating that Erpingham genuinely sought to resolve the matters in contention. Suffolk's award, by contrast, was an exercise either in naivety or in deliberately favouring one party, to the benefit of the earl, Wetherby's faction or both. This distinction is reflected in the level of success each achieved. The Composition appears to have resolved the matters it set out to address, and in 1417 formed the basis of a new royal charter.²⁹⁸ Suffolk's award, by contrast, was the catalyst for further discord and the suspension of the city's liberties. It also, as we shall see, resulted in the city (now dominated by Wetherby's opponents) becoming implacably hostile to Suffolk, something which was to result in their undoing in the early 1440s, when the earl's second arbitration dismissed their case against the priory. In both cases however, it is again clear that landed aristocrats were considered to be legitimate actors in urban politics: indeed, Erpingham was the citizens' own choice. In the case of Suffolk, although the citizens may have resented his involvement, they never publicly challenged his right or authority to sit in judgement on their internal affairs. It is possible that they accepted Suffolk's arbitration only because he was (or claimed to be) acting on the king's instructions, but this would still imply that the citizens believed that a magnate was an appropriate figure, as they did not petition the king to replace Suffolk with an alternative they considered more suitable.

who have both sought to partially rehabilitate the earl. Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 98-100, 127; Watts, 'Pole, William de la, first duke of Suffolk (1396–1450)', *ODNB*.

²⁹⁸ Hudson and Tingey persuasively argue that this delay was the result of the absence of the king and Erpingham in France. *RCN* i, p. lxx.

Suffolk's arbitration does, however, present a very different picture of aristocratic-urban relations to that assembled over the course of this chapter, and it is also one of the few occasions when aristocrats became involved in urban affairs without being invited by the citizens: even if Suffolk intervened at Wetherby's plea, this was still different from being invited by the united city government or by both factions in a dispute. Erpingham and Berney's involvement, however, fits with the wider picture of aristocratic involvement in urban affairs. Both men were established contacts who had assisted the city on numerous occasions, while Berney's associates, Lancaster and Paston, were more recent acquaintances who had nonetheless provided the city with support previously. It is also worth noting that while Erpingham was effectively a royal lieutenant in the region, Suffolk was a true local magnate whose power rested on his own landed wealth as well as his connections in national politics and landed society. Throughout this chapter, examples have been presented of particularly close relationships between towns and figures whose local authority was in some way limited: Erpingham by his reliance on royal office, Stafford and Holland by their reliance on royal landed grants, John of Gaunt by his national status and public responsibilities as a prince of the blood. Suffolk does not fit in this category: although by the late-1430s his position in national politics was becoming comparable with Gaunt, Suffolk was still a dominant local magnate in a way that Gaunt was not, particularly through his substantial and active local affinity.²⁹⁹ It is perhaps therefore meaningful that his troubled relationship with Norwich in some respects mirrors that between Exeter and another true local magnate, the Courtenay earl of Devon.

²⁹⁹ For Suffolk's position in local and national politics at this date, see Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 155, 158-80; Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 86-99. For the limited activity of Gaunt's Norfolk affinity, see Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 182-96.

V – Conclusions

A number of strands have run through this chapter: we must now draw them out and consider their implications. The most basic is that aristocrats (including lawyers and, later in the period, royal courtiers) were frequently involved in urban affairs, and were, moreover, generally considered to be acting legitimately on the urban stage. There is no suggestion, for instance, that townsmen resented the presence of aristocrats because they considered them to be outsiders who had no right to engage in urban politics. When townsmen did balk at aristocrats' involvement, it was for the more mundane reason that the man in question acted contrary to the city's interests, such as by favouring the city's opponents. At most other times, aristocratic participation was accepted and even actively sought out by the citizens. Indeed, the desirability of aristocratic assistance is another point touched upon repeatedly above. Townsmen sought support from aristocrats in a range of different circumstances and to act in a number of different ways, but most can be categorised as assisting town governments manage their relationships with other entities, notably the crown, religious institutions, other aristocrats, and factions within the city. The example provided by Salisbury indicates that such assistance was not truly necessary, but it is nonetheless striking that when aristocratic support was available, townsmen (including the citizens of Salisbury) tried to harness it.³⁰⁰

Of course, aristocratic support was technically always available: England never lacked noblemen or gentlemen, after all. What towns sought, however, was *local* aristocratic support. This is perhaps surprising, particularly on occasions when towns were seeking a grant from the crown: why wouldn't any man with the king's ear and experience of the workings of royal government have been suitable? There are a number of possible reasons for this, most of

³⁰⁰ *Infra*, pp. 211-16, 219, 267-9.

which are connected to the fact that although royal grants were arranged in London, they had to be enacted locally, and had local effects. In some cases, the need for local authority was straightforward: as the 1425 commission concerning the Exeter weirs proved, an aristocrat's ability to procure a royal instrument such as a commission was worthless if he could not also influence the local men who inevitably discharged it.³⁰¹ Similarly, local authority was probably a prerequisite for an aristocrat to act as an arbitrator, as he could not necessarily expect to bind the parties if he lacked the power to enforce an award. In addition, power in the locality probably increased these men's influence in central government, as the crown was presumably more likely to consider a request if it came from a figure who was believed to have the 'rule' of the area concerned. We must also, however, consider the possibility that local magnates were themselves more interested in assisting towns from their 'countries'. Distant figures with no connection to the area had little to gain from helping a town, and may therefore have been unwilling to do so, or else may have expected substantial compensation for their efforts. By contrast, it seems that local figures did receive a benefit from becoming a town's 'good lord', as it appears that doing so contributed to their worship and the perception that they enjoyed political hegemony in the region. The example of the earl of Devon and Sir William Bonville's joint arbitration of the dispute between Exeter and its bishop even suggests that magnates who were vying for local dominance could compete to offer lordship to towns, again indicating that their involvement in urban affairs could bolster their wider local standing.

³⁰¹ Above, p. 230.

5 – County and National Politics

I - Introduction

The previous chapter explored various routes by which aristocrats became involved in urban affairs, and the circumstances in which townsmen sought aristocratic support. It necessarily concentrated on developments within towns, and on how these either persuaded townsmen to enlist aristocratic support, or persuaded aristocrats to intervene. However, this obscures the fact that local political societies were not static, and were not identical (or even similar) in the counties which surrounded towns. Furthermore, developments at a national level could dramatically affect the disposition and make-up of local political society, as repeatedly demonstrated over the course of this period. As such, any investigation into connections between towns and aristocratic society needs to explore how these interactions were affected by differences between county societies, and by developments within them. This chapter will consider a range of circumstances which were external to towns but which affected the establishment and nature of urban-aristocratic connections, including both the long-term structures of county society and the shorter-term changes within them, before considering whether the ‘new monarchy’ of Edward IV and Henry VII had any impact on the kinds of aristocrat towns approached for assistance.

II – The Structure of County Society

One of the salient points identified in the previous chapter was that townsmen most frequently sought assistance from aristocrats who had close connections with the locality, and particularly from local magnates. Similarly, those aristocrats who became involved in urban affairs in ways other than by the townsmen’s invitation, such as the earls of Devon in Exeter and the earl of Suffolk in Norwich, were figures who had possessions in the locality and were influential in its political society. As such, we need to understand how differences in the make-up of local society created varying patterns in urban-aristocratic relationships.

As discussed in the Introduction, there were significant differences between the very magnate-centred structure of Devon's landed society and that of Hampshire, where relationships between the gentry were more important, while Wiltshire's unusual landholding patterns created a void in which resident landed aristocrats were rare.¹ What effect did these difference have on how these societies interacted with towns?

Unsurprisingly, the example provided by Salisbury and Wiltshire is at one extreme: the small number of aristocrats active in Wiltshire (and the outward-looking nature of those who *were* active) is almost certainly responsible for the minimal contact which Salisbury enjoyed with the nobility and landed gentry. Apart from a period during the reigns of Henry V and VI (discussed below), there was no magnate who acted as the focus of political life in Wiltshire, and at no point was there any competition for political dominance in the county. As a result, there was also usually no figure like those who attracted the attention of townsmen elsewhere, that is someone who possessed power in the locality but also influence in London. Salisbury therefore relied almost exclusively on delegations of lawyers and its own citizens to liaise with outsiders and royal government: as mentioned in the previous chapter, Exeter and Norwich also relied on such groups, but they were assisted by aristocrats.² Salisbury's strategies to defend its interests also differed in subtler ways, notably by displaying unusual respect for the shrievalty. Whereas our other towns generally only approached the county sheriff at times when they needed some specific benefit, Salisbury presented each sheriff with a pipe of wine from at least 1392-3 until the early-1420s.³ This difference was perhaps because Salisbury could not access the sheriff through a supportive local magnate, or through

¹ Above, pp. 33-7.

² Above, p. 216.

³ LB1, #15, 33, 36, 42, 43, 54, 71, 98, 100, 113, 128, 142, 167, 170, 185, 197, 203, 217, 227, 246. Note that, like much of the published version of LB1, these transcriptions are often marked by errors (such as Sir John Berkeley being described as the sheriff's treasurer rather than as the sheriff in #98) but the meaning is quite clear. For other towns approaching the sheriff, see above, pp. 105-6.

contacts in the local administrative or legal elites. Even if Salisbury had possessed such contacts, they might not have been able to influence the sheriff, as the absence of a coherent political community in the county meant that there might have been no meaningful connection between the city's contact and the sheriff. In Devon, Hampshire or Norfolk, almost all sheriffs were involved in local magnate affinities (such as that of the earl of Devon, or the crown-Duchy network in Norfolk) or in the wider political community in the shire, something which was far from guaranteed in Wiltshire's thinner, more fragmented society.

However, for about thirty years this situation changed, and Salisbury's strategies changed with it. The shift was initiated by Walter, lord Hungerford (1378-1449), perhaps the only aristocrat who truly exercised hegemony in Wiltshire in this period. Building on the work of his father, Sir Thomas (an estate administrator who rose high in the service of the duchy of Lancaster, among others), Walter Hungerford assembled a substantial collection of estates in western Wiltshire and the counties to the west.⁴ His service to the house of Lancaster (and especially Henry V) also saw Hungerford become increasingly prominent in central government, serving terms as steward of the household, lord treasurer and as a royal councillor. Within Wiltshire, Hungerford created a network which demonstrated many of the typical features of a magnate affinity, albeit modified for Wiltshire's sparse and dispersed political society. Most noticeably, Hungerford employed almost all of the administrators and lawyers active in Wiltshire during the reigns of Henry V and VI (such as Robert Long, John Westbury, John Whittocksmede and William Alexander).⁵ Similarly, Hungerford induced many of the various gentlemen who had liminal interests in Wiltshire to act as his feoffees (including Sir John Stourton, Sir John Baynton and Sir William Darell).⁶

⁴ For Sir Thomas, *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 433-6. For Walter, *ibid.*, iii, pp. 446-53 and C. Kightly, 'Hungerford, Walter, first Baron Hungerford (1378-1449)', *ODNB*.

⁵ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, p. 24; iii, pp. 452, 616-17; iv, p. 814. *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 945.

⁶ E.g. *WFF*, #400, 420, 484, 485, 553.

As such, it is unsurprising that Hungerford also enjoyed a lengthy connection with the citizens of Salisbury. This may have begun as early as 1414, when he was admitted to the St. George's fraternity.⁷ The timing is possibly meaningful, as the accession of Henry V in 1413 marked the beginning of Hungerford's rise.⁸ Throughout the following three decades there are regular (if not especially frequent) references to gifts made to Hungerford by the citizens, or to his role in raising royal loans.⁹ Members of Hungerford's affinity were also involved in the city's affairs. The best example of this was William Alexander, Hungerford's deputy as chief steward of the south parts of the duchy of Lancaster, who was retained as counsel by the city between 1418 and his death in 1446, and who also sat as Salisbury's MP six times between 1415 and 1432.¹⁰ The overlap between Hungerford's affinity and the episcopal administration (probably caused by the small number of local administrators, rather than deliberate policy) also meant that both of Salisbury's episcopal bailiffs in this period, William Westbury and Robert Long, were associated with Hungerford.¹¹ It is even possible that the unusually harmonious relationship between the city, the bishop and the bishop's officials in these years was the result of the binding influence provided by the Hungerford connection: it is certainly worth noting that when the city sought to persuade Long to adopt a particular position in an obscure dispute over the profits of the borough court (so-called 'green wax' money), they chose to send William Alexander to make their case.¹²

⁷ Above, p. 181.

⁸ *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, p. 449.

⁹ E.g. LB1, #153, 167, 169, 236, 254, 270, 308, 316, 345, 367, 369, 386, 400, 405.

¹⁰ For a summary of Alexander's career, *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 23-4.

¹¹ Long directly, Westbury mostly through his brother John, although he himself acted as Hungerford's feoffee in 1423. E. Green ed., *Pedes Finium commonly called Feet of Fines for the County of Somerset. Henry IV to Henry VI* (London, 1906), pp. 59-60.

¹² LB1, #281. For 'green wax' money, see Street, 'The Relations of the Bishops and Citizens of Salisbury', p. 207. The city's election of Long as MP and auditor may also owe something to his connections to Hungerford and Alexander, rather than solely to his position as episcopal bailiff. LB1, #375, 390.

After Hungerford's death in 1449, his family's fortunes suffered precipitous decline due to long-lived widows, political miscalculation and simple bad luck.¹³ In many counties, this would have led to an abrupt realignment in local political society, as another aristocrat moved to claim the newly vacated space. In Wiltshire, there were simply no other candidates. Indeed, the challenge for potential successors was even greater than that which had faced Hungerford, as the nature of the Hungerfords' fall meant that another substantial portion of Wiltshire's land was effectively removed from play. As a result, no-one took Hungerford's place as Salisbury's magnate contact, and no other magnate affinity was represented in the city's legal counsel (indeed, as mentioned above, the city's legal advisors in the Yorkist years were sourced from other counties).¹⁴

The Salisbury example suggests that relationships between towns and local political society were dependent on the existence of some form of organisation within that society. A patchwork of gentlemen whose interests, relationships and connections were mostly in other counties barely interacted with Salisbury, but when a degree of cohesion was briefly introduced through the Hungerford network, the level of urban-aristocratic contact increased. The examples of Southampton and of certain periods in the history of Norwich and Exeter qualify and clarify this argument: it was not simply the greater cohesion of Wiltshire society under Hungerford which led to an increase in urban-aristocratic contact, but the fact that this cohesion took the form of a magnate-led affinity. The burgesses of Southampton, for example, formed just as few aristocratic links as the citizens of Salisbury, despite the fact that political society in Hampshire was far more populous, vibrant and internally-organised than in Wiltshire. As discussed in the Introduction, although there were few (and often no) noblemen resident or active in Hampshire, there was a healthy population

¹³ See e.g. M. Hicks, 'Hungerford, Robert, second Baron Hungerford (c.1400-1459)', *ODNB*; idem, 'Hungerford, Robert, third Baron Hungerford and Baron Moleyns (c.1423-1464)', *ODNB*.

¹⁴ Above, p. 123.

of substantial gentlemen, who were closely connected through marriage, politics and friendship.¹⁵ Southampton's failure to engage with this network suggests the possibility that 'horizontal' political societies (based on groups of so-called 'independent gentry') presented townsmen with fewer opportunities or incentives for engagement than did their 'vertical', magnate-dominated equivalents.¹⁶

Periods in the history of Exeter and Norwich support this hypothesis. In the mid- and late-1420s, for instance, Devon's landed society was left leaderless due to the minority of the earl of Devon.¹⁷ During this period, county society coalesced into a far more 'horizontal' form than it had before. A similar situation developed in the 1470s, when the three main magnate power-bases in the county had been simultaneously crippled: the estates of the earldom of Devon were in the hands of the duke of Clarence and then the king; the Bonville inheritance was split between widows and an heiress married to the marquess of Dorset; while the duchy of Exeter estates were in the possession of a widow.¹⁸ Both Clarence and Dorset were apparently uninterested in establishing themselves as leaders of county society, and Devon's landed aristocracy instead gravitated around members of the minor nobility, such as Lord Fitzwaryn and Lord Dynham, although their leadership was more akin to being 'first among equals' than a true magnate affinity.¹⁹ In these two periods, Exeter's patterns of engagement with the landed aristocracy shifted dramatically. Prior to the death of the earl of Devon in 1422, the citizens had frequently provided gifts and hospitality to him and members of his affinity, but the new local political circumstances of the mid-1420s saw a marked change.²⁰

¹⁵ Above, p. 40.

¹⁶ For this distinction see e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, chapter 9, especially pp. 287-91; eadem, 'Gentry and Community'; Walker, 'Communities of the County'.

¹⁷ For this period, see Cherry, 'Struggle for Power', pp. 124-5; idem, 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 94-6.

¹⁸ For Devon society in this period, see Stansfield, *Political Elites*, pp. 238-60.

¹⁹ Dynham was, of course, a privy councillor, but he never seems to have assumed any sort of political leadership in Devon. H. Kleineke, 'The Dinham family in the later Middle Ages' (Royal Holloway Univ. of London Ph.D. thesis, 1998), pp. 242-52.

²⁰ DHC, ECA, CRA for the reigns of Henry IV and V and above, pp. 225-6.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the city instead approached figures from outside the county, notably the duke of Gloucester and an associate of the lord admiral.²¹ In the 1470s, the change was slower but no less dramatic. Prior to the disturbance of 1469-71, the city had established a relationship with Humphrey, lord Stafford of Southwick, who had been Edward IV's local lieutenant.²² At first, the city attempted to engage with Stafford's apparent replacement, Clarence, as well as with his local retainers, the Courtenays of Powderham.²³ Simultaneously, the city also provided gifts and hospitality to Lord Dynham and Lord Fitzwaryn, perhaps expecting that one of these men could also assume the position previously held by Stafford.²⁴ However, within a few years both of these approaches had withered away, and the city instead chose to conduct its affairs entirely through local lawyers, with support from close associates of Edward IV, including the bishop of Exeter and Sir Thomas St. Leger.²⁵

We can perceive a similar pattern in Norwich in the late 1420s and early 1430s, as discussed in the previous chapter.²⁶ This brief period saw the crown-Duchy network left leaderless following the deaths of Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, and Sir Thomas Erpingham and before the emergence of the earl of Suffolk. This was precisely the period that Norwich turned elsewhere for aristocratic support, including to noblemen without local connections, such as the duke of Gloucester and Lord Cromwell, and to those with only a very limited presence in the region, such as Lord FitzWalter. Taken together, the examples from Southampton, Exeter and Norwich suggest that townsmen saw less benefit in engaging with more 'horizontal' political societies than with more 'vertical' ones, although there are subtle

²¹ Above, pp. 226-30.

²² Above, pp. 205-6.

²³ DHC, ECA, CRA for 1471-2, 1472-3, 1474-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Below, p. 296.

²⁶ Above, pp. 239-42.

differences in their behaviour. In Southampton, where local landed society was permanently characterised by a group of greater gentry, the result was that very few links developed between the city government and aristocrats. In Norfolk and Exeter, however, such periods of ‘horizontal’ arrangement were aberrations in a political society normally firmly organised around magnate affinities. These cities were used to dealing with magnates: when this support was ripped away because of minorities, dynastic failure or political shifts, the citizens sought out new sources of magnate lordship. If none emerged to fill the void in the locality, the examples of Norwich and Exeter in the 1420s suggest that the citizens would instead turn to figures with comparable levels of *national* influence to their previous contacts, but who lacked the same authority in the locality (or, indeed, any connection to the locality whatsoever). These figures were, as discussed in the previous chapter, ‘second-best’ as they lacked the means to influence the course of politics in the locality, but Norwich and Exeter were perhaps so accustomed to receiving magnate support that they sought out a figure like Humphrey of Gloucester anyway.

Of course, county society could also evolve in the opposite direction and become more ‘vertical’, such as when Hungerford’s rise altered politics in Wiltshire: on these occasions, towns began to establish more links with the new magnate and his associates. Town governments were sensitive to events which might result in significant changes in county society, and were often quick to respond. On some occasions, for instance, the arrival of aristocrats with the mere potential to reshape local society persuaded townsmen to seek their favour. In 1426, John Holland, earl of Huntingdon (1395-1447), visited his south-western estates for the first time, reanimating a local power base which had been dormant since the execution of his father in 1400. As previously mentioned, the mid-1420s was a period of political vacuum in Devon: Exeter’s behaviour suggests that the citizens believed that Huntingdon might fill the void. The mayor and his fellows rode out to meet the earl and

then dispatched two pipes of wine to his residence at Bovey Tracey.²⁷ In addition, his butler, minstrels, and a relative, Richard Holland, were entertained at city expense.²⁸ This was undoubtedly a serious attempt to establish a connection with Huntingdon, perhaps one similar to that which the city had enjoyed with his father under Richard II.²⁹ However, the arrangement collapsed almost immediately, as Huntingdon's potential proved to be illusory: as Michael Stansfield comments, 'his landed power was not overwhelming ... and his long absences in France and London meant his presence was too infrequent for his influence to be dominant'.³⁰ A similar example of townsmen rushing (ultimately unsuccessfully) to establish ties with a new aristocrat was discussed in the previous chapter, when the citizens of Norwich sought to persuade the earl of Suffolk to become their 'good lord'.³¹ As with Exeter and Huntingdon, this example followed a period of more 'horizontal' social organisation in the region, and again it is notable how swiftly the citizens reacted to a development in county society: in 1430-1, Suffolk's later dominance was by no means assured, but his potential was evidently sufficient to attract attention.

The lack of connections between towns and 'horizontal' landed societies is ultimately a reflection of the pattern identified in the previous chapter, in which towns sought the support of magnates, that is those aristocrats who had significant local authority alongside meaningful national influence. Members of 'independent gentry' networks generally had neither: their local authority was circumscribed by being one of many roughly-equal peers, while they mostly had little influence in central government. Even in the case of arbitration, 'independent gentry' were probably less useful to towns than a true local magnate, as they lacked a similar level of authority and thus the prestige and latent power required to

²⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA 1425-6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Above, pp. 222-5.

³⁰ Stansfield, 'Holland Family', p. 218.

³¹ Above, pp. 243-6.

successfully bind the parties. By contrast, magnates from more ‘vertical’ societies possessed both almost by definition, on account of their leadership of local affinities and the national influence which was linked to both this leadership and their rank and connections. A corollary to this is that urban-aristocratic connections were generally between towns and magnates or magnate affinities, rather than between towns and landed, county or gentry society more widely. The landed gentry had little to offer a town on their own account (except those like Sir Thomas Erpingham who were rare examples of gentlemen-magnates), and they were unlikely to pose a similar scale of threat to that which a nobleman like the earl of Devon could present. This has two important implications for our wider understanding of connections between town governments and the aristocracy. Firstly, it may be misleading to refer to such contact as being with landed society: instead, towns sought assistance from the *leaders* of landed society, and from those leaders’ particular gentry intimates and lawyers. Similarly, there is no evidence of landed gentlemen, individually or corporately, seeking to insert themselves into urban affairs as some magnates did.³² Secondly, town governments interacted with the aristocracy because they needed assistance, not because they considered themselves a part of landed society. If aristocratic assistance was available locally then towns would seek it out (even at times when they did not need assistance immediately), but otherwise there was little for them to gain by expending money and effort on interacting with landed society.

III – The Disposition of County Society

The previous section discussed how the long-standing, structural arrangement of different regions’ political societies could affect the level of interaction between those societies and towns. However, it also alluded to the fact that lordship and county society were not truly

³² As discussed in Chapter 2, a small number of very minor gentlemen did become directly involved in urban government, but the significant landed gentry did not.

static, even if broad patterns (that Devon and Norfolk were, for instance, generally much more ‘vertically’ arranged than Wiltshire and Hampshire) remained reasonably stable. In the examples above, the changes in county society were those caused by the emergence or disappearance of magnates who could provide lordship, but there were other changes in local lordship and in the disposition of county society more widely which affected relationships between towns and aristocrats. The key principle was the town’s perception of the balance between the risks and the rewards associated with engaging (and, indeed, not engaging) with the aristocracy at any given time. This balance was often the result of a complex network of interacting factors, which made it liable to shift rapidly, causing marked changes in towns’ behaviour towards aristocrats. This section will consider a number of these factors, starting with the impact of united or contested magnate lordship.

On a few occasions, the balance of risk and reward was simple. Predictably, when towns perceived little risk in seeking assistance from an aristocratic connection, strong links developed. The clearest example of such a low-risk situation was when the political society in the surrounding region was united into a single affinity, such as the relationship between Norwich and the crown-Duchy network in c.1399-1426. Although this network grew out of the old Lancastrian affinity, it eventually included almost the entirety of the region’s political elite.³³ In particular, there was little bloodletting between supporters and opponents of the Ricardian regime. Indeed, as Helen Castor notes, the network even included Sir Simon Felbrigg, who had been Richard’s standard bearer, but who was also a close neighbour and associate of Sir Thomas Erpingham.³⁴ A number of other local figures who had previously been members of other affinities, such as the duchy of Norfolk/Mowbray connection, were similarly included through their relationships with neighbours and friends. It is perhaps

³³ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 59-81.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

unsurprising, then, that members of this near-universal association were approached for assistance by the citizens of Norwich. As already mentioned, the city had close links to the network's two leaders (Erpingham and Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter), as well as with several more junior members of the affinity.³⁵ The city's legal counsel were likewise drawn exclusively from the pool of lawyers who were associated with the network, including those who were themselves from city families: Walter Eton, John Alderford and William Ampulford (respectively recorder, city attorney and city clerk in this period), for instance, were involved in the landed affairs of members of the network, while Alderford and Ampulford married into crown-Duchy families.³⁶

It does not necessarily follow, however, that the opposite situation – local lordship which was subject to significant competition or outright opposition – inevitably deterred townsmen from seeking assistance from members of political society, as two examples from Exeter demonstrate. In the first, contested lordship actually gave the city an opportunity to strike at its enemies. This was the period in the 1390s discussed in the previous chapter, when John Holland, duke of Exeter, challenged Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, for pre-eminence in Devon.³⁷ Although Exeter maintained some contact with Courtenay throughout, the citizens became increasingly connected with Holland, and appear to have made common cause with him in an attempt to recover rights and possessions which the Courtenay earls had seized. On this occasion, a new division in county society actually *encouraged* townsmen to become involved: the reward they expected from gaining Holland's favour was sufficient to compensate for the risks involved in taking a side in an aristocratic dispute. The second example from Exeter is more complex. This dates to the period of the Courtenay-Bonville feud, when the minority of Thomas Courtenay, earl of Devon (d.1458, a minor until 1433)

³⁵ Above, pp. 201-4, 219-20, 250-4.

³⁶ *HoP 1386-1421*, ii, pp. 19-21, 31-2; iii, pp. 2-3.

³⁷ Above, pp. 222-5.

allowed Sir William (later Lord) Bonville (d.1461) to challenge the Courtenay earls' dominance of Devon and the wider region.³⁸ The two decades after the earl came of age saw the struggle become increasingly hostile, especially as it began to interact with fractures in the wider late-Lancastrian polity. The feud culminated in 1455, when the earl's armed retainers occupied Exeter, besieged the fortified residence of one of Bonville's allies and engaged Bonville's men in battle at Clyst Bridge. From c.1439 onwards, however, there were repeated outbreaks of conflict and even violence between the two factions, and Exeter behaved in a number of different ways as it sought to navigate the situation. The city's responses to each development in the county are all of interest, so we will consider them in order.

During the 1430s, before the feud truly began, the corporation had engaged with both Bonville and the earl, especially over the dispute between the city and the cathedral chapter.³⁹ Wine and other hospitality were frequently given to both, and they were also sought out for their advice or support.⁴⁰ From 1439-40 until 1442, however, both men (as well as almost all other Devon aristocrats) disappear from the city's accounts.⁴¹ It appears that Exeter withdrew entirely from its connections with Devon's political society: given that this period marked the first violent outbreak of feuding, it seems likely that there was a connection between this decision and the state of the county.⁴² The risk involved in engaging with either party (which might have alienated or angered the other) was evidently deemed to outweigh any reward, especially in a period when the city was no longer actively involved in any disputes. In 1442, however, the balance changed. Firstly, the county situation improved as

³⁸ For this period, see Cherry, 'Struggle for Power'.

³⁹ Above, pp. 233-4.

⁴⁰ DHC, ECA, CRA 1432-3, 1433-4, 1437-8, 1438-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1439-40, 1440-1, 1441-2.

⁴² Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 251-6.

the royal council intervened to pacify the feuding.⁴³ Shortly afterwards, the city found itself in a situation where it could benefit from aristocratic assistance, on this occasion in response to a request for a royal loan.⁴⁴ The choice of the earl of Devon as an intermediary with the crown is a somewhat-puzzling one, given that he had recently been chastised for his role in the previous disturbances, but it indicates that either the city's own situation had changed to the extent that they were willing to risk Bonville's displeasure, or that the temperature of county politics had cooled substantially.⁴⁵ The following year, an unknown dispute developed between Exeter and Sir John (IV) Dynham, a substantial local gentleman.⁴⁶ Managing this confrontation seems to have been the occasion for the renewal of connections with the earl and Bonville, who both received substantial gifts of wine.⁴⁷

This incident was almost immediately followed by the dispute between the city and the bishop between 1445 and 1448, which was discussed in the previous chapter.⁴⁸ Although it is unnecessary to reprise the details of this case here, it is important to note that the city continued to treat with both the earl and Bonville throughout the period, and that the corporation's decision to particularly seek Bonville's aid towards the end of the struggle was probably a defensive measure in response to the earl favouring the bishop's party, rather than a deliberate declaration of wider support for Bonville. However, this same period also saw the Courtenay-Bonville feud again erupt into open conflict. In 1446, Bonville returned from

⁴³ Nicolas ed., *Proceedings of the Privy Council*, v, pp. 158, 173-5.

⁴⁴ DHC, ECA, CRA 1442-3.

⁴⁵ One possibility for the choice of Devon is that his Beaufort connections (by marriage) were of greater value following the restoration of Cardinal Beaufort to pre-eminence in the royal council from late-1441. Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 190-2.

⁴⁶ Dynham's loyalties in the area are difficult to determine, although he appears to have remained mostly neutral in the Courtenay-Bonville feud. He himself quarrelled (apparently violently) with Bonville in 1439 but this did not draw him into the earl's faction; indeed, Martin Cherry argues that by 1452-3 Dynham was one of Bonville's friends and allies. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', p. 288. Hannes Kleineke, however, notes that their association cannot have been especially close, as Dynham was not among the Bonville supporters who were attacked by the earl's men in 1455-6. Kleineke, 'The Dinham Family', p. 193n.

⁴⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA 1443-4.

⁴⁸ Above, pp. 234-8.

a term as seneschal of Gascony and this almost immediately resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of allegations of violence brought by both parties against each other.⁴⁹ As such, the corporation's behaviour in this period was in distinct contrast to its strategy during the earlier period of county violence, when it had severed connections with both Courtenay and Bonville. The difference was undoubtedly the complicating factor provided by the dispute with the bishop: either the city's need for aristocratic support outweighed the dangers posed by the feud, or, alternatively, the bishop had sought aristocratic allies and the corporation was forced to respond in kind.

In many respects, however, this strategy still represented a form of neutrality, as the city continued to maintain contact (particularly in the form of gifts of wine) with both men throughout, something which continued after the dispute with the bishop was concluded.⁵⁰ This displays two stark contrasts to the normal behaviour of town governments. Firstly, corporations typically sought the support of only one magnate (and his affinity) at a time, whereas Exeter worked with both the earl and Bonville: even though the corporation apparently came to regard Bonville as the more useful or sympathetic ally and perhaps even saw the earl as the bishop's partisan, they still maintained a connection with Courtenay. Secondly, the city government continued to seek the earl's favour after the conclusion of the dispute, even though he had proven demonstrably less useful than another magnate. In normal circumstances, we might expect a city to sever ties with such a figure, but Exeter chose not to: the most likely cause was that this was a way of limiting the threat posed by aristocratic feuding. If the corporation had cut all ties with the earl and placed itself clearly in Bonville's lordship, this would presumably not have endeared the city to the earl or his supporters. This may also explain why the corporation did not sever contact with both men

⁴⁹ Cherry, 'Struggle for Power', p. 127.

⁵⁰ DHC, ECA, CRA 1448-9, 1449-50, 1450-1, 1451-2, 1453-4, 1454-5.

even after the conclusion of the episcopal dispute, when they no longer needed active magnate assistance. In a highly-charged situation produced by competition for hegemony in the region, Exeter might have suffered the displeasure of *both* parties if it had again withdrawn entirely from county society: if it snubbed both men, both might have taken it as an insult, particularly as each may have been unaware that the other had also been cut off. Moreover, simply avoiding the earl and Bonville was impossible, since Exeter itself was one of the most important theatres for demonstrating and disputing local authority (especially at the county sessions and assizes, which were repeatedly disturbed by violence in the 1450s).⁵¹ The corporation must also have considered that warring aristocrats were more likely to consider collateral damage to the city acceptable if the city did not treat them with due respect. As such, the city government's behaviour can still be described as being one of studious neutrality: by engaging with both parties equally but keeping them at equal arm's length, the corporation sought to avoid becoming associated with either, while simultaneously alienating neither.

There was, however, a significant change in the pattern of the city's links to the aristocracy after 1448: rather than only dealing with the earl and Bonville, the corporation sought out third parties. The most important of these was Henry Holland (d.1475), who succeeded his father as duke of Exeter in 1447.⁵² Holland himself was not approached until 1456-7, but a number of his servants were entertained by the city in 1448-9, including his marshal and Master Hugh Payne, who was the duke's lieutenant in the admiralty court.⁵³ Furthermore, Payne was elected as the city's MP in 1450, as were the duke's relative Thomas Holland (in

⁵¹ Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 292-4, 306, 322.

⁵² Holland himself did not, of course, prove to be an eirenic figure either in Devon or elsewhere. However, this was not necessarily evident in the late 1440s and, moreover, he was the only magnate who possessed a similar level of land in the far south-west as Devon or Bonville. For his later disruptive influence in Devon see Cherry 'Crown and Political Community', p. 326, and for his wider activities Griffiths 'Local Rivalries and National Politics'.

⁵³ DHC, ECA, CRA 1448-9, 1456-7. For Payne, *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 669.

November 1449 and 1455) and another admiralty servant, David John (in 1453).⁵⁴ Another Holland connection was Sir Robert Vere, who was repeatedly rewarded by the corporation between 1453 and 1455, as the feud reached its climax: Vere was certainly the duke's chamberlain in 1457, and this later appointment makes it likely that he was associated with him earlier.⁵⁵ The greatest of the city's gifts, however, was the £20 given to the duchess of Exeter when she arrived in the city in 1455-6.⁵⁶ This may, of course, bear more relation to the duchess being the daughter of the duke of York, rather than the wife of the duke of Exeter, but even that would indicate the corporation's desire to secure the favour (and thus, perhaps, the protection or intervention) of a neutral figure. Another neutral figure approached by the city government was Richard, lord Rivers. Rivers was a complete outsider who had no property in Devon, but in 1451 he was in the county preparing to lead an army to Gascony. He also, however, took an interest in the ongoing hostilities, and a love-day was held under his auspices at Colcombe, a principal Courtenay residence about twenty-five miles east of Exeter.⁵⁷ Rivers and his wife received a substantial amount of hospitality while in and near Exeter, far more than any other visiting nobleman (and, indeed, more than most local magnates received in a given year). The corporation evidently felt that the threat presented by the feud was so great that they had to encourage Rivers and his mediation, even if it was unlikely to have a meaningful effect.

In both the 1390s and the period of the Courtenay-Bonville feud, therefore, division within county society caused changes in Exeter's engagement with the landed aristocracy. However, the nature of these changes is difficult to predict, and relied upon the interaction of factors from both within and without the town. One very striking difference, however, was that

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 462, 502. Alexander, 'Exeter Members of Parliament', p. 208.

⁵⁵ *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 905. DHC, ECA, CRA 1453-4, 1455-6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1455-6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1450-1. Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 280-1.

between each of the two periods: why did the corporation attempt to remain neutral in the 1440s and 1450s, but took a side in the 1390s? The reason for this can be found in the nature of the two disputes and the wider political situation in which they took place. Put simply, the feud between Thomas Courtenay and William Bonville was much more volatile and violent than that between Edward Courtenay and John Holland fifty years earlier. The 1390s did not see armed men raiding estates, besieging castles, fighting skirmishes or, crucially, occupying cities.⁵⁸ This was a consequence of the fact that Earl Thomas and lord Bonville were well-matched and neither was obviously in the ascendant. Both had significant local support, substantial local estates and also connections at court. This produced a desperate scenario where the only possible option for each side was to escalate the feud further, or else capitulate. In the 1390s, however, Earl Edward was very much on the defensive: Holland's position as half-brother of the king gave him an insurmountable advantage while Richard II lived. This difference between the two was itself caused by differing political atmospheres. In the 1440s and 1450s, the vacuum caused by Henry VI's inadequacy meant that a dispute between aristocrats like Courtenay and Bonville could become remarkably bitter and violent before there was any meaningful intervention from central government. By contrast, the favouritism shown by Richard II for his half-brother meant that any violence against Holland's adherents swiftly attracted royal attention: regional hegemony in the 1390s was thus disputed through the law and the loyalties of local gentlemen, rather than through violence.⁵⁹

For Exeter, the principal dangers to be avoided were physical damage due to violence, and legal or economic damage due to attracting aristocratic or royal ire. In the 1390s, neither of these were likely outcomes from associating more with Holland than with Courtenay, as

⁵⁸ As happened in Taunton in 1451 and Exeter in 1455. *Ibid.*, pp. 281, 306-13.

⁵⁹ In a famous case, Courtenay was forced to throw himself on Richard's mercy to avoid imprisonment, after protecting a man who had murdered one of Holland's servants. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

Courtenay was unlikely to conduct violent attacks on his rival's supporters, while Richard II could hardly punish the city for adhering to his own favourite. This gave the city the opportunity to use Holland's favour to strike at the Courtenay interests which conflicted with Exeter's own: there was little risk to the city, but the reward might be significant. In the 1440s-50s, by contrast, the violent and uncertain nature of the county situation meant that the city could not do the same by aligning itself with Bonville. Had Henry VI been a more effective monarch, with the authority to dissuade aristocrats from using sustained campaigns of violence to advance their interests, then Exeter might well have been able to take advantage of the challenge posed by Bonville to the Courtenays' hegemony, but the vacuum caused by royal weakness instead made this an exceptionally risky venture.

In these examples from Exeter, one of the corporation's main objectives was to avoid antagonising the aristocrats who were competing for dominance in Devon, except when the citizens were confident that one party could protect them from the other. By contrast, when Norwich was faced with a divided political society in Norfolk, the city's response was dictated by the fact that it had already somehow attracted the enmity of the earl of Suffolk or of some element of his affinity.⁶⁰ Suffolk's growing local and national influence made him an exceptionally dangerous enemy, and the citizens did not help themselves by repeatedly giving the royal government the opportunity to intervene in their affairs. The citizens' response to the challenge posed by Suffolk's hostility was to align themselves with the disparate group which opposed Suffolk's regional hegemony, particularly the connection surrounding Sir

⁶⁰ See above, pp. 245-6. The citizens themselves had a number of explanations for the malice they believed Suffolk displayed against them, notably a bizarre story in which Suffolk's wife and Sir Thomas Tuddenham came to the city in disguise and were challenged by the keeper of the city ditches, after which they were 'ever afterwards set against the city'. *RCN*, i, pp. 344-5. One definite possibility for Suffolk's hostility was suggested in the previous chapter: that Suffolk had demanded something from the city (such as the right to nominate its MP, perhaps) which the citizens were unwilling to give.

John Fastolf and later the duke of Norfolk. This association between the city and the anti-Suffolk grouping can be divided into several stages.

The first of these was between 1436 and 1448, when the city twice lost its liberties on account of the allegedly-riotous conduct of its citizens. On both of these occasions, the royal government appointed wardens and justices of the peace to conduct the affairs of the city. In the circumstances, we might expect these men to have been Suffolk's dependents, but instead they were mostly figures who were associated with Fastolf. Following the seizure of the liberties in 1437, for instance, a warden and two sheriffs were appointed by the crown. The warden, John Welles, was a Norwich citizen who had established himself in London, but he was also a close associate of Fastolf who had been heavily involved in the investment of his profits from the French wars.⁶¹ The sheriffs, meanwhile, were John Lynford and Walter Eton.⁶² Lynford, an esquire from Stalham, was one of Fastolf's councillors and had been involved in Fastolf's land purchases since at least 1428, while Eton, a lawyer and former recorder of Norwich, had acted on Fastolf's behalf in a Norwich court a few years earlier.⁶³ After the second seizure in 1443, the government again appointed a warden and again the man chosen, Sir John Clifton, had links to Fastolf.⁶⁴ Clifton was also associated with Suffolk, making him a very rare example of a man who was probably acceptable to both factions in county politics.⁶⁵ The men appointed to be justices of the peace in the city were similarly mostly gentlemen connected with Fastolf such as Edmund Wichingham (another of Fastolf's councillors) or else lawyers associated either with him or with the wider anti-Suffolk group

⁶¹ Smith, 'Aspects of the career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 4-6, 103.

⁶² *CPR 1436-41*, p. 123.

⁶³ For Lynford see Smith, 'Aspects of the career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 27n, 45, 67, 79, 104, 109-11; Blomefield, x, p. 67. For Eton, see Smith, 'Aspects of the career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 48-9 and *HoP 1386-1421*, iii, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁴ Fastolf, Clifton and others (such as William Oldhall and Andrew Ogard) formed a network of veterans from the French wars. Smith, 'Aspects of the career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 103, 107, 136-7.

⁶⁵ Both, for instance, acted as Clifton's feoffees in 1447. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

(such as Henry Sturmer, William Yelverton and William Jenney).⁶⁶ Suffolk's interests were represented by a few men including John Heydon, but they were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the earl's opponents.⁶⁷

Quite how the Fastolf network acquired such a grip over these royal appointments is difficult to say: although he was hardly an unimportant figure, Fastolf could not match Suffolk's national or local influence, and he was also in France until 1439. What is undeniable, however, is that his supporters must have been more acceptable to Norwich's ruling elite than Suffolk's, given that the city government was dominated at this stage by the anti-Wetherby faction which the earl had ruled against in 1437.⁶⁸ This is further demonstrated by the patterns of Norwich's engagement with county society in the same period. Unfortunately, no city accounts have survived from between 1436-7 and 1442-3, the period when Fastolf's men were first involved in the city, but the influence of his supporters is almost immediately evident when the accounts begin again. In 1444-5, for instance, we find the citizens hiring a number of lawyers to represent them: at least four of the five (Thomas Young, Thomas Green, William Wangford and Henry Sturmer) were also employed by Fastolf.⁶⁹ In 1447-8, meanwhile, the citizens provided hospitality to William Yelverton, perhaps Fastolf's closest legal associate.⁷⁰ The city also made approaches to more senior figures who were in some way associated with Fastolf, such as Lord Scales. Scales was, of course, later to side with Suffolk (and, indeed, extend his lordship to Suffolk's affinity after Suffolk's death), but at this stage he was considered a possible ally by Fastolf, with whom he had established a cordial

⁶⁶ *CPR 1441-6*, p. 475. For Wichingham see Smith, 'Aspects of the Career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 45, 48, 103n, 104, 106-10. For the lawyers, *ibid.*, pp. 35, 46, 66, 113n, 114, 117, 132, 133n, 144-5, 195.

⁶⁷ *CPR 1441-6*, p. 475.

⁶⁸ Above, pp. 254-60.

⁶⁹ The fifth, Walter Moyle, was a serjeant-at-law who is not known to have been connected with either party. Smith, 'Aspects of the Career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 114, 118, 195. CAB, f. 227d.

⁷⁰ NRO, NCR, Case 17d, Chamberlains' Account Book 1448-58, f. 5d.

relationship in the French wars.⁷¹ Perhaps when the city sent a messenger to Scales' residence at Berkway (Hertfordshire) in 1442-3 they also expected that he might become part of the anti-Suffolk nexus.⁷² A further possible Fastolf connection was the city's attempt to gain the favour of Sir John Fortescue in 1449-50, when the king visited the city. Although the chief justice was an obvious person for the city to approach, it is nonetheless notable that of the entire royal party, the citizens chose a man who favoured Fastolf.⁷³

In the circumstances, it is a striking omission that Fastolf received nothing from the city. It is possible that approaches were made in the period for which there are no accounts, but it is nonetheless peculiar that the man himself received nothing during the latter part of this period. Moreover, from 1449 onwards, the preponderance of men with links to Fastolf was replaced by those with links to the duke of Norfolk. This was not the first time the duke and his men had been approached by the city: Norfolk himself had received £10 in 1442-3, and the rector of Hethill (a living in the duke's gift) and 'other esquires' of the duke were given a breakfast by the city in the same year.⁷⁴ From 1449, however, we find an increasing presence of the duke's men. In that year, his butler and hosteller both received coin from the citizens, while the following year John Dowebygging was retained by the city on an annual pension of 40s.⁷⁵ Dowebygging was a servant of the infamous Thomas Daniel, an esquire of the household with connections to the duke of Norfolk and himself a significant figure on the political stage.⁷⁶ Daniel was repeatedly entertained in the houses of prominent citizens in 1451-2 and the same year saw gifts to the duke (a pipe of wine), his wife (a porpoise) and his

⁷¹ Castor, *Duchy*, p. 148n. Eadem, 'Scales, Thomas, seventh Baron Scales (1399?-1460), soldier and administrator', *ODNB*.

⁷² CAB, f. 224.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, ff. 8d, 11. Gifts were also received by the king's domestic servants and the king himself, but there is no record of anything given to other magnates or courtiers. Smith, 'Aspects of the Career of Sir John Fastolf', pp. 113n, 211.

⁷⁴ CAB, f. 224. For Hethill, Blomefield, v, p. 109.

⁷⁵ NRO, NCR, Case 17d, Chamberlains' Account Book 1448-58, ff. 12d, 16d.

⁷⁶ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 174n, 176n.

cousin, John Howard esquire (25d).⁷⁷ Fastolf's men, meanwhile, disappeared from the city's expenses, other than the pension of the city's legal counsel, William Jenney.

What caused the city to suddenly shift from Fastolf to the duke? It was certainly not a political change, given that Fastolf and Norfolk were effectively allied through their mutual opposition to Suffolk.⁷⁸ Instead, this development may have been caused by a breakdown in the relationship between Fastolf and the corporation. The shift to Norfolk took place almost immediately upon the restoration of the city's liberties in 1448: after this date, the only connections to Fastolf were the retention of William Jenney from 1450 and the approach to Sir John Fortescue in 1449. This may indicate that the citizens were keen to cut ties with Fastolf after they regained their independence. A letter from Sir John Clifton while he was the royal governor of the city (1443-6) indicates that this preference for Norfolk over Fastolf may have originated earlier. This missive, written when Clifton had temporarily left the city at the urging of his wife (allegedly on account of poor health), suggests that the citizens had promised him that they would be 'rewlyd' by the duke of Norfolk during his absence.⁷⁹ A letter from Fastolf himself, meanwhile, implies that he expected the citizens to support his own legal affairs (quite how they were to do so is unclear), and felt betrayed when they did not.⁸⁰ Perhaps Fastolf's own demands on the city had become just as unwelcome as Suffolk's interventions. Alternatively, it cannot have escaped the citizens' notice that Fastolf had failed to protect their own interests against Suffolk. In the aftermath of the 1442 riot (when the citizens threatened to demolish the priory with cannon), Suffolk imposed a humbling settlement on the citizens, which marked their total defeat in their struggles with the priory

⁷⁷ NRO, NCR, Case 17d, Chamberlains' Account Book 1448-58, ff. 17-17d.

⁷⁸ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 156-64.

⁷⁹ NRO, NCR, Case 9d, #5.

⁸⁰ Gairdner ed., *Paston Letters*, ii, p. 213. This was concerned with the will of Lady Bardolf, so perhaps related to her property in the city.

and a number of other religious institutions.⁸¹ The citizens were also forced to recognise that Suffolk's power was such that only he could undo his own acts. It is, for instance, notable that they (fruitlessly) appealed to Suffolk himself pleading for the modification of his settlement, rather than asking Fastolf, Norfolk or any other aristocrat to reopen the arbitration.⁸²

While Suffolk lived, therefore, the corporation were limited to a defensive strategy of seeking the support of aristocrats who shared their hostility towards the earl, in the hope that such figures might provide some protection against such a powerful opponent. Following Suffolk's murder, however, the citizens instead leveraged these connections to go on the offensive. In late-1450 and 1451, the corporation supported Norfolk, Fastolf, Yelverton and others in their efforts to use Suffolk's fall to destroy his local affinity, particularly men like Heydon and Sir Thomas Tuddenham. The city presumably hoped that a new local political order might emerge (which might be more sympathetic than Suffolk in the citizens' struggles against the cathedral priory), or else that Suffolk's interventions in urban politics might be discredited (and thus ripe for overturning) if his and his affinity's rule of the locality was tarnished by accusations of treason, extortion and corruption. The corporation's involvement in the wider attack on Suffolk's affinity was welcomed and perhaps even encouraged by the leaders of the anti-Suffolk faction in county society. In October 1450, for instance, we find Yelverton's clerk writing to John Paston to report his master's advice that they should encourage the inhabitants of both Norwich and Swaffham to direct their complaints against Tuddenham, Heydon and others to the duke of York.⁸³ A few months later, the city was deemed so hostile to Suffolk's men that the sessions which were to hear

⁸¹ NRO, NCR, Case 9c, #14.

⁸² *Ibid.*, #15.

⁸³ Gairdner ed., *Paston Letters*, ii, p. 175. For Swaffham's petition against Sir Thomas Tuddenham, *ibid.*, ii, pp. 231-3 For the articles against Suffolk and his men which Norwich produced at this date, see *RCN*, i, pp. 343-7.

the case against them was moved from Norwich to Walsingham by the Suffolk-loyalist judge John Prisot.⁸⁴

However, as discussed by Castor, Suffolk's network proved resilient and swiftly recovered under the leadership of lord Scales.⁸⁵ The failure of the anti-Suffolk faction caused a further shift in how Norwich's government connected with landed political society: it cut ties almost completely from 1452 onwards. Indeed, the only evidence of any connections at all are the annual pensions given to John Damme (the recorder, and friend of the Pastons), William Jenney (as legal counsel) and Dowebygging between 1453-4 and 1457-8, when the city records abruptly end.⁸⁶ We can again explain this shift using the framework of risk and reward. Between 1437 and 1450, the citizens had been forced to engage with one faction in county society in an attempt to minimise the risk posed by Suffolk and his affinity. Following Suffolk's fall, the corporation maintained their connections with men like Norfolk and Yelverton, as supporting their attacks on Suffolk's affinity offered possible rewards for the city, notably the potential to overturn the damaging provisions of his arbitration of the city's dispute with the priory and other religious institutions. However, when the old Suffolk affinity regained its balance under the leadership of Scales, the city's connection to Norfolk and his allies became unnecessary and potentially dangerous. Unlike Suffolk, Scales had no history of conflict with Norwich, meaning that the city had no need of aristocratic assistance to defend itself against him, while engaging with Norfolk or Fastolf might have needlessly antagonised him without benefiting the city in any way. As such, the citizens adopted a policy of isolation, since engaging with either faction offered far more risk than reward.

⁸⁴ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 158-9.

⁸⁵ Castor, *Duchy*, pp. 161-4, 167-73.

⁸⁶ NRO, NCR, Case 17d, Chamberlains' Account Book 1448-58, ff. 26-34.

Divided lordship, in summary, produced a number of different responses from towns, depending on, among other things, the nature of the division, the wider political situation, the needs of the town, and the pre-existing relationships between the town and individual aristocrats. However, divided lordship was not the only scenario which forced towns to consider the state of county society, and decide whether the balance of risk and reward made engagement or isolation the wiser course of action. The various outbreaks of violent instability throughout the later middle ages, for instance, caused similar headaches for city governments. On these occasions, events persuaded the corporation that their interests were best served by forging closer ties with the aristocracy, but for a number of different reasons. Sometimes, for instance, a payment to an aristocrat during a period of conflict appears to be little more than protection money or a bribe to persuade the aristocrat to leave, such as the 100s paid by Exeter to the duke of Somerset in 1460 when he was in Exeter gathering men.⁸⁷ Other payments to aristocrats at similar times, however, are more likely to represent appeals for protection against the threat posed by others, or by general disorder. Thus, as mentioned earlier, Exeter paid ten marks to Sir Philip Courtenay of Powderham for his ‘friendship’ in 1460-1.⁸⁸ With both the earl of Devon and lord Bonville actively involved in the civil war, Sir Philip was probably the most substantial aristocrat left in Devon, making him well placed to protect the city against the bands of soldiers who were harming (‘nociant’) the city.⁸⁹ Ten years later we find the city turning to Scintclere Pomeray to ‘treat for peace’ with soldiers returning home to the region.⁹⁰ Pomeray was a member of a reasonably important Devon family, but was nevertheless a remarkably minor figure compared to the city’s usual magnate contacts, suggesting that no-one of greater rank was at hand. In 1497, Exeter swiftly resurrected a connection with the earl of Devon in response to the twin Cornish risings of

⁸⁷ DHC, ECA, CRA 1460-1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ The city also expended considerable amounts on guarding its walls, and also paying off at least one group of soldiers.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1470-1.

that year.⁹¹ The preceding few years had seen the earl receive only a little wine and other hospitality, but the threat posed by the rebels persuaded the city government to provide him with both soldiers and supplies.⁹² On all of these occasions, the corporation engaged with landed aristocrats in an attempt to protect the city against the physical risks posed by disorder, when threats of force could only be countered by a response in kind: Exeter was poorly equipped to defend itself against large armed groups, and was forced to turn to the landed aristocracy. A similar situation can be seen in Norwich in 1381 (we are again reliant on Blomefield's narrative), when the corporation sought out the advice of Sir Thomas Morieux, a retainer of the duke of Lancaster, in how to defend itself against the East Anglian outbreak of the Peasants' Revolt.⁹³ This approach to Morieux is slightly different to those in Exeter as Norwich had an established relationship with both Morieux and his lord, Gaunt, but it again displays the importance to cities of aristocratic contacts in a time when the city was threatened by external violence.⁹⁴

Sometimes, the citizens' very failure to adequately insure themselves against disorder spilling over from the countryside produced situations in which they needed to seek help from aristocrats to defend themselves against further damage, especially in the form of royal displeasure. In late 1483 until 1485, for instance, Exeter was at pains to ingratiate itself with John, lord Scrope of Bolton, Richard III's 'northern plantation' in Devon.⁹⁵ In part, this was probably because of the opportunities provided by the proximity of an ally of the new king, but it is also very likely they sought Scrope's support in persuading the king of their loyalty after Buckingham's Revolt: the bishop of Exeter was one of the leaders, the rebels' standard

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1496-7, 1497-8.

⁹² For the earlier relationship, below pp. 299-300.

⁹³ Blomefield, iii, p. 108.

⁹⁴ Above, pp. 198-201.

⁹⁵ DHC, ECA, CRA 1483-4, 1484-5. R.E. Horrox, *Richard III: A Study of Service* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 22-3, 204.

had been raised in the city and several important rebels (such as Sir Thomas St. Leger) had later been executed outside the Guildhall.⁹⁶ It is possible that Salisbury's decision to elect John Musgrave esquire (another northerner, who had been installed in Wiltshire by Richard) as its MP, apparently without his knowledge, was made on similar grounds: Salisbury had also been a centre of the rebellion (and, indeed, had been the site of Buckingham's execution).⁹⁷ In 1450, Salisbury had been similarly exposed on account of its involvement in the disturbances of that year, notably the murder of Bishop Ayscough and the subsequent looting of his palace in the city.⁹⁸ The city's unusually high expenditure on gifts to the nobility in the immediate aftermath can almost certainly be explained by a need to gain some measure of aristocratic favour in an attempt to placate the government.⁹⁹ Lord Stourton received 16s 8d, lord St. Amand 6s 8d and the duke of Somerset £1 6s 8d, while the sheriff received a pipe of wine and his deputy a mark in coin.¹⁰⁰ In Norwich, we are again reliant on Blomefield for knowledge of the city's actions in 1381, when Bishop Henry Despenser drove Lister's rebels from the town. According to Blomefield, the citizens received Despenser with 'all joy and honour imaginable', but it is far more likely that their gift to him was an attempt to excuse their failure to resist the rebels, rather than just gratitude.¹⁰¹

As well as the instability they caused, royal dynastic changes themselves caused cities to re-examine their interactions with aristocrats. Indeed, from the perspective of a provincial city, perhaps the most immediate consequences of a usurpation were the changes in the make-up of the local aristocracy. Moreover, engagement with newly-prominent local magnates was a

⁹⁶ Gill, *Richard III*, p. 75.

⁹⁷ LB2, f. 151d. *HoP 1439-1509*, p. 620.

⁹⁸ M.L. Kekewich, 'Ayscough, William (c.1395–1450)', *ODNB*.

⁹⁹ Given the nature of Henry VI's rule, the citizens were presumably more concerned with the displeasure of the aristocrats who had replaced the duke of Suffolk as quasi-regent than that of the king himself.

¹⁰⁰ LB1, #445-6. The editor judges that 'Lord Seyntmond' refers to Lord Seymour, but given that this title did not exist in 1450-1, it is far more likely to refer to William Beauchamp, Lord St. Amand (and brother of Ayscough's successor as bishop).

¹⁰¹ Blomefield, iii, p. 110.

critical part of the city's integration into the new regime: with the king generally a distant figure, the most obvious components of the new order were the new monarch's lieutenants or favourites in the region, and it does not seem implausible to suggest that city governments often perceived changes of regime through the lens of these local shifts. In Exeter, each stage of the Wars of the Roses saw a change in the corporation's policies of engagement with local aristocrats, reflecting the shifts in the local balance of power. After Edward IV took the throne in 1461, the city government quickly attached itself to the new power in the region, Humphrey, lord Stafford of Southwick, while the Readeption saw the corporation shift to the restored Lancastrian aristocracy, especially Sir Hugh Courtenay of Boconnoc and John Courtenay, earl of Devon.¹⁰² After the restoration of Yorkist rule, the citizens (briefly) engaged with the duke of Clarence, who had been granted the estates previously held by Stafford, while Richard III's usurpation, as discussed above, led them to seek the favour of Lord Scrope of Bolton.¹⁰³ Following Richard's defeat in 1485, the corporation proceeded to associate with the new Tudor aristocracy, particularly the restored Courtenay earl of Devon and lord Willoughby de Broke.¹⁰⁴ These shifts are, of course, entirely predictable, but they again illustrate that city governments were alert to changes in local and national politics, and to how these changes required them to seek out new aristocratic supporters.

In all of the examples throughout this section, the behaviour of urban governments can almost-exclusively be classed as passive or reactive: their tactics were *responses* to changes in county and national politics which originated elsewhere. Ultimately, this is because towns lacked any ability (and, arguably, desire) to influence developments in the county or beyond. It is, for instance, difficult to imagine a situation in which a town's actions could have played

¹⁰² For Stafford of Southwick, above, pp. 205-6. Sir Hugh Courtenay of Boconnoc assisted the city in a number of ways during the Readeption, notably by attempting to persuade Richard Tunstall (Henry VI's chamberlain) to excuse the city from some burden. DHC, ECA, CRA 1470-1.

¹⁰³ Above, pp. 210, 291-2.

¹⁰⁴ Below, pp. 299-300.

a key role in determining the outcome of an aristocratic feud: if Exeter's government had chosen to support Bonville over Courtenay, for instance, would this have tilted the scales? Towns' passivity in the face of county politics, however, often went even further than this, as many of their actions were not only responses to events, but responses which sought to insulate themselves from danger, mainly through the preservation of some form of neutrality, or by swiftly seeking the favour of newly-established magnates. Apart from during times of peaceful or unchallenged lordship, the only examples of a town attempting to take advantage of a development in county politics to advance its own interests were Exeter's engagement with John Holland, duke of Exeter, in the late 1390s (to reduce the Courtenays' encroachment on the city) and Norwich's courting of the anti-Suffolk network in the early 1450s (to strike at Suffolk's affinity, presumably in the hope of overturning his award of 1443).¹⁰⁵ At other times of local political division, our cities responded to events in a defensive manner, seeking to persuade aristocrats to protect them against general disorder, against other aristocrats and, indeed, to persuade them not to menace the city themselves. When their own campaigns required aristocratic support, the citizens attempted to acquire it in a way that did not involve the city in any divisions in the countryside unless, as in the case of Norwich in the 1430s-40s, some earlier incident had already compromised the city's neutrality. To return to the formula of risk and reward, towns were first and foremost concerned with the elimination of the risks posed by county society. When possible, such risks could be negated by a policy of isolation, such as that practised by Exeter in 1439-42 and Norwich in 1452-8, or through studious neutrality, such as Exeter's arms-length engagement with the warring county factions in 1449-55.

¹⁰⁵ Above, pp. 222-5, 288-9.

IV – Changes Over Time: the ‘New Monarchy’

Having considered how the nature and frequency of urban-aristocratic relationships were affected by the structure of county society and by developments in local and national politics, we must now turn our attention to how these relationships developed in response to long-term shifts in the English polity. This naturally brings us to the disputed concept of the ‘new monarchy’ supposedly established by Edward IV and developed further by Henry VII.¹⁰⁶ One of the key changes generally associated with this idea is that the crown modified the means by which it connected with and governed the provinces, mostly by empowering lesser figures (notably men in the royal household and affinity) to perform roles which had previously been the preserve of the nobility and members of magnates’ connections. As discussed in the previous chapter, town governments valued contacts who combined local authority with national influence: the ‘new monarchy’ thesis implies that this category would have broadened to include lesser figures, and perhaps also that the traditional landed nobility might even have been eclipsed by these new men as targets for urban appeals.

The evidence from Norwich and Exeter mostly supports this conclusion, although there are subtleties within the pattern.¹⁰⁷ In broad terms, developments can be split into two phases. In the first, the landed aristocracy (whose influence was based upon their own estates, affinities and established connection to the region) were replaced as urban contacts by figures with close personal relationships with the monarch, who we might term courtiers. The provision of support by this type of figure was not, of course, an entirely new development:

¹⁰⁶ For differing views on this issue see e.g. J.R. Lander, *The Limitations of English Monarchy in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 53-5; Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, chapters 11-12; A. Goodman, *The New Monarchy: England 1471-1534* (Oxford, 1988); J.L. Watts, “‘A New Ffundacion of is Crowne’: Monarchy in the age of Henry VII”, in B.J. Thompson ed., *Reign of Henry VII* (Stamford, 1995), pp. 31-53; Horrox, *Richard III*, pp. 226-72; S.J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government 1485-1558* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 24-38. Morgan, ‘The King’s Affinity’; Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 301-18, 323-30.

¹⁰⁷ As discussed above, Southampton and Salisbury established few links with the aristocracy, and so are not useful examples in this context.

Sir Thomas Erpingham was, for instance, an earlier example. What was new, however, was that Norwich and Exeter began exclusively to seek the favour of such men, in preference to local magnates. Norwich's government, for instance, was particularly interested in securing the favour of Anthony Woodville, lord Scales and later earl Rivers, despite the fact that 'he was a second-rate figure even in East Anglia, where the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, the earl of Oxford, and Lord Howard counted for more'.¹⁰⁸ Woodville was, however, the king's brother-in-law, and was close enough to Edward IV to be appointed tutor to the prince of Wales. Such familiarity with Edward was a characteristic shared by almost all of Exeter and Norwich's aristocratic contacts during his second reign: Norwich also sought the favour of the duchesses of York and Suffolk (Edward's mother and sister), while Exeter approached Edward's other sister, the dowager-duchess of Exeter, and her second husband, Sir Thomas St. Leger.¹⁰⁹ Exeter also sought the assistance of figures who were close to the king in ways other than blood, such as Peter Courtenay, a clerk who had been in Edward's service since at least 1463 when he served as royal proctor in the papal curia.¹¹⁰ By 1472 he had become Edward's secretary, which was followed by presentations as dean of Exeter (1476), dean of Windsor (1477) and then bishop of Exeter (1478), by which point he was also a royal councillor. Courtenay was a frequent recipient of gifts from the city throughout the late-1470s and early-1480s, and his relationship with the citizens was similar to those which they had previously established with landed magnates, rather than with his episcopal predecessors.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Attreed, *King's Towns*, p. 118. M. Hicks, 'Woodville [Wydeville], Anthony, second Earl Rivers (c.1440-1483)', *ODNB*.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. NRO, NCR, Case 7e, Chamberlains' Roll 1463-4; Case 18a, Chamberlains' Account Book 1470-90, f. 74; 1479-87, ff. 5-7d. Attreed, *King's Towns*, pp. 117-18. DHC, ECA, CRA 1474-5, 1476-7, 1478-9, 1482-3.

¹¹⁰ Courtenay was a member of a cadet branch of the family, which had allied with Bonville against the senior Courtenay line in the 1440s-50s and supported the Yorkists in 1460-1. R.E. Horrox, 'Courtenay, Peter (c.1432-1492)', *ODNB*.

¹¹¹ DHC, ECA, CRA 1476-7, 1477-8, 1478-9, 1480-1, 1481-2, 1482-3. The city's relationship with Courtenay's immediate predecessor, John Booth, had also been unusually close, which may be related to Booth's own links with the king, as he had been Edward's secretary in the 1460s. N. Orme, 'Booth [Bothe], John (d. 1478)', *ODNB*.

The second phase in these developments saw the senior courtiers themselves replaced by lesser men, particularly well-connected lawyers and royal administrators and functionaries. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of these was Robert Rydon, the clerk of the royal council, who assisted Exeter during the royal visit of 1497 and was then retained by the city from at least 1503-4 onwards.¹¹² Another example was the valet of the crown William Frost, who was rewarded by Exeter several times in this period.¹¹³ Unless an otherwise-unknown city man of the same name existed, Frost was even elected mayor in September 1497, when Henry VII himself was in the city passing judgment on Warbeck's rebels.¹¹⁴ Norwich, meanwhile, made particular use of the friendship of Sir James Hobart, a Norfolk lawyer who served as privy councillor and attorney-general from 1486 onwards.¹¹⁵ The legal cases fought by Exeter during Henry's reign make plain how little role the landed aristocracy now had in the city's affairs. Perhaps the most striking was a dispute with St. Nicholas Priory, a Benedictine monastery in the city. Just as in the city's disputes with the cathedral chapter and the bishop in the reign of Henry VI, this institution claimed to hold a fee within Exeter which was poorly defined and conflicted with the rights claimed by the citizens.¹¹⁶ The outcome is unknown, but the city's accounts make it very clear that the corporation's strategy was based entirely around lawyers such as John Denys of Orlegh and the 'king's servant' Roger Holland.¹¹⁷ The contrast between this and the disputes earlier in the century is stark: of course, lawyers were involved in the city's battles with the cathedral and the bishop, but the earl of Devon and Sir William Bonville also played crucial roles.¹¹⁸ A second legal case was

¹¹² Above, pp. 209-11.

¹¹³ DHC, ECA, CRA 1486-7, 1494-5, 1495-6, 1503-4.

¹¹⁴ Frost was only admitted to the freedom (as a merchant) in 1495-6 and, very unusually, was elected mayor without first serving in the junior office of receiver. This strongly suggests that the Frost who was elected mayor was not a 'normal' city man. The valet of the crown of the same name is by far the most likely candidate given his existing links to the city and the circumstances of a royal visit. Rowe and Jackson eds., *Exeter Freeman*, p. 62.

¹¹⁵ E.g. NRO, NCR, Case 7e, Chamberlains' Roll 1492-3; Case 7f, Chamberlains' Roll 1503-4. *HoP 1439-1509*, pp. 458-9.

¹¹⁶ DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Roll #50, m.2.

¹¹⁷ E.g. DHC, ECA, CRA 1487-8, 1488-9, 1489-90, 1494-5, 1495-6.

¹¹⁸ Above, pp. 236-8.

with the city of London over a landing duty known as ‘scavage’.¹¹⁹ The details of the case are mostly irrelevant here, but again the landed aristocracy played a strikingly limited role. Indeed, their only definite involvement was when the matter came before parliament in 1504, when ‘diverse gentlemen and lawyers in parliament’ were paid 10s, presumably to secure the bill’s passage.¹²⁰ Apart from this, however, all the city’s expenses were on lawyers and on Robert Rydon (who received a linen cloth worth 35s for his assistance in 1501-2) and William Frost (who received 10m in 1503-4, either as a reward or to pay for legal work in London).¹²¹

As discussed at length in the previous chapter, city governments typically sought the assistance of men who combined local authority and national influence: these shifts under Edward IV and Henry VII imply that progressively more junior men began to offer this combination. Household figures had, of course, enjoyed national influence throughout the period through their close association with the ultimate source of such influence, the king. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, men with only national influence had previously struggled to assist towns because they did not represent a link between centre and periphery and could not ensure that the instruments they had access to (such as royal commissions) were discharged as intended by the local gentry. However, with the expansion of the royal affinity and the decline of magnate power bases which were truly independent of the crown, senior household figures could carry the king’s writ into the provinces far more effectively, making them an obvious target for townsmen seeking assistance.¹²² The increasing usefulness of royal administrators, meanwhile, reflected their growing prestige and influence, but also the growing ability of the crown to manage affairs in the provinces from

¹¹⁹ For this dispute see DHC, ECA, Miscellaneous Roll #82. TNA, STAC 1/2/78; E 111/114. *RP*, vi, p. 550.

¹²⁰ DHC, ECA, CRA 1503-4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* for these years.

¹²² For the expansion of the royal affinity into the provinces, see e.g. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 523-47; Horrox, *Richard III*, chapter 1.

London without reference to independent power structures.¹²³ In short, the evidence provided by townsmen's strategies for securing aristocratic assistance strongly support the thesis that the royal affinity and administration became far more important in the running of the English provinces from the reign of Edward IV onwards.

Within this broad picture of a decline in the importance of landed aristocrats, however, there were periods when they assumed a greater prominence in urban affairs. One of these, as already mentioned, was during Perkin Warbeck's revolt in 1497, when Exeter strengthened ties with the earl of Devon, who was leading the military resistance to Warbeck's army.¹²⁴ This presumably relates entirely to the physical threat posed by the rebels, something which the city's legal and administrative contacts were unable to counter. However, there is also a pattern in Exeter whereby landed magnates were approached more frequently by the corporation at the beginning of each reign. Thus, under Edward IV the city government first established a connection with lord Stafford of Southwick: although Stafford's landed strength was entirely reliant on royal grants, he was still much more recognisably a magnate than men like Sir Thomas St. Leger or Bishop Courtenay.¹²⁵ In the first few years after Henry VII's victory, meanwhile, the citizens sought the favour of Edward Courtenay, the restored earl of Devon, and Robert, lord Willoughby de Broke.¹²⁶ As with Stafford, these men were heavily reliant on royal grace for their landed wealth, but they were nonetheless magnates rather than courtiers or administrators.¹²⁷ In both instances, however, relationships with magnates withered: after the Radeption, Exeter briefly courted Stafford's apparent replacement, the duke of Clarence, but he was swiftly supplanted by St. Leger, Peter

¹²³ See e.g. Gunn, "New Men" and "New Monarchy"; idem, *Early Tudor Government*, pp. 48-50.

¹²⁴ Above, pp. 208, 290-1.

¹²⁵ Above, pp. 205-6.

¹²⁶ DHC, ECA, CRA 1486-7, 1487-8, 1488-9, 1489-90, 1490-1, 1491-2.

¹²⁷ For Willoughby, see D.A.S. Lockett, 'The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty: Henry VII and the Lords Willoughby de Broke', *Historical Research*, 49 (1996), pp. 254-65. For Courtenay, Stansfield, *Political Elites*, p. 324.

Courtenay, and well-connected legal figures like the royal attorney-general, Sir William Huddesfield.¹²⁸ In Henry VII's reign, meanwhile, the citizens severed their connections with Courtenay and Willoughby after c.1493 (except for during Warbeck's revolt in 1497), after which point they conducted their affairs with the assistance of men like Rydon and Frost, as well as local lawyers. We can see the first part of this pattern during the Readeption and also during the brief reign of Richard III, when the city was keen to secure the favour of the restored Courtenay earl and Richard's northern ally, lord Scrope of Bolton, respectively: had these reigns lasted longer, perhaps they too might have been replaced by courtiers or administrators.¹²⁹

Two questions are raised by this pattern: why were landed aristocrats useful to towns only at the beginning of these reigns, and why did this differ from earlier periods when such men remained useful throughout? The latter was a consequence of the developments discussed above, whereby increasingly minor figures acquired the ability to assist towns and were apparently preferred by townsmen over magnates. The first question, meanwhile, is related to the precise nature of the changes wrought by the 'new monarchy': the power of royal courtiers and administrators (and thus their ability to assist townsmen) was entirely underpinned by the authority of the crown. Given that Edward and Henry were both usurpers, this authority was significantly limited during the first years of their reigns. In addition, bodies like the royal household and affinity were in a state of flux in the aftermath of each usurpation, as the new monarch balanced rewarding his supporters with placating the less-hostile elements of the old regime.¹³⁰ In a situation where the authority of the royal affinity and administration might not be accepted, and when these institutions themselves

¹²⁸ Above, p. 296. DHC, ECA, CRA 1471-2, 1472-3.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 1470-1, 1483-4, 1484-5. Above, p. 293.

¹³⁰ See e.g. D.A.L. Morgan, 'The House of Policy: The Political Role of the late Plantagenet Household, 1422-1485', in D.R. Starkey *et al.*, *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London, 1987), pp. 25-70.

might be undergoing significant changes in personnel, it is perhaps unsurprising that townsmen instead sought the assistance of landed magnates associated with the new monarch. Although these men ultimately also relied on the crown, their authority was magnified through their possession of significant estates, making their influence much more immediate and effective during the period after each usurpation, something which may have been especially attractive if the townsmen believed that early-reign instability might turn violent.

V – Conclusions

As in the previous chapter, this discussion touches on themes which we must now draw out. The simplest but perhaps most important point is that town governments were keen observers of local and national politics, and were quick to react to changes which had the potential to affect urban affairs, including events which rendered certain aristocrats more or less useful to the town: this poses a significant challenge to any suggestion that towns were introspective, isolated pockets. However, this concept is not without validity, as the evidence discussed above indicates that towns probably *were* habitually introspective, but their governments were prevented from becoming truly isolated because they were forced to take account of the opportunities and challenges posed by the world outside the city walls. In particular, town governments made connections with aristocrats in two scenarios: when they sought the aid which these men could provide, or when the situation in the county or country threatened the town's physical or legal safety. In both cases, however, towns normally limited this contact to only a few aristocrats, generally a local magnate and a handful of his associates or, later in the period, a small number of courtiers and royal administrators. At no point, therefore, would it be accurate to suggest that towns were connected to or integrated with county society or with aristocratic or gentry society more widely: they approached aristocrats in the pursuit of specific benefits, rather than because they considered themselves to be part

of landed society. This can be obscured by the long, near-permanent relationships which towns established with some figures, but even these were a means of prosecuting the town's interests, rather than representing a structural connection. Once a magnate had proven himself to be a suitable 'good lord', the town would maintain a connection with him through hospitality and gifts, but this was an investment towards his assistance in future difficulties, rather than being a recognition that a permanent politico-social link had been formed, or that they had joined his affinity. Similarly, relationship with local lords whose interests overlapped with a town's (notably the earls of Devon in Exeter) had to be managed permanently to prevent friction becoming hostility, but this did not represent a wider linkage between urban and aristocratic, nor a structural link between town and country.

The limited connection between towns and landed society probably also explains the decline in links between the two during the late fifteenth century: if towns only worked with the landed aristocracy because they could provide benefits or pose threats, then we would expect any links to atrophy if the landed aristocracy's capacity to help or hinder towns was reduced, or if other figures supplanted them. This was precisely what the 'new monarchy' appears to have brought about, as courtiers and administrators became more effective supporters than landed magnates on account of the extended reach of the royal government. The landed aristocracy's increasing reliance on royal grants and the crown's increasing oversight of their activities may also have limited the threat which local lords could pose to towns. There is little positive evidence of this from our towns, but it is nonetheless difficult to imagine an early-Tudor magnate acting in the same way as the fourteenth-century earl of Devon without attracting Henry VII's displeasure, especially when Exeter could call upon men like Robert Rydon.

Conclusions to Part 2

The previous two chapters have considered the circumstances in which aristocrats became involved in urban affairs, and also how developments and conditions in county and national politics affected the relationships between aristocratic society and our towns: we can now turn to drawing out the wider implications of these findings. In particular, this concluding section will concentrate on producing a framework in which to compare different urban-aristocratic relationships, ranging from the co-operative to the hostile. It will also then consider the difficult question of why some aristocrats were willing to assist towns: what benefits did they expect to receive in exchange for their lordship?

The 'Spectrum' of Urban-Aristocratic Relationships

As discussed in the Introduction, historians have previously discussed the relationship between towns and the aristocracy through the concept of the provision of 'patronage'.¹ This is an inadequate framework for considering the full scope of interactions between these groups, as it obscures a wide range of subtleties by creating a binary distinction between those who were 'patrons' and those who were not (the latter, moreover, often being overlooked entirely). Informed by the previous chapters, we can now construct a more comprehensive model, consisting of a number of categories on a 'spectrum' of such relationships. Three of these – 'good lords', 'failed lords' and 'enemies' – are particularly interesting and will be discussed at length, but there are a few other categories to consider first.

The largest category, perhaps predictably, contained those aristocrats who had no socially or politically-meaningful relationship with each of our cities. This group included the

¹ Above, pp. 10-12.

overwhelming majority of the English landed aristocracy, something which was mostly the result of two factors. Firstly, there were few connections between town governments and the landed gentry. Towns may have been central locations in the social and political life of the gentry, and this may have led to contact and communication between gentlemen and townsmen, but there is little evidence of any interaction between the gentry and the corporate structures of urban governments.² There were, of course, exceptions to this, notably when a gentleman was a close associate of the city's chosen magnate ally; when a gentleman's status was elevated by some external factor (such as Sir Thomas Erpingham's leadership of the crown-Duchy network, or Sir Thomas St. Leger's close relationship with Edward IV); or else during periods of crisis when more senior figures were absent. Secondly, as discussed repeatedly above, town corporations almost exclusively interacted with *local* aristocrats. Distant figures probably had little to offer towns and had little to gain in return. Furthermore, they were unlikely to be drawn into contact with distant towns through having entangled interests, as happened with Exeter and the earls of Devon. As such, these towns very rarely interacted with noblemen from outside the region or, until late in the period, with 'court' figures who lacked any local presence. The clear implication is that to find relationships between town governments and the aristocracy, we must generally look towards local magnates and their affinities.

A more complex relationship existed between towns and those aristocrats who were too locally powerful for the city to ignore, or whose interests were thoroughly entangled with the city's, but who did not become either a lord or an active enemy of the city. This produced an uneasy *détente*, where the corporation was forced to maintain a near-permanent relationship through gifts and hospitality, solely to protect the city's interests. Perhaps the

² As noted in Chapter 2, gentlemen who served in royal government did interact with town governments, but they did so as royal officers, rather than on their own account.

best examples of this group of aristocrats were the bishops of Exeter, Norwich and Salisbury. Bishops have appeared very little in this study because they rarely provided support to a town and, although spectacular, their confrontations with city governments were rare events. This, however, obscures the fact that each of these cities constantly maintained relationships with their bishops and cathedral authorities, with a stream of hospitality as well as more substantial gifts whenever a bishop was enthroned. As examples from each of these towns show, the unclear jurisdictional boundaries between religious institutions and their host cities could produce outbreaks of dangerous hostility, encouraging towns to maintain a cordial and constructive relationship where possible. The Courtenay earls of Devon provide an example of a similar relationship, but with secular aristocrats. In some periods (notably before 1377-c.1390, 1399-1422 and 1485-c.1492) the earls provided lordship to Exeter, but the city also maintained relations with the earls (or with men like the duke of Clarence who held the earldom's estates) at almost all other times. Just as with the bishops, the earls' interests permanently conflicted with those of the city, producing friction which had to be managed to prevent it developing into open hostility.

We can now turn our attention to the three most interesting groups of aristocrats who interacted with towns, and in particular on the factor which distinguished each from the others: their level of local authority. 'Failed lords' were those aristocrats who provided ineffective lordship to towns because they lacked sufficient local authority. In some cases, these men were significant national figures who possessed no real connection to the locality, such as Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, who was approached by both Exeter and Norwich in the 1420s but failed to provide either with meaningful aid.³ In other instances, a 'failed lord' had some possessions in the vicinity but not enough to exercise leadership, while a

³ Above, pp. 226-8, 241.

further group held sufficient estates to become a significant force in the region, but did not do so because their interests were elsewhere. An example of the latter was John (II) Holland, earl of Huntingdon, who failed to convert his estates in Devon into political dominance because his time was spent in London and France.⁴ In normal circumstances, men with this sort of handicap would never have been approached by towns, as the townsmen were well aware of the limitations of national figures with limited local authority. As such, another factor which united 'failed lords' was that their opportunity to offer lordship to a town only came because of the default of more suitable figures.

These more suitable aristocrats were the 'good lords'. Like 'failed lords', these men enjoyed significant national influence, but they also possessed sufficient local power to help towns, particularly through their ability to control the local organs of royal government, to provide arbitration, and to authoritatively represent the locality to the crown. However, although most of these men were true magnates who dominated the politics of their 'country', their power was in each case limited in some way, which prevented them from trying to control the town or expand their interests at the city's expense. Limitations could take a number of forms: Sir Thomas Erpingham, for instance, was constrained by the fact that his position depended entirely on his royal connections and the Norfolk gentry's continued acceptance of the crown-Duchy structure. Humphrey, lord Stafford of Southwick, was a parvenu whose local position was entirely based on royal grants of land, and further limited by his apparent unpopularity with Devon's landed society. John Holland, duke of Exeter, was unable to establish hegemony in Devon in the 1390s because of significant competition from the earl of Devon. John of Gaunt's local authority in Norfolk, meanwhile, was limited firstly by the fact that he treated his Norfolk estates mostly as a source of revenue, and secondly because

⁴ Above, pp. 272-3.

his freedom to actually *use* his local authority was (perhaps counterintuitively) limited by his position as a royal duke, which produced popular expectations on his public behaviour.⁵

‘Enemies’, by contrast, were figures who lacked such limits, because they enjoyed both unrivalled landed wealth and overwhelming national influence compared to any other aristocrat in the vicinity. There is only one example of such a figure from one of our four towns in this period – William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk – but we can usefully compare him with Hugh Courtenay (d.1340), the earl of Devon who menaced Exeter in the early fourteenth-century. In both cases these men were by far the most powerful figure in their ‘countries’, Courtenay on account of his landed dominance and Suffolk by means of both his own estates and his leadership of the majority of the crown-Duchy network. Both men were also the figures in the region who possessed the strongest links to the centre of the polity, Suffolk through his own position in Westminster and Courtenay through his links to court circles, especially through the de Bohun family.⁶ In both cases, this unmatched strength was what allowed these men to threaten towns. For Courtenay, his dominance of local politics and society meant that any investigation into his actions was unlikely to find against him, and there was no counter-balancing force within local society for the city to appeal to. Norwich was similarly powerless in the face of such a powerful force, as it could not acquire the lordship of any figure with sufficient influence to fend off Suffolk’s attacks. We might ask why Exeter and Norwich did not seek the lordship of these men, or, in the case of Norwich, why an early attempt to secure Suffolk’s favour failed. Again, with a sample of two this is a difficult question to answer, but it seems plausible that the overwhelming authority held by these men led them to require too much from the city in exchange for lordship.

⁵ Walker, ‘John of Gaunt’, *ODNB*. See also John Watts’s comments on the public responsibilities of the higher nobility, e.g. Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 63-80, 85-90; idem ‘Richard of York, third duke of York (1411-1460)’, *ODNB*; and idem ‘Polemic and Politics in the 1450s’, in M.L. Kekewich *et al.* eds., *The Politics of Fifteenth Century England: John Vale’s Book* (Stroud, 1995), pp. 3-42.

⁶ Burls, ‘The Courtenays’, p. 153.

Aristocrats whose authority was limited or challenged by competitors might, in this reading, have been willing to accept less from a city in exchange for lordship, or indeed nothing at all, if aiding the city would provide them with legitimacy in the eyes of the crown or local society.⁷ Men like Suffolk or Courtenay, by contrast, did not need legitimacy or any other benefit from cities and, indeed, could take what they wanted by force. In short, 'lords' sought allies, while 'enemies' sought, if anything, subjects.

The Motivations of the Landed Aristocracy

This study has considered at length the question of why towns sought aristocratic assistance and lordship. However, this only covers one aspect of the relationship, leaving the question of why some landed aristocrats were willing to extend their lordship to towns. This is an extremely difficult question to answer, but one that is so interesting that it is nonetheless worth considering the various possibilities. Some explanations can be immediately dismissed, notably that the motivating factor was money. In general, the amounts offered to aristocrats by towns were vanishingly small compared to the landed incomes enjoyed by such figures: a few pounds' worth of wine or coin was no doubt welcome, but it seems unlikely that this would have encouraged men like John of Gaunt or Humphrey Stafford to go to significant lengths to assist a town. Another possibility which can be ruled out is that aristocrats hoped to receive any sort of military support from towns: although towns often provided contingents for royal armies, there is no suggestion that they contributed to aristocratic forces, whether for service in England or abroad. By the fifteenth century, landed aristocrats only needed to raise non-professional soldiery during times of domestic discord: for towns to have provided troops at such a moment would have exposed them to intolerable risk of retribution.

⁷ For more on this theme, see below.

Indeed, towns' reluctance to take any action which might endanger their liberties or safety throws doubt on other possible explanations for what landed aristocrats might have expected in return for their good lordship. It is plausible, for instance, that a town might have been able to offer benefits to a magnate who was competing for political dominance of the region, but to do so risked attracting the displeasure of that man's opponents. During the rare periods when a town was forced to take sides in an aristocratic dispute, the citizens were certainly able to contribute towards their chosen side. Norwich, for instance, aided the anti-De La Pole network by throwing its political weight behind the campaign to indict Suffolk's former associates in the early-1450s.⁸ Alternatively, when one party in an aristocratic feud was obviously in the ascendant, it was probably significantly less risky for a town to seek his lordship than it might have been if the conflict was more evenly balanced. This is apparent from the example of Exeter in the 1390s, when the corporation aligned themselves with the duke of Exeter to strike at the interests of the earl of Devon: the duke enjoyed an insuperable advantage (in the form of royal favour), and the citizens presumably expected that he could therefore protect them. It is difficult, however, to imagine a city providing this sort of assistance to landed aristocrats at any other time. If competing magnates were evenly matched (such as the earl of Devon and lord Bonville in the 1430s-1450s) then siding with one would place the city in significant danger, while magnates who enjoyed the unchallenged rule of the locality had no need of assistance against competitors

As such, we need to explain what towns offered to magnates at times of local harmony, especially the 'good lords' discussed above whose position in the region was secure. In particular, we must consider the possibility that magnates could receive a more nebulous benefit from being the recognised 'good lord' of a major town: reputation and prestige. It is

⁸ Above, pp. 288-9.

generally accepted by historians that receiving the loyalty of prominent local gentlemen was a prerequisite for a magnate to assert his authority over an area and, conversely, that the defection of a significant supporter could be a serious blow to a magnate's prestige. Could the same have been true of towns in the region? In the case of significant towns like the four considered in this study, this is not as unlikely as it may at first seem. Each of our four towns was a large and obvious part of their respective localities: even if they were not socially or politically integrated into the local gentry, they were indisputably *geographically* linked into the 'country' which magnates sought to make their own. John Watts has written of the 'dream of every nobleman' being the 'unchallenged rule of the locality', something which was achieved by means of 'comprehensive control through comprehensive representation'.⁹ Could this representation have extended to local towns and, indeed, to other local institutions (such as religious houses) which overlapped with the more obvious elements of landed society? If we were to map the estates of magnates and their adherents, towns would stand out as notable lacunae: might they have sought to fill in the gaps?

Certainly, those figures who came closest to achieving 'comprehensive representation' of a region were almost universally providers of lordship to towns, such as Sir Thomas Erpingham and Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter, in Norwich; Walter, lord Hungerford, in Salisbury; and some of the Courtenay earls of Devon in Exeter. There is also a suggestion that competing magnates were willing to contest lordship of towns. The award which settled the dispute between Exeter and its bishop in 1448 was, for instance, given by the earl of Devon and lord Bonville, in what initially appears to be a bizarre act of cooperation between two men who were concurrently engaged in a private war.¹⁰ However, if we accept that providing lordship to a substantial city might embellish a magnate's claim to wider local

⁹ Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 63-74, quotations from p. 67.

¹⁰ Above, pp. 236-8.

authority, this incident can instead be reconstructed as two men competing to be seen as the one who brought an end to a complicated and high-profile dispute between two critical elements of local society. We can also perceive a similar pattern in the period between 1386 and 1395, when Exeter elected two men as mayor in alternating years, one of whom was an associate of the earl of Devon and the other a probable supporter of the earl of Huntingdon.¹¹ Even the earl of Suffolk's impositions on Norwich might fit this pattern, as the citizens' rejection of his lordship might be seen as a glaring omission in the reach of his hegemony.¹²

It is possible, however, to push this argument a little further, and suggest that the provision of lordship to towns was not only a demonstration of magnate status, but was an actual responsibility which local magnates were expected to undertake by both the crown and the town. Although the subject of the public responsibilities and behaviour of late-medieval monarchs has been much discussed, this concept has not often been extended to magnates, who are instead mostly approached through the framework of their acquisition of power, rather than the contemporary expectations of how those who did acquire power should deploy it. Magnates' responsibilities to their retainers and gentry supporters have, of course, been explored, but were they, like monarchs, perceived to also have a more general responsibility towards the wider political society in their 'country'? For those magnates with a very significant national position, might this responsibility have extended further? This might, in particular, explain the willingness of Humphrey of Gloucester to become involved in the affairs of Exeter and Norwich, two cities in regions into which his own estates did not extend. Conversely, the *failure* of a magnate to provide lordship to a city might have damaged his prestige and claim to hegemony. Did it reflect poorly on the earl of Suffolk, for instance,

¹¹ Above, pp. 143-7, 222-4.

¹² Above, pp. 243-6, 254-60, 283-9.

that a town in his 'country' was so poorly governed that its inhabitants engaged in a riot, and locked the city gates against the king's commissioners? Did his reputation suffer because he had allowed a dispute in his sphere of influence to reach such a level? It is difficult to answer these questions confidently, but the examples discussed in the preceding chapters present a persuasive case that a magnate's reputation and worship could be affected by how he and his affinity interacted with local towns.

Conclusions

This study set out to consider how connected late-medieval English towns and townsmen were with local landed society and other aristocrats. The preceding chapters have investigated a range of specific ways in which towns and aristocrats could and did interact, and we must now bring these threads together to answer the original question. In short, the evidence examined here suggests that we must draw a distinction between political links, of which there were many, and social links which were (with some important exceptions) much rarer. A corollary to this is that those connections which did exist between urban and aristocratic society were far more likely to develop through the structures of town governments, rather than directly and voluntarily between individual townsmen and aristocrats. The ‘theatres’ examined in part one indicate that social connections between the citizens of these four towns and local landed society were vanishingly rare: very few townsmen owned rural property, took part in the non-urban parts of royal government, or forged connections with the gentry through marriage, friendship or other bonds of trust. Even among those townsmen who did extend their activities into the countryside, the majority did so as an extension of their urban identities as merchants and businessmen, rather than as part of an attempt to create ties with landed society. Moreover, only a handful of men from these four towns demonstrably sought gentry status for themselves. Christine Carpenter’s judgement that townsmen ‘had no effect on the structure of local society’ seems entirely justified and, indeed, might be extended to include the argument that individual townsmen had no effect on the *politics* of local society as well. Within this general picture of the limited involvement of individual townsmen in landed affairs, however, there are patterns and subtleties which are worthy of comment. Firstly, Norwich’s citizens were far more likely to establish rural links than the citizens of our other three towns. This is almost certainly the result of the nature of Norfolk’s landed society, which was particularly fluid and accessible to newcomers, whether lawyers, royal servants or townsmen, suggesting that the key variable in encouraging

individual urban-county connections was the openness of local landed society. The experience of Norwich also suggests that although townsmen had little impact on politics in the countryside, those few who did become involved in landed society could import their rural political loyalties back into the city, with potentially dangerous results for the city. The most significant consequences of townsmen establishing links to the countryside may well, therefore, have been within their home borough.

If few townsmen played parts on the county stage, the same cannot be said for aristocrats in towns. However, the formal roles which the aristocracy assumed in an urban context were generally short-lived, and often only represented a connection between their office and the town, rather than a personal link. Gentlemen and other aristocrats might hold power over a town or townsmen in a multitude of ways – as sheriffs, escheators, commissioners, customs officials and a variety of other offices – but in each case the relationship ended when their term expired, leaving no true link between the town and the aristocracy. Similarly, many aristocrats owned townhouses, but these properties were (like much of townsmen's rural property) extensions of their principal identities: events of importance to landed aristocrats took place in towns, and having a residence was therefore convenient. The exceptions to this were the minor gentlemen, lawyers and royal servants who became personally involved in the government of these towns through their election to urban office, rather than by being appointed to a royal office with power over towns and townsmen. The lower status of these men made urban offices appropriate positions for them, and may also have encouraged towns to admit them, given that they were less likely to involve the town in county factionalism and were less able to use power from the countryside to attempt to coerce towns. However, these same characteristics also limited the extent to which these men truly represented a link between urban and landed society. Although they themselves crossed the boundary between town and countryside, their connections outside the town were few (and,

in the case of the royal servants, were more with the crown than landed society): did they therefore really represent a bridge between urban and county society? The exceptions to this were the significant county lawyers, men who were heavily involved in both urban and landed affairs in the same region on account of their profession.

Individual, social connections between townsmen and aristocrats were, therefore, rare and, moreover, were often insignificant where they did exist. Political ties between town governments and landed society were, however, much more common, more interesting and more meaningful. We have found evidence of a broad selection of links between towns and the aristocracy, particularly between towns and the most powerful figures in their region, the magnates. These men could provide a number of benefits to the governments of towns in their 'country', ranging from arbitration, to military support, to intercession with the crown and royal government. The last of these was particularly sought after by towns, and was, moreover, useful to them in a wide range of circumstances, perhaps predictably given the importance of the crown to the constitutional and economic health of a city. Across this period, magnates assisted towns in gaining new charters, economic privileges and other associated grants, helped the citizens to defend their liberties against encroachment by royal servants, and supported them in minimizing the impact of royal demands for taxes and loans. The precise role aristocrats played in presenting a town's case to the crown is unclear. In some instances, they may have been able simply to procure what the town required using their own influence, or by requesting it as a personal favour. However, the examples from our towns make it clear that often this was not enough, as delegations of citizens and lawyers were often dispatched to London as well: if aristocratic intercession had been sufficient, town governments would not have wasted money sending these groups. As such, it is likely that magnates could instead play a supporting role, perhaps by using their own influence to

expedite the citizens' requests, or to ensure that they were heard (and heard sympathetically) by senior figures such as the chancellor, royal council or the king himself.

In order to provide such assistance, however, an aristocrat needed to combine national influence with local authority. The importance of the former is predictable: without power and connections in Westminster, a magnate could not influence the process or personnel of royal government. That local authority was similarly critical may, however, be unexpected: given that much of what towns needed or desired was in the hands of the king or his officers, would influence with them not have been enough? In fact, however, local authority was important on a number of levels. On a practical basis, for instance, significant parts of royal government were devolved to the localities, and were therefore often outside the reach of men with authority only in London: only local magnates could influence the local officers who often made decisions and judgments which were of critical importance to towns. The same local power and connections were also important in underpinning magnates' national influence, as the royal government would presumably have given greater weight to the requests and opinions of men who could speak for and command local political society when urban as well as county affairs were under discussion. Local power was also, of course, critical when towns sought aristocratic assistance in disputes with their neighbours, particularly religious institutions: without the threat of latent power to enforce their awards, the arbitration provided by such men would have been of significantly reduced value.

These same local magnates could, however, also present problems for towns. In some instances, this was because a magnate's possessions conflicted in some way with a city's own landed, economic or legal interests, forcing the corporation to commit time and resources to managing a relationship they might otherwise have abandoned, simply to prevent friction from boiling over. In other cases, magnates actively tried to expand their interests at a city's

expense, or else backed a city's enemies in a legal or jurisdictional dispute. These hostile figures were often recognizably from the same group as the more amenable men who assisted towns: members of both groups were true magnates who enjoyed national influence as well as local authority. What distinguished a 'good lord' from an 'enemy' may have been nothing more than circumstance or personal character, but it is notable that magnates who assisted towns tended to have far greater limits on their local power, most often because their position was based on royal favour or grants.

As we have seen, however, contact between urban governments and aristocratic society was, in general, not permanent, and its frequency differed between our four towns. For the most part, the structure of local landed society determined whether townsmen engaged with the aristocracy, rather than the needs of the town itself: if a capable source of good lordship was present in the vicinity, the town would establish ties with him and his close associates, even if the citizens had no immediate need of his assistance. If there was no such figure, however, the corporation would not waste time or money on gaining the favour of men who could not provide the same lordship, and any contacts who proved unsuitable were swiftly discarded. This meant that Norwich and Exeter (which were sited in regions where magnate lordship was common) established relationships with aristocrats far more frequently than did Salisbury (where there were few aristocrats in general) or Southampton (where landed society was composed of a network of gentry).

There were, however, important exceptions to this simple pattern of town governments only engaging with landed society when a suitable 'good lord' was available. Firstly, our towns maintained near-permanent relationships with a handful of aristocrats whose interests were entangled with the citizens' own. Norwich and Exeter, for instance, treated constantly with their bishops and cathedral authorities to minimize the friction caused by the poorly-defined

liberties which these ecclesiastical figures held within the city walls. For Salisbury, managing this relationship was even more important (albeit also more challenging) on account of the bishop's position as the city's lord. A second exception to the overall pattern can be found during periods when local landed society was riven by factionalism. In general, aristocratic feuding discouraged towns from seeking a single 'good lord' from among the warring parties, as to do so might have gained the town enemies as well as friends. There were, however a number of scenarios when the citizens nonetheless maintained links with the local aristocracy, notably at times when the town had particular need of aristocratic assistance in their own affairs. In these circumstances, they attempted to reduce the risk of angering powerful local figures by engaging with both factions at once. The only exceptions to this were when one party to a feud was clearly in the ascendant and was therefore able to protect the city from retribution, or else when the city had already somehow earned the antipathy of one side, forcing the citizens to seek the protection which might be offered by the other.

Over the course of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, however, the relationships between landed aristocrats and towns shifted, as towns increasingly sought the assistance of more minor figures instead. Under Edward IV, towns established relationships with men with personal links to the monarch, particularly his close relatives and members of the royal household and affinity. By the middle of Henry VII's reign, however, even these men had been passed over, and towns instead retained royal servants, lawyers and administrators. The implication of these changes is that these lesser men were, in later decades, able to offer the same combination of local authority and national influence which had previously been the sole preserve of the landed aristocracy. This is connected to the changes in government undertaken by these monarchs, which significantly expanded the crown's ability to monitor and rule the provinces from London, which had the effect of making local authority the natural corollary of influence with the monarch.

In summary, towns and townsmen were not integrated with landed society, and they were not themselves important actors in county or regional politics. In particular, this meant that there were few meaningful links between townsmen and the gentry: as groups, there was little overlap between them, and they had few shared interests. However, significant provincial towns such as Norwich and Exeter were almost inevitably affected by the aristocratic politics of the region in which they were situated. Both their physical location and their positions as the sites of important county events meant that they could never isolate themselves entirely from the local aristocracy, particularly during times of feuding and other factional strife. In Exeter's case, this was complicated by the fact that the city's interests were entangled with those of the pre-eminent local aristocrat. In addition, until the last decades of the fifteenth-century, the leaders of local landed society, the magnates, offered towns assistance which they could not gain from any other source: although towns could if necessary pursue their goals by themselves, it is striking that they only chose to do so at times when they could not procure such aristocratic aid. This gave town governments a considerable incentive to establish relationships with their local magnate, but we must also take into account whether the magnates themselves had an incentive to assist their local boroughs. Although the material benefits of such a relationship were probably of little consequence to such wealthy men, it seems likely that they derived a meaningful enhancement to their prestige from being the acknowledged 'good lord' of the substantial towns in their 'country'. Conversely, their reputation might have been damaged if they allowed a competitor to supplant them, or if they failed to prevent a town in their 'country' from becoming badly governed or riven by factionalism. Indeed, it is worth considering the possibility that magnates were *expected* to take some role in the affairs of their local boroughs and that both the citizens and the king looked to them to provide a link between town and crown.

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- MC – Campling Papers
 - MC 44/36, 500X1 – Will of Thomas Wetherby
- NCR – Norwich City Records
 - NCR Case 7 – City accounts
 - NCR Case 8 – Documents relating to the City Courts and City Administration
 - NCR Case 9 – Documents relating to litigation between the city and various parties
 - NCR Case 16 – Records of the city courts and assembly
 - NCR Case 17 – City Registers and Books of Evidence
 - NCR Case 18a – Chamberlains' Account Books
 - NCR Case 26 – Royal Charters
- PHI – Papers of Sir Thomas Phillipps
 - PHI 99, 577X1 – Award concerning the manor of Cringleford

Southampton Archives, Southampton

Southampton Corporation Archives
The 'Second Book of Remembrance'
Port books
Stewards' rolls and books
Deeds, Municipal and Private

Wiltshire and Swindon Heritage Centre, Chippenham

D – Diocese of Salisbury
D 1/1/5 – The 'Black Book' of Bishop Richard Beauchamp
D 1/2 – Episcopal Registers
G 23 – City of Salisbury
G 23/1/2 – Second Ledger Book/General Entry Book
G 23/1/44 – Chamberlains' Rolls
G 23/1/212-215 – The 'Domesday' Books

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