

Four Southampton Rebels of 1483

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WHEN, AT THE end of February 1484, Richard III's only parliament was dissolved, four bills of attainder had been passed; penalising one hundred and four persons; included in the list were four rebels 'of Suthampton', who had taken part in the insurrection of the previous autumn. Although not reckoned among the leaders of the rebellion, at least three of the four played an important part in Southampton's affairs in the late fifteenth century. William Overey 'late of Suthampton, Knyght' had been mayor in 1474; Walter William 'late of Suthampton, Merchaunt', was mayor in 1483 itself; whilst Roger Kelsale 'late of Suthampton, Yeoman', had collected customs and subsidies in the port regularly. Of the fourth, John Fesaunt 'late of Suthampton, Gentilman', nothing much is known, but he seems to have been employed mainly in Poole, further along the south coast.

Southampton itself was a considerable port in the late middle ages, and the recent researches of Colin Platt and others have shown the vicissitudes of merchants' lives.¹ Whilst the Italians, with resident agents in London and Southampton, reserved the luxury trades of spices, silks, armour, etc., almost totally for themselves, the basic goods—such as fish, salt, wine and dyestuffs—for which there was a steady demand in the port's hinterland, were best handled by the local men with their own personal contacts. In general, the Southampton merchants kept clear of their London counterparts, as they could rarely compete with the latter's expertise and financial strength. Much of the town's trade linked it with the Baltic, providing wool and cloth in return for furs and timber products; with the Biscayan ports of Nantes, Bordeaux and Bilbao, exporting mainly cloth and pewter and importing salt, wine, leather, woad and oil; and with the Mediterranean towns of Pisa, Genoa and Florence, providing wool in return for luxury goods.

Inland, long established routes took all types of goods: through Surrey to London, via Guildford; to Reading via Basingstoke; to the west and Exeter via Shaftesbury and Sherborne; to Bristol via Warminster; and north to Banbury via Andover, Newbury and Oxford, whilst the route to Chipping Camden lay through Marlborough and Burford. The latter two routes led to the great wool producing areas of the south midlands. One town in particular seemed to figure in most of Southampton's dealings with its northern hinterland—Salisbury. It lay both at the junction of the major roads to the west, and at the vortex of the well-to-do textile industry. In 1443–4, over a third of the outgoing journeys from Southampton carried Salisbury trade!

Such a busy port was vital to the nation's trade, and it inevitably figured in national affairs, and national as well as local politics often divided parties in the town. Edward IV visited Southampton in the autumn of 1461, and conferred a

new charter, confirming all previous ones, excluding those made by Lancastrian kings. From the start of his reign Edward sought to build up his finances by personal involvement in trade—he was actively concerned with the wool trade and dominated the tin industry, especially at its main port—Southampton. However, Lancastrian sympathies were evidently about, as in 1461 the king ordered the mayor to arrest a servant of the Duke of Somerset, who had been trying to gather support in the area. Edward visited the town again in April 1470 after the defeat of Warwick and Clarence, who had attempted to escape from the port. Twenty prisoners were drawn, hanged and beheaded, and exposed to the townsfolk's eyes for some three weeks—a grim warning to potential traitors.²

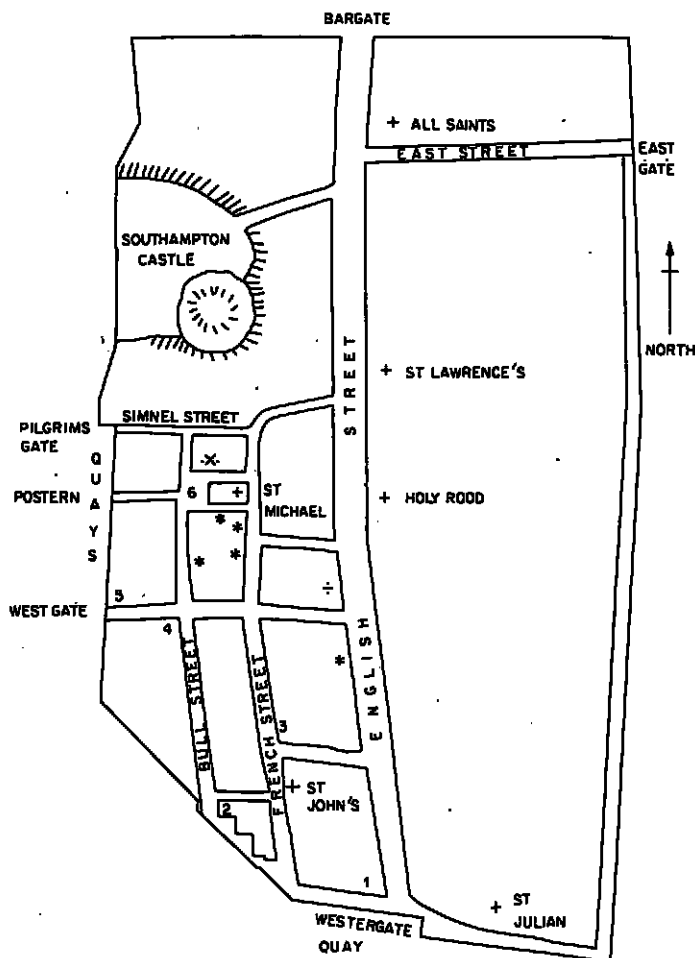
It was at Southampton in September 1471 that the Bastard of Fauconbridge, captain of the fleet of adventurers who had tried to rescue Henry VI from the Tower, was captured by Richard of Gloucester. Ten years later Edward IV visited the town again; on 1st March, 1482, a tun of sweet wine worth £7 was presented to him.³ A month after the king's death, preparations at the nearby religious house of Beaulieu were in hand for the possible arrival of the marquis of Dorset, who had taken sanctuary with his mother, Elizabeth Woodville, at Westminster.

When Buckingham's revolt broke out, Southampton was one of the major towns where Richard III's proclamation, denouncing Dorset and the other rebels, was issued. Yet Richard did not visit the town after his arrival in Salisbury at the end of October, choosing rather to go via Bridport to Exeter in early November, and returning to London through Bridgwater, Salisbury again, and Winchester. There is no evidence that Southampton was a centre of discontent, and this itinerary suggests the king was satisfied with the town's loyalty. Although the four rebels were described as being 'of Suthampton', Overey, William and Kelsale were included in those 'falsely and traiterously' conspiring to rebel at Newbury, in Berkshire, whilst Fesaunt was named amongst the Salisbury group.

Of the four rebels themselves, there is far less evidence than for men like Walter Hungerford, William Norris or John Norris, all members of important and well-established gentry families. What little information there is to be found on John Fesaunt lies mainly in the Fine Rolls—appointments such as searcher of ships in the port of Poole and in all adjacent ports and places, as collector of the petty custom in Poole, as collector of the subsidies of tunnage and poundage, and the subsidies on wools, woollfells, and hides in the same port. However, these all refer to Henry Tudor's reign from November 1485 to November 1489.⁴ Fesaunt appears to have died before October 1506, as in that month 'William Myklow hathe takyn to Ferme the Tenyment that John Fesaunt late held withyn the new corner of Seynt Myhell. . .'. Included in the transaction were 'two shoppys and a solar', suggesting Fesaunt's business interests in the town.⁵

Roger Kelsale was a yeoman of the Crown from 16th July, 1461, till 1483, with a daily wage of 6d taken from the fee farm of Warwick. By 1467 he had also been granted the bailiwy of the Cheshire hundred of Broxstow—he and his brothers seem to have been natives of that county. He was exempted from Acts of Resumption in 1461, 1464, 1467 and 1472.⁶ In December 1472 he was appointed 'to take carpenters called "wheelers" and "cartwrights". . . and other workmen for the works of the king's ordnance and bombards, "colverynes", "fowlers", "serpentynes" and other canons' and other 'necessaries for the ordnance and carriage for the same and horses called "hackneys" and ships and other vessels.'⁷

LATE MEDIEVAL SOUTHAMPTON



Key:

- * = Cottages or tenements belonging to Agnes Overay c.1454
- x = Cottage and tenement belonging to Walter William c.1482-5
- ÷ = Two tenements 'now of Thomas Kelsall' c.1511-12

- 1 = Customs House
- 2 = Wool House
- 3 = Weigh House
- 4 = Bull Hall
- 5 = Linen Hall
- 6 = Fish Market

(Not to Scale)

In 1475 he was, with the sheriff of Southampton, on a commission to arrest William Whyte of Portsmouth 'marchaunt'; and in 1475, 1476 and 1483 he served on commissions enquiring into shipments of wools, hides, woolfells, etc., and concerned with the levying and collection of the necessary subsidies for the crown.⁸

Roger was also appointed by Edward IV to supervise the strengthening and upkeep of the 'walls, stathes, quays, wharves and foundations' of Southampton—he was obviously a trusted servant by 1478.⁹ In the *Black Book of Southampton* there occurs a long indenture 'between the mayor of the town on the one part and Roger Kelsale on the other part'. It deals with the grant of a house to the east of the Watergate, with a way through it to Winkle Street, the tower over the Watergate itself, and the right to build apartments and a shed on waste ground nearby. Roger is called 'our dear brother Roger Kelsale, one of the yeomen of the crown of our lord king and our fellow burgess', and appears as a man full of 'benevolence and true zeal' for the upkeep of the town's seaward defences. This indenture was dated 2nd June, 1481;¹⁰ on 23rd October, Roger was 'grauntyd an hows in Seynt Jones parish that late peryn schercher dwellyd in For xl yere paying by the yer viii s. vi d. and Rogger and his assynys to bere all charges'.¹¹

Roger had already served as a burgess in the 1478 Parliament, and was again one of Southampton's representatives in January 1483. As late as 17th September of that year, Roger was commissioned to collect the customs in wool, hides and woolfells in the town and adjacent ports, and to keep the 'coket' seal in the said ports. Yet he joined the October rebellion and was attainted in 1484. Roger survived Richard's reign, but possibly not for long, as his will is dated 10th October, 1485. His instructions were that his body be buried in Beaulieu monastery and his goods be divided 'one third for his soul, one third for his children, one third among his friends'. Roger had connections with Reading (hence his link with the Newbury rebels?) where his brother Henry was an important clothier. Henry's own will, dated and proved in 1493, left his lands in Reading to his brother Thomas and the remainder to his brother Roger.¹² As Wedgwood maintains Roger died in 1485, it seems strange that he should be a recipient in his brother's bequest eight years later! In fact there is no date on Roger's will, as to when it was 'proved' at Canterbury—hence, he may well have been alive in 1493.

Walter William was the son of John William, an important burgess and cloth exporter in Southampton, and who had been sheriff in 1447–8, mayor in 1448–9, 1455, 1469 and 1470, and MP in 1455–6. John seems to have been wealthy, since he was possessor of the ship *le Edward of Southampton* in 1451, but somewhere between 1475 and 1480 he fell foul of the law and was classed as an outlaw.¹³ Walter himself was steward of the town in 1473, senior bailiff in 1479, and sheriff in 1481. In the *Book of Remembrance of Southampton* Walter William is written in as mayor for 1483; what is particularly interesting is that the name has been pen-cancelled and the next entries are in a different hand. In the margin is the note '*quod fugam fecit ad santuariam Johannes Walker electus pro eodem anno*'—elected 29th September, 1483!¹⁴ So Walter must have fled to sanctuary a full month before the planned outbreak of the southern revolt—could he have been an early and important link in the plot? Had he merely left Southampton to

join the Berkshire contingent? Tantalisingly nothing is known of his movements, but he cannot have taken the decision lightly: he had much to lose, quite apart from the mayoral office—property in the middle of the town and a position of some importance in the merchant community. However, he survived Richard's reign, and his attainder was reversed by Henry VII, who appointed him *troner* and *weigher* in the port of Southampton in the 1490s.¹⁵

William Overey was the son of William Overey 'senior', the latter having been steward in 1394–5, mayor in 1398–9 and 1406–7, bailiff in 1425, and Parliamentary burgess in 1426.¹⁶ William 'senior' owned a house on the west side of English Street, in the parish of Holy Rood, and was still alive in 1428. Agnes, his wife, had previously been married to Bartolomeo Marmorata, the earliest Florentine living in Southampton of whom any personal details are known. Their son, Laurence, was brought up as 'Laurence Overay, otherwise callid Laurence Marmoray'. Agnes' marriage to William brought more children—Juliana, probably John, and 'young' William. The latter married Joan and had two children—Isabel and Joan.

William figures on several commissions in the 1460s, enquiring into merchants' complaints. In 1470 he was asked, with John William, to take ships in Southampton 'for the conduct of the armed force which the king is preparing to resist George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard, Earl of Warwick and Salisbury, and foreign enemies.' In 1471 he was 'controller of the great and petty custom, the subsidy of wools, hides, and woolfells', with the custody of one part of the coker seal.¹⁷ The following year he was sheriff, and in 1474 became mayor. Perhaps William is most famous in Southampton's history, however, for his work in the intervening year when, 'he beinge burgesse succedinge his father's burgeswicke by inheritaunce, and by free election afterwards chosen clerk and made shreve of the said towne' . . . , he 'translated out of Frenche into Englishe . . . the paxbreade . . . beinge the olde rules and ordinaunces of the good town of Suthampton'—i.e. the Merchant Guild Laws. He presented the work to the town in 1478.¹⁸ It was during William's mayoralty that the Guild of Tailors petitioned against foreign tailors practising their craft in Southampton.

William's mother, Agnes, features in the *Southampton Terrier* of 1454 (a record of all the properties within the town walls, with their owners and tenants), as a major landlord, owning several cottages and tenements in the Parishes of Holy Rood and St Michael. The capital tenement was apparently the now-vanished Woollen Hall, lying to the south of St Michael's church.¹⁹ Thus, William was obviously a man of some substance and would, like Walter William and Roger Kelsale, have thought carefully about the serious act of rebellion against his monarch. He must have been knighted between 1478 and 1483, as he was attainted as 'late of Suthampton, Knyght'. He, too, survived Richard III, and was soon collecting customs and subsidies at Southampton for the first Tudor in the December of 1486.²⁰ His widow is mentioned in 1499, but he seems to have died some years before.

Why did the four rebel? Perhaps original commercial links with other traders in Salisbury and Wiltshire, in Reading and Newbury, may have developed into personal ties and friendships. Perhaps past gratitude to Edward IV may have turned their minds against Richard III; perhaps promises by or links with the Marquis of Dorset or members of his family may have played a part: perhaps the

old Lancastrian biases of some of the Southampton burgesses may have risen to the surface again. Certainly the records of Southampton provide few clues, and the national records even less!

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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