

Memoir of a Yeoman in the Service of the House of York, 1452-1461

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ON PALM SUNDAY 1461 Edward IV secured his newly won crown at the battle of Towton. In the months that followed his coronation on 28 June he was able to turn his attention to rewarding some of the men who had fought for him, and his father before him, in the previous decade. It can be assumed that many retainers and servants of the house of York, in petitioning for preferment, drafted brief accounts of the services that they had loyally performed and the costs they had stoically borne. Petitions of this sort doubtless lie behind the numerous royal grants which allude to the grantee's 'good service to the king and the king's father, the duke of York'.¹ It is a pity that the king's clerks found little reason to preserve them for posterity. The historian of the Wars of the Roses has been denied what would certainly have represented a most revealing class of records.

An item in a Bodleian Library Latin miscellany gives some impression of the lost riches.² It is a petition composed by or on behalf of Hugh Wiot, yeoman, fairly early in the reign of Edward IV, and copied some fifty years later by a Cheshire gentleman, Humphrey Newton of Newton in Prestbury parish.³ Unfortunately neither the miscellany nor the petition offers any direct evidence regarding Hugh Wiot's identity. His surname is rather too commonplace to provide any firm guide as to his origins. Though most of the material in the manuscript relates to Newton's own district, it cannot be assumed that Wiot was a Cheshire man. The language of the petition has a few dialectal peculiarities, mainly from the west midlands, but it would be unwise to place much reliance on the orthography of a text copied at so late a date.⁴ Still, what Wiot reveals himself about his career must greatly strengthen any supposition that he came from the west midlands, though perhaps not from Cheshire itself. In view of his early and steadfast commitment to the house of York, it seems probable that he was a tenant of Richard, Duke of York, though his name cannot be found in any of the surviving estate records.⁵ The balance of probability is that he was from one of York's lordships in Herefordshire or Shropshire rather than from the East Midlands or the North.⁶ It seems indicative that Wiot almost exclusively fought in Yorkist armies recruited in the Welsh marches, that the spoliation of his property took place after the rout of Ludford Bridge in 1459, and that the reward he sought after the Yorkist triumph was the office of bailiff of Cleeton and Farlow in Shropshire.⁷

It is a pity that Hugh Wiot, yeoman, cannot be properly identified, because his petition provides a remarkable record of service in the Wars of the Roses. He claimed to have been with Richard, Duke of York in 1452, in what came close to being the first battle of the civil war. Over the winter of 1451-2 York had been based at his castle in Ludlow, marshalling his forces. On 3 February he wrote to the citizens of Shrewsbury as part of a bid to win public support for his cause. About a week after York began his advance on the capital at the head of an army largely made up of men from his marcher lordships. In all likelihood Wiot was among them. Meeting with his allies, the Earl of Devon and Lord Cobham, York crossed the Thames, skirting around London, and took up a strong defensive position near Dartford. On 1 March Henry VI, the Duke of Somerset and the royal host advanced to Blackheath, and negotiations between the two sides began. On the following day the protagonists came to terms, and the armies disengaged. York, Devon and Cobham, accompanied by only forty horseman, came before the king at Blackheath, made their submission in return for his promise to hear their grievances, and went under escort to St Paul's cathedral, where they promised on oath not to raise rebellion again.⁸ Since Wiot claimed to have been with York at Blackheath and in London, it might well be that he was a member of the small retinue that was allowed York at this stage.

Wiot records nothing of his activities between the summer of 1452, when York returned, a defeated man, to Ludlow, and the summer of 1459, when the town was again a rallying point for Yorkist rebellion.⁹ On 23 September York's Neville allies, marching to join him at Ludlow, were mauled at Blore Heath, and when the Yorkist forces came together they could achieve little against the advancing royal army. After a brief engagement at Ludford Bridge, the Yorkist leaders took to flight: York to Ireland, and his son Edward, with the Neville earls, to Calais.¹⁰ The rank-and-file Yorkists were left to fend for themselves. The town of Ludlow and other Yorkist estates were subjected to extensive pillage.¹¹ By his own account Wiot was at this stage despoiled of oxen, cows, bullocks and sheep to value of £40.

To his ultimate good fortune, Wiot made his way not to the Duke of York in Dublin, but to Calais. There he entered the service of York's son, Edward, Earl of March, and was appointed a yeoman of his chamber. In June 1460 he served under Sir John Wenlock and John Dinham, in a cross-Channel raid on Sandwich.¹² He was wounded in the thigh, perhaps like Dinham, who was also wounded in the leg, from gunshot.¹³ The capture and garrisoning of Sandwich, hitherto the main Lancastrian naval base, provided a beach-head for a Yorkist invasion. Edward, Warwick and the rest crossed over later in the month, and by 4 July had established themselves in London. Maintaining their momentum, the Yorkist lords advanced to engage the royal host at Northampton, and within a week they were returning to the capital with Henry VI as their captive.¹⁴ Wiot does not mention his own participation in the battle of Northampton. If he were not still recovering from his wound, he might perhaps have been sent on his lord's business to Ludlow and the Welsh marches. His petition in fact makes no mention of any of the vicissitudes of the Yorkist cause in the second half of 1460. He was certainly wise not to rejoin Richard of York, who on his return to Ireland made a vain bid for the crown. On a foolhardy progress north, York was defeated and killed at the battle of Wakefield.

Edward, Earl of March, spent Christmas and New Year in the west midlands, probably at Shrewsbury, where he first received news of his father's death. If Hugh Wiot had not been in attendance during the festive season, he certainly rejoined his lord at this critical juncture. Gathering together his forces, Edward might well have been in a dilemma how best to deploy them, because the Lancastrians were clearly poised for a two-pronged spring offensive. It was perhaps tempting to seek to avenge his father's death by moving immediately against the large army being assembled in the north by Queen Margaret and her lieutenants, but such a move would have been rash in the extreme, not least because it left Edward's marcher lordships exposed to the forces which the Earls of Pembroke and Wiltshire were leading from South Wales. Resolving to leave the defence of the capital to his ally Warwick, Edward established himself at Hereford, and on 3 February defeated the Lancastrian earls at Mortimer's Cross.¹⁵ It was Edward's personal triumph, marking his final emergence from the shadows cast by his father and the Earl of Warwick, who for his part narrowly escaped defeat when he engaged the main Lancastrian army in the second battle of St Albans.

In framing his petition, Wiot was thus wise to stress his participation in Edward's 'journey at Mortimer's Cross'. His memoir offers a little new detail on this important but generally poorly documented battle.¹⁶ It records his capture of Llewellyn ap Hulkyn, esquire, of Anglesey. He was a man of some substance, and can almost certainly be identified with the head of a prominent Welsh family, who held office as rhingyll of Talybolion for much of Henry VI's reign and disappeared from the record in 1460.¹⁷ While it is well known that the Lancastrian army was largely composed of Welshmen, it is interesting that some had come from as far as Anglesey, the homeland of the Tudors.¹⁸ Wiot's account of the incident, however, has a more general interest. Little is known about the fate of prisoners in the Wars of the Roses. The chroniclers, naturally enough, tended to be most interested in the casualties: Gregory provides a notoriously gruesome account of the execution of Owen Tudor and other Lancastrian captives at Hereford.¹⁹ What must have been far more common in the civil war was for prisoners to compound for their liberty, and the petition throws useful light on this process. Wiot claimed that he was offered £100 to let Llewellyn go free, but instead handed him over to Edward, who was allegedly able to realise 1000 marks from the ransom. The figure is very large, and it is hard to believe that it could ever have been fully paid. Still, Wiot's testimony lends weight to the supposition, too seldom voiced, that the vicissitudes of civil war involved considerable transfers of wealth which are wholly undocumented. Ensclosed in Hereford castle, in the aftermath of his victory, Edward can be seen as a latter-day warlord, presiding over the trials of his enemies, garnering booty and ransoms, and giving gifts to his followers. Wiot remembered the time well: he was given five marks from Edward's treasure-chest, the only recompense he had thus far received.

The die was now cast for the Yorkists, for men like Hugh Wiot almost as much as the Earl of Warwick and Edward, 'heir of England'. Though the main Lancastrian army had withdrawn northwards after worsting Warwick at St Albans, they now had the hapless Henry VI in their keeping. It was in a mood of desperation as much as jubilation that Edward was crowned king. Though he

mentioned nothing of affairs in the capital, it is most likely that Wiot remained in harness throughout this time. He was certainly in the army that Edward led north immediately after his accession. He took part in the battle of Towton, or, in Wiot's words, the 'journey' at Sherborne in Elmet, and doubtless remained with the king until his return to London for his coronation at the end of June. The reference to his continuing in the king's service all the time that he was 'in the north country' could indicate that he took part in the king's campaigning in 1462-3 and 1464. The subsequent phrase, 'in all which journeys', might be thought to support this view, but such an interpretation is not warranted: it clearly refers back to all the campaigns in which Wiot had served since 1452.

It was certainly early in Edward IV's reign that Hugh Wiot drafted his petition. It could be as early as the summer of 1461, and can scarcely be much later than 1464. It is interesting to note that, though he refers to the battle of Towton in a rather imprecise fashion, he already refers to Edward's earlier triumph as the battle of Mortimer's Cross.²⁰ If some record could be found of Wiot's appointment as bailiff of Cleeton and Farlow, of course, it would be possible to be more precise. The patent rolls record no grant of any sort to Wiot, and the possibility remains that his petition was in vain, save as an interesting document for historians to ponder. Needless to say, its value would be greatly enhanced if more information about Wiot and his background could, as surely it must, be found. The supposition that Wiot came from one of York's lordships in Shropshire or elsewhere in the Welsh marches has a great deal in its favour. If it could be proved, it would lend support to the view that involvement in the war tended to be rather localised, and would enrich with human detail the notion that the defence of their lordships was a major strategic consideration of the Yorkist lords. None the less the supposition might be wholly wrong. If Wiot were a townsman from Kent, or even a yeoman from Yorkshire, the story and its significance would be rather different.

APPENDIX

Transcription of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Lat. misc c. 66, f.104v. By kind permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Punctuation added, and contractions expanded.)

To the kynge oure sovereyn lorde.

Mekely bisechethe unto your highnesse youre humble servaunt & true liegeman Hugh Wiot yoman that when your said bisecher at his grete costes & ieopardy of his life was withe the myghty prince youre fader whom god assoile at the Blake hethe, after ward at London ayenste the duc of Somerset that diede at Seint albonis, afterward at Ludlowe, and for that service your seid besechere by your Rebelles was robbid & spoilede of hym, oxen, kyen and Bollokkis and shepe Cxl, price of xl li. as by a lettre testimonial under the seales of mony honest men of that cuntrey hit may appere, and then your seide Besecher came to youre hyghnesse to Caleys when hit pleased your excellence to make him a

yoman of your honorable chambre. And came then withe Sir John Wenlok nowe lorde Wenlok and John Denham to Sandwiche when your seide bysecher was smyte thurgh on of his theese and afterwarde was withe you at your iorney at Mortymer Crosse abe side Wyggemore where your seide besecher toke llewelyn ap Hulkyn squiere of the shire of Anglesay in Northe Walis and delivered hym to your seide hyghnesse whiche llewelyn would have peide to youre seide bisecher C li. to have letten hym go, and the same llewelyn offered you a M marke, and afterwarde your seide besecher was withe you at your grete iourney at Shirburne, and so continued in your most honourable service duryng al the tyme the yo were in the Northe cuntrey, in al whiche jorneyes your seid bisecher at his awne costis contynued withe outen ony fee or rewarde but onely that he [it] liked your excellence & special grace at your beinge at Herford to gif unto your seid besecher v markis. Please hit youre highnesse thes premisses tenderly to conside and therupon of your most habundant & speciall grace in recompense of the seid longe continuel service and his seid grete hurtes and costis to gife & graunt unto youre seide besecher by youre gracious lettres patentes in due forme to be made the office of Baillif of your townes of Cluton and forlowe to have & occupie by hym or by hus depute sufficient duryng the lif of youre seide besecher by his own handis of the issues profetes & revenues of your seide townes commynge at the festis of the annunciacion of oure lady & synt Michill by even portions and withe all other profetts and commodites to the seide office due and accustomed eny statute att ordinaunce destreynt or provision in contrarie hore of made ordered or provydid notwithstandinge. And your seide bisecher shal specialy praye to god for youre moste noble and prosperous rigne longe to endure.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Professor Ralph Griffiths and Dr P. A. Johnson in the preparation of this paper.

1. E.g. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1461-1467*, pp.130, 137, 148-9.
2. Oxford Bodleian Library, MS. Latin misc. c.66, f.104v.
3. R. H. Robbins, The poems of Humfrey Newton esquire, 1466-1536, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 65 (1950), pp.249-81, provides a description of the manuscript and details the life and career of its compiler.
4. The 'standardisation' of written English, gathering pace in the fifteenth century, tended to bring together features from previously distinct dialects. Compounding the problem of the text under discussion, Wiot might have had it drawn up by a professional scribe, while Newton might have modified its spelling in the process of transcription. The dialectal features deemed significant include 'withouten' (above the Thames), 'mony', 'ayenste' and 'thurgh' (West Midlands). On the other hand, 'awn' is a northern form, while the unetymological 'h' in 'hit' and 'habundant' is typically southern. A. McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and M. Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (Aberdeen 1986), vol. 1, p.451, vol. 2, pp.57-62, 153-8, 225-30, 315-20, vol. 1, p.548.
5. I owe this information to Dr P. A. Johnson, who in his research on Richard, Duke of York, has worked systematically through the surviving records.

6. J. T. Rosenthal, The estates and finances of Richard, Duke of York (1411-1460), *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, vol. 2, ed. W. M. Bowsky (Lincoln, Nebraska 1965), pp.115-204, provides a list (pp.194-6) of York's properties. Wiot's reference to his service 'in the north country' seems to imply that the region was not his home.
7. Cleeton and Farlow lie a few miles northeast of Ludlow and northwest of Cleobury-Mortimer. See Rosenthal, *Estates and finances of Richard, Duke of York*, p.195.
8. A. Goodman, *The Wars of the Roses. Military Activity and English Society, 1452-1497* (London 1981), pp.20-2; R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI. The Exercise of Royal Authority 1422-1461* (London 1981), pp.693-7; P. A. Johnson, *Duke Richard of York 1411-1460* (Oxford 1988), pp.117-15.
9. He does, however, make reference to the Duke of Somerset's death at the battle of St Albans in 1455.
10. Goodman, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.26-31; Griffiths, *Reign of Henry VI*, pp.818-22; G. Hodges, The Civil War of 1459 to 1461 in the Welsh Marches. 1. The rout of Ludford Bridge, 12-13 October, *The Ricardian*, vol. 6, no. 84 (1984), pp.286-93.
11. J. S. Davis (ed.), *An English Chronicle from 1377 to 1461*, Camden Society, 1st series, vol. 64 (1856), p.122; J. Guidner (ed.), *The Historical Collections of a London Citizen in the Fifteenth Century*, Camden Society, 2nd series, vol. 17 (1876), p.207; G. L. and M. A. Harriss (eds.), *John Benet's Chronicle for the Years 1400 to 1462*, *Camden Miscellany XXIV* Camden Society, 4th series, vol. 9 (1972), p.224.
12. There were two raids on Sandwich, the first under Dinham on 15 January 1460 and the second in June under Dinham and Wenlock: Goodman, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.32-3.
13. Griffiths, *Reign of Henry VI*, p.859.
14. Goodman, *Wars of the Roses*, pp.37-9.
15. G. Hodges, The Civil War of 1459 to 1461 in the Welsh Marches. 2. The campaign and battle of Mortimer's Cross — St Blaise's day 3 February 1461, *The Ricardian*, vol. 6, no. 85 (1984), pp.330-45; C. Ross, *Edward IV* (London 1974), pp.31-2; Griffiths, *Reign of Henry VI*, p.871.
16. The battle of Mortimer's Cross is quite well-documented in one respect — the composition of Edward's army. Given its relevance to the problem of Wiot's origins, the preponderance of men from his marcher lordships is worth noting: J. H. Harvey (ed.), *William Worcester, Itineraries* (Oxford 1969), pp.202-5; Hodges, *Civil War of 1459 to 1461*, pp.331-4.
17. A. D. Carr, *Medieval Anglesey* (Llangefni 1982), pp.215, 223, 228. He was at Beaumaris on 12 September 1460, when he quit claimed land in Anglesey to John Godfray, burgess: The National Library of Wales, Sotheby document no. 51. I would like to thank Professor Ralph Griffiths and The National Library of Wales for providing photocopies of these items.
18. Cf. R. A. Griffiths and R. S. Thomas, *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty* (Gloucester 1985), p.52; G. Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation. Wales, c.1415-1642* (Oxford 1987), p.188.
19. *Historical Collections of Citizen of London*, p.211.
20. There is some debate as to whether 'Mortimer's Cross' was a pre-existing place-name or was coined with specific reference to the battle: Hodges, *Civil War of 1459 to 1461*, pp.339, 344n. Wiot's early use of the name is compatible with either view.