

The English Delegation to the Conference of St Omer (1463)

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The conference of St Omer, attended by delegates of England, Burgundy and France, was a resounding diplomatic success for England's relatively new Yorkist government.¹ Edward IV's diplomats had managed to persuade the French king, Louis XI, to renounce the treaty of Chinon (signed in 1462). By this treaty Louis had aligned himself with the exiled house of Lancaster, Henry VI and his wife Margaret of Anjou. Louis provided some financial support to the Lancastrians and in return was offered the tempting morsel of Calais, England's last territorial possession on the Continent.² Although Louis XI's support of the Scottish-Lancastrian invasions of England in 1462-3 was never as whole-hearted as supporters of Henry VI might have liked, it was one of the most pressing priorities of the Yorkist diplomats to remove any possibility of foreign support for Lancastrian insurrection. After a long series of negotiations from September to mid-October 1463 held at St Omer and then Hesdin, the threat of direct Franco-Lancastrian co-operation was removed, at least for the time being. In England, on 27 October, orders were given to proclaim the news that Louis XI had finally promised not to make war against Edward and had promised not to give 'Ayd or Favour to Henry late calling himselfe Kyng of England, Margarete his Wyff, nor her Sonne'.³ The truce between England and France on land, signed on 8 October, was to last until 1 October 1464, but a further truce at sea was left for future negotiation. In addition, an extension of the commercial agreement between England and Burgundy had been agreed at Hesdin with the representatives of Duke Philip the Good on 7 October.⁴

This paper will explore some neglected aspects of the English delegation to St Omer and will reveal the activities of those English officials whose duties were to prepare for and organise the logistics and day-to-day aspects of such a large and eagerly awaited diplomatic conference. It will become clear that evidence from the records of the English Chancery and Exchequer provides only a partial and incomplete picture of the way in which English diplomacy was carried out during the late medieval period. Our knowledge of the Yorkist diplomatic polity (and, in fact, of the late medieval polity as a whole) would be

greatly improved if historians were to make far more of the substantial records of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives Départementales du Nord (in Lille). However, it should be a source of some pride to all Ricardians that three frequent contributors to this journal, Livia Visser-Fuchs, Michael K. Jones and Cliff Davies have already set the example which others should follow.⁵ Amongst other scholars of the Yorkist age, Ian Arthurson, Mark Ballard and Kathleen Daly too are unusual in their employment of French and Burgundian sources. Still, much remains to be done.⁶ Despite Cliff Davies' call some time ago for historians to see the Wars of the Roses in a European context, the rich resources of the North European archives able to provide such a context remain under-used by much of the historical community concerned with the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III.⁷

The accounts of Robert de la Bouverie, ducal receiver-general, for 1463–64, and a large collection of letters from the Bibliothèque Nationale provide a detailed picture of the hectic pace of diplomacy in the months preceding the conference of St Omer and the elaborate preparations which were being made for it. The arrival of the English delegation to the conference seems to have been expected from the early part of the summer of 1463. On 19 June Alard de Rabodenghes (*bailli* of St Omer) wrote to Antoine de Croy, Count of Porcien, explaining that one of his servants had recently returned from England with the news that the English ambassadors had been chosen and that a pursuivant of John Lord Wenlock would soon arrive in search of a safe-conduct for the English embassy.⁸ The following day Antoine de Croy wrote that the conference would take place on St John's Day [24 June] or a few days afterwards; he also revealed that Lord Wenlock had recently written to Jean de Lannoy (Croy's nephew) explaining that there would be no equivocation on the part of the English, and that the embassy would come bearing 'sufficient powers'.⁹ Louis XI, it seems, had already decided that Croy would be one of his representatives at the conference; Croy wrote on 24 June that he had decided to travel back to his lodgings at Rouen since, in his opinion, it was preferable for him, as the representative of the king of France, to arrive at St Omer after the arrival of the English.¹⁰ The representatives of the duke of Burgundy were also waiting for the arrival of Edward IV's ambassadors. Jean Schoonhove, ducal secretary and 'garde de ses chartes de Flandres', waited for three weeks with other members of the ducal council at St Omer from 9 July.¹¹

An English warrant for issue of 4 July 1463, ordered that payments should be made to Edward's ambassadors in preparation for their mission. George Neville, Bishop of Exeter (Edward's chancellor), Henry Bourgchier, Earl of Essex, John Lord Wenlock, Peter Taster, Dean of St Severin's, Dr Thomas Wynterbourne, Dr Thomas Kent, Dr Henry Sharp, Sir Walter Blount, Louis

Galet and Richard Whetehill were to be paid in expectation of their mission to 'mete with the commissaries and ambassatours' of the duke of Burgundy.¹² It was widely believed amongst interested parties on the Continent that the purpose of the conference was to allow England to come to some agreement with France (either by direct negotiation or by mediation of Philip the Good), but there is no formal mention of this possibility in the warrant for issue. The prospect of an Anglo-French truce was probably an open secret rather than a publicly and officially accepted fact. Meanwhile, there was still no immediate sign of the English embassy at St Omer. Apparently Edward was waiting for the unstable situation on the Anglo-Scottish border to be resolved.¹³ At the end of May, Alnwick had been given over to a Lancastrian force by Sir Ralph Grey and a few days later the earl of Warwick had been dispatched to the North in response. By the middle of July Norham too was threatened by a besieging Scottish army.¹⁴

When Antoine de Croy wrote from Boulogne on 7 July to Louis d'Harcourt, Patriarch of Jerusalem, he informed the bishop that he had recently been told that the English ambassadors to the St Omer conference were at Sandwich. However, he went on to say that an envoy of Edward IV, Thomas Vaughan (Edward's esquire of the body), had recently arrived to meet with Philip the Good and had explained that the English ambassadors did not yet dare to board their ships owing to rumours of a fleet of Louis XI's ships which was feared to be roaming the seas. Croy found Vaughan's report difficult to believe since, as he told Harcourt, the conference at St Omer was to be held partly at the desire and knowledge of the French king.¹⁵ On Saturday 16 July, Philippe de Loan (lieutenant of the *sénéchal* of the Boulonnais, and somewhat of a specialist in diplomatic contacts with the English) wrote to Antoine de Croy with further news of the long-awaited English embassy.¹⁶ Apparently, one of Richard Whetehill's clerks, Colin Herevé, had arrived in Boulogne that very morning bringing news that on the following Monday, Whetehill (lieutenant of Guînes), Sir Walter Blount (treasurer of Calais) and Otwell Worseley would arrive at Calais to prepare for the arrival of the English delegation to the conference.¹⁷ Supposedly, on that Monday, the English embassy was finally to leave London for Sandwich. De Loan quickly passed this information on to Antoine de Croy who then, in turn, informed his colleague Louis d'Harcourt and promised to notify the bishop as soon as the embassy had arrived at Calais.¹⁸

A letter written by William Lord Hastings on 7 August most clearly demonstrates that Edward IV was waiting for a successful resolution of the disorder in the Border area before sending any embassy abroad. Hastings wrote that the embassy was almost ready to leave for St Omer, where it would have been

already had it not been for the 'great enterprise of the ancient enemies of my sovereign lord, the Scots, allied with the king's great traitors and rebels, Henry calling himself king and Margaret, his wife'.¹⁹ On 13 August Antoine de Croy had heard, by means of some further letters from England (written this time by Sir Walter Blount), that the ambassadors' ships and certain other ships of war were ready to leave.²⁰ Blount's message may have been carried by his own pursuivant, Chateaubleu, who was rewarded by the duke of Burgundy at about this time for delivering certain 'lettres closes' to him whilst he was at Boulogne.²¹ At last, on 21 August, after a final meeting with Edward IV at Dover, the English delegation departed, although still in some fear for their personal safety. For as soon as they had arrived at Calais, John Lord Wenlock was dispatched with thirty-six people in his company to meet the duke of Burgundy at Boulogne in order to procure safe passage for the embassy.²² Whilst at Boulogne, Wenlock and the duke spoke of the grave concerns that some of the English ambassadors had expressed concerning the security of the embassy; apparently they were still suspicious of the intentions of certain subjects of Louis XI.²³ Wenlock it seems was only mollified when told that Philip would hold himself personally responsible for their safety and would arrange for Jean de Lannoy and Alard de Rabodenghes to meet the English near Guînes on Monday 29 August and conduct them to the site of the conference at St Omer.²⁴ After months of delay, Wenlock and his colleagues spent almost the whole of September in negotiation at St Omer after which they travelled to Hesdin where they stayed from 30 September until the end of the conference on 10 October. The Englishmen were eventually persuaded by the duke of Burgundy to meet the French king at Hesdin on Monday 3 October.²⁵

Evidence from the English archives gives an inadequate impression of the frenetic diplomatic activity that preceded the conference of St Omer. Thomas Vaughan and Colin Herevé's missions in July and Chateaubleu's trip to Boulogne in August are not recorded in the documents of the English Exchequer. It might, perhaps, be supposed that both Herevé and Chateaubleu were paid by their masters (the lieutenant of Guînes and treasurer of Calais respectively); the payments being accounted for in some now-lost set of Calais accounts. In any case, as far as Vaughan's mission is concerned, some crucial Tellers' and Issue Rolls for Michaelmas Term 1463 are now missing, but the Tellers' Roll for Easter of that year is also unhelpful. Other crucial pieces of evidence for the embassy itself are not to be found in the English archives. Strangely, no ambassadorial powers for the embassy are contained in the Treaty Rolls (Public Record Office, C 76), showing that the rolls do not provide a completely accurate guide to the full number of powers which were actually issued during this period. On the other hand, this does seem to be one of the few

instances for Edward IV's reign where an ambassadorial commission for a *major* series of negotiations is not preserved in the English archives.²⁶ A set of powers (issued on 6 August) for the Englishmen to treat with Burgundy for a commercial agreement and an abstinence of war, is to be found, however, in the Archives Départementales du Nord.²⁷ All ten of the men named in the original warrant for issue of 4 July were included in the commission as well as Thomas Vaughan and Robert Danvers (justice of the King's Bench). Eventually all of these ambassadors, except Danvers, were present at the negotiations and became signatories to the intercourse of merchandise between England and Burgundy signed on 7 October.²⁸ No other powers exist (either in Continental or English archives) for the English ambassadors to treat either directly or indirectly for a truce with France.

Furthermore, the English evidence and the ambassadorial commission itself gives a very incomplete picture of the make-up of the English delegation to the conference. Two of the king's officers of arms accompanied the embassy, Windsor Herald and Calais Pursuivant; Warwick Herald represented the earl of Warwick, who had not been able to attend the conference owing to commitments in the North of England.²⁹ It seems also that William Overey was present at the conference in order to act as a specialist advisor in the drafting of the commercial agreement between England and Burgundy. Overey, governor of the Merchant Adventurers in the Low Countries up to May 1462, had been included in an ambassadorial commission of September of that year to treat with Duke Philip the Good.³⁰ Although Overey was neither named in the commission of 6 August 1463, nor acted as a signatory to the agreement of 7 October, he was still described in the receiver-general's accounts as one of Edward's 'ambassadeurs'.³¹ This probably indicates the important role which Overey played during the negotiations, despite being attached to the embassy in an informal capacity. In fact, the number of people who formed part of the embassy (either as ambassadors, specialist advisors, heralds, pursuivants, servants and other assorted hangers-on) reached around 200. Over 855 *livres* were spent by Duke Philip in providing hospitality for the English ('ou nombre de environ deux cens') from 30 September to 8 October.³²

An interesting group of noblemen also accompanied the English embassy to Hesdin and St Omer. The accounts of the ducal receiver-general state that 'John, son of the duke of Boucquinghen [Buckingham]', 'my lord of Willeby [Willoughby]' and the 'son of the earl of Assenfort' were in attendance.³³ The son of the duke of Buckingham was John Stafford, son of Humphrey Duke of Buckingham (Duke Humphrey had been killed at the battle of Northampton in 1460).³⁴ Richard Welles of Willoughby is surely meant by 'my lord of Willeby', since it is known that Willoughby had also been at Dover with George Neville

when the great seal was handed over to Neville's deputies.³⁵ Willoughby had been pardoned by Edward IV in February 1462 but did not come into his inheritance until 1464–65 owing to his father's attainder.³⁶ His pursuivant, Noir Lyon, also accompanied him to the conference.³⁷ If 'Assenfort' can be read as Oxford, then John de Vere, son of the earl of Oxford, may also have been present. Edward IV had executed his father and brother for treason in the previous year.³⁸ Accompanying these noblemen was 'Thomas Thirel', who should probably be identified as Sir Thomas Tyrell of Heron; his brother had also been executed for treason in 1462, but by the year of the St Omer conference he was serving on Edward IV's commissions of the peace.³⁹ The presence of these men at the conference (whose familial loyalties were quite anti-Yorkist) may have been arranged to impress upon Louis XI just how far Edward's government had come. Louis was perhaps expected to believe that the Lancastrian cause was now hopeless. For these men were either in Edward's power or were now his (possibly reluctant) supporters.

All this, of course, serves to remind us of the limitations of the source material remaining in the English archives. Records of relevance to diplomatic history (and much else) may be entirely missing, such as the Tellers' and Issue Rolls for Michaelmas 1463, which might have provided evidence for payments to such people as Windsor Herald or Calais Pursuivant. And those records which do exist may only tell us half the story. The English evidence for much of late medieval diplomacy consists of formal diplomatic commissions in the Treaty Rolls (and these, as we have seen, are not fully comprehensive) and cursory references concerning payments to envoys in the records of the Exchequer. Such evidence gives very little indication of the lowly missions of Chateaubleu Pursuivant or the informal role of men such as William Overey, or indeed the way in which hangers-on to the main body of an embassy could be used for subtle political purposes. John Stafford, John de Vere and Richard Willoughby may not have received formal ambassadorial powers, but their presence at St Omer and Hesdin would have sent an important message to Louis XI. So, some of the subtleties and more informal aspects of late medieval diplomacy have been obscured by the vagaries of the survival of English documentary evidence. But the rich resources of the archives of Lille and Paris can allow us to examine diplomatic intercourse between England, France and Burgundy in far greater detail. A more complete picture of late medieval diplomacy then begins to emerge, which highlights the important responsibilities of minor agents, officers of arms, specialist advisors and members of ambassadorial entourages, as well as the more well known duties of ambassadors.

Appendix

A.D.N., B 2051, f. 79v.

[By permission of the Archives Départementales du Nord. Punctuation and capitalisation have been modernised]

Lundi iij^e jour d'Octobre l'an mil CCCC lxij le roy, monseigneur le duc de Bourgogne et de Brabant, madame la duchesse de Bourbon et mes damoiselles ses filles tout le jour a Hesdin. Et plusieurs des gens de l'ostel du roy logiez en l'ostel et aux despens de mondit seigneur le duc. Et ce jour disnerent en l'ostel et aux despens de mondit seigneur les ambassadeurs du roy d'Engleterre assavoir le chancelier d'Angleterre⁴⁰, le conte d'Essez⁴¹, messire Jehan van Loop⁴², messire Watier Blont⁴³, le doyen de Bourdeaux⁴⁴, maistre Thomas Cande⁴⁵, maistre Henry Caret⁴⁶, maistre Loys Galet, maistre Thomas Vintebort⁴⁷, Thomas Wagant⁴⁸, Richart Wetel⁴⁹ et maistre Guillaume Awray⁵⁰ tous ambassadeurs. Et en leur compaignie messire Jehan filz du duc de Boucquinghen, monseigneur de Willeby, le filz du conte d'Assenfort, maistre Thomas Thirel et plusieurs autres de leurs gens. Escu xx s. a la valeur de xl gros monnaie de Flandres. Somme du jour sans garnisons comprins gages

iiij^c xj l. j s. ix d.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1. The most accessible (and detailed) description of this conference is to be found in C.L. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth*, 2 vols, London 1923, vol. 1, pp. 298–308. See also: J. Calmette and G. Périnelle, *Louis XI et l'Angleterre (1461–1483)*, Paris 1930, pp. 40–45; M.-R. Thielemans, *Bourgogne et Angleterre: relations politiques et économiques entre les Pays-Bas Bourguignons et l'Angleterre 1435–1467*, Brussels 1966, pp. 396–404 and K. Daly, 'The Vraie Cronique d'Escoce and Franco-Scottish Diplomacy: an Historical Work by John Ireland', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 35 (1991), pp. 106–33. I am grateful to Dr Daly for providing me with an offprint of this article.
2. The Treaty of Chinon was signed on 23 June 1462: in return for a loan of 20,000 livres it was agreed that once Calais had returned to the hands of the Lancastrians it should then be returned to Louis, if the loan had not been paid back within a year, (the agreement is printed in Jean de Wavrin, *Anchiennes Croniques d'Engleterre*, ed. L.M.E. Dupont, 3 vols, Paris 1858–63, vol. 3, pp. 176–77).
3. *Foedera, conventiones, literae, et cujuscunque generis acta publica inter reges Angliae et alios quovis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes vel communitates*, ed. T. Rymer and rev. by G. Holmes, 10 vols, The Hague 1745, repr. Farnborough 1967, vol. 5, pt. 2, pp. 117–18.
4. Lille, Archives Départementales du Nord (hereafter A.D.N.), B 575/16033.
5. For example: L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Richard was Late', *The Ricardian*, vol. 11, no. 147 (1999), pp. 616–19; M.K. Jones, '1477 — The Expedition that Never Was: Chivalric Expectation

- in Late Yorkist England', *The Ricardian*, vol. 12, no. 153 (2001), pp. 275–92; C.S.L. Davies and M.H.A. Ballard, 'Etienne Fryon: Burgundian agent, English royal secretary and "principal counsellor" to Perkin Warbeck', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 62 (1989), pp. 245–59.
6. I. Arthursen, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy 1491–1499*, Stroud 1994; M.H.A. Ballard, 'An expedition of English archers to Liège in 1467, and the Anglo-Burgundian marriage alliance', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 34 (1990), pp. 152–74 and see footnote 1.
 7. A. Pollard, ed., *The Wars of the Roses*, London 1995, pp. 162–85, esp. p. 185.
 8. Wavrin, *Anchiennes Croniques*, vol. 3, pp. 159–61.
 9. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale [henceforth B.N.], Ms. Fr. 6970, f. 137r–v (Legrand's copy); for the dating of this letter and Croy's letter of 24 June see Calmette and Périnelle, *Louis XI*, p. 37, n. 2.
 10. Scofield, *The Life and Reign*, vol. 1, pp. 296–97; B.N., Ms. Fr. 6970, ff. 207r–208r; for further discussion of diplomatic etiquette and precedence at a medieval diplomatic conference, see J.G. Dickinson, *The Congress of Arras 1435: a study in medieval diplomacy*, Oxford 1955, pp. 110–13.
 11. A.D.N., B 2051, f. 203r; Thielemans, *Bourgogne*, p. 399.
 12. London, Public Record Office, E 404/72/3/48.
 13. Calmette and Périnelle, *Louis XI*, pp. 37–38.
 14. Scofield, *The Life and Reign*, vol. 1, pp. 287–88, 293; Wavrin, *Anchiennes Croniques*, vol. 3, pp. 159–60.
 15. Croy's letter is printed in Calmette and Périnelle, *Louis XI*, *pièce justificative* no. 17, pp. 290–91.
 16. The letter is printed in Wavrin, *Anchiennes Croniques*, vol. 3, pp. 162–64, although Dupont's date of 15 July is incorrect, see Thielemans, *Bourgogne*, p. 399, n. 183; de Loan had, for example, been in England from April to June 1462 and from February to May 1463 (A.D.N., B 2045, f. 165r and B 2051, f. 197v).
 17. Wavrin, *Anchiennes Croniques*, vol. 3, p. 162; Worseley was lieutenant of the Castle of Calais by 1466 although it is not known whether he held this office in 1463, London, British Library, Add. Ms. 46455, f. 65r.
 18. See Croy's letter of 19 July 1463, Calmette and Périnelle, *Louis XI*, *pièce justificative* no. 18, pp. 291–92.
 19. Scofield, *The Life and Reign*, vol. 2, pp. 461–62 (Appendix I).
 20. B.N., Ms. Fr. 6970, f. 364r.
 21. A.D.N., B 2048, f. 228r–v and *The Complete Peerage*, ed. G.E. Cokayne and rev. by V. Gibbs *et al.*, 14 vols, London 1910–98, vol. 11, Appendix C, p. 61.
 22. A.D.N., B 2048, f. 241r; the ducal receiver-general paid out 17l. 18s. for hospitality given to Wenlock's 'people and servants' during their two-day stay in Boulogne. See also Thielemans *Bourgogne*, pp. 399–400.
 23. B.N., Ms. Fr. 6970, f. 374r.
 24. Calmette and Périnelle, *Louis XI*, *pièce justificative* no. 20, p. 294 (letter from Philip the Good to Louis XI, written from Boulogne on 24 August 1463).
 25. The date of the Englishmen's departure from Hesdin is given by Scofield as 10 October, *eadem*, *The Life and Reign*, vol. 1, p. 307; and see also Calmette and Périnelle, *Louis XI*, p. 45 (for the meeting with Louis XI, see p. 44). There is, however, some reason to think that the English ambassadors actually left Hesdin on 8 October, see below.
 26. See E.L. Meek, 'The conduct and practice of diplomacy during the reign of Edward IV (1461–1483)', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge 2001, pp. 10, 54.
 27. A.D.N., B 575/16040.
 28. A.D.N., B 575/16033.
 29. A.D.N., B 2051, f. 292r–v.
 30. *Foedera*, ed. Rymer, vol. 5, pt. 2, p. 111; Overey had probably been elected as governor in late 1461 but by letters patent of April 1462 Edward IV himself had then granted

him the office, an obvious challenge to the right of the Adventurers to elect their own governor. Edward soon restored this right on 28 May, after which William Caxton was elected as governor (I would like to thank Dr Anne Sutton for bringing this information to my attention). For Overey's career, consult: Thielemans, *Bourgogne*, pp. 389, 398, 493; A. Sutton, 'Caxton was a Mercer', in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. N. Rogers, Harlaxton Medieval Studies IV, Stamford 1994, pp. 126–32 and N.F. Blake, *William Caxton and his World*, London 1969, pp. 21, 39.

31. See Appendix.
32. A.D.N., B 2051, f. 341v.
33. See Appendix.
34. John Stafford had been pardoned on 25 June 1461 and was later made earl of Wiltshire on 5 January 1470. He was also a cup-bearer at the installation feast of George Neville as Archbishop of York (Scofield, *The Life and Reign*, vol. 1, p. 399, and n. 3).
35. In the formal documentation concerning the hand-over of the great seal, Willoughby is described as Sir Richard Welles of Willoughby, *Foedera*, ed. Rymer, vol. 5, pt. 2, pp. 116–17.
36. By Act of Parliament of 1467 he was granted full restitution in blood and honours, thereby becoming Lord Welles until his execution in 1470 (*Complete Peerage*, vol. 12, pt. 2, pp. 444–46; he acted as carver in the feast held to celebrate George Neville's installation).
37. A.D.N., B 2051, f. 292r–v; Noir Lyon was later the pursuivant of Viscount Welles (*Complete Peerage*, vol. 11, Appendix C, p. 79).
38. *Complete Peerage*, vol. 10, pp. 239–44; it is to be noted that custody of his lands had been granted to George Neville on 19 July 1463, *CPR, 1461–67*, p. 287.
39. Sir Thomas Tyrell (c.1411–1476) may have accompanied the embassy as an associate of Henry Bourchier, Earl of Essex; see Scofield, *The Life and Reign*, vol. 1, pp. 231–33 and R. Horrox, *Richard III: a study of service*, Cambridge 1989, repr. 1992, p. 80. I am grateful to Dr Rosemary Horrox for her advice on this subject.
40. George Neville.
41. Henry Bourchier, earl of Essex.
42. John Lord Wenlock.
43. Sir Walter Blount.
44. Peter Taster, Dean of St Severin's.
45. Dr Thomas Kent.
46. Probably Dr Henry Sharp.
47. Dr Thomas Wynterbourne.
48. Thomas Vaughan.
49. Richard Whetehill.
50. William Overey.