

Sedition and the King 'Beyond the See'? The Norwich Cordwainers, the Prior of Shouldham and Edmund de la Pole, 1504–08

JAMES ROSS

AMONGST THE DIFFUSED and patchy sources for what might be termed the early Tudor executive, there are a few sources in the National Archives which, although under the duchy of Lancaster class marks, undoubtedly belong to that nefarious Tudor institution, the council learned in the law.¹ In archival terms, this may be a result of Sir Reginald Bray and Sir Richard Empson, the latter once removed from the position of attorney-general of the duchy of Lancaster by Richard III, both being chancellors of the duchy of Lancaster and leading lights of the council.² Amongst these records are two little-known cases relating to seditious comments alleged to have been spoken late in Henry VII's reign by East Anglians in favour of Edmund de la Pole, the last serious Yorkist opponent to the first Tudor king. One case, recorded only in a single page in the council's proceeding and appearance books, details allegations made against the prior of Shouldham in Norfolk by a former servant and the subsequent examination of witnesses and the prior himself in the spring and summer of 1508.³ Contemporaneously, a second case was ongoing, relating to the matter of words spoken by two cordwainers in Norwich; more copiously documented than the Shouldham suit, the sources for this case comprise five items, dating from March and April 1508. In chronological order they are a copy of a report made to Thomas Lucas, the king's solicitor-general, on 24 March 1508, a letter in response to this information from John de Vere, thirteenth Earl of Oxford, to Lucas, dated 29 March, a letter from Lucas to Sir Richard Empson on 2 April, a privy seal letter dated 10 April to the mayor of Norwich, which, although in the king's name, was almost certainly initiated by Empson, and finally the mayor's reply, primarily consisting of a copy of proceedings made before his predecessor in May 1504.⁴ Referenced for other purposes by

¹ Quotation in the title is from the National Archives: Public Record Office (hereafter TNA), DL 3/4, N1 c and d. I am very grateful to Dr Sean Cunningham for reading and commenting on an early draft of this article.

² M.M. Condon, 'Empson, Sir Richard (c.1450–1510)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition, 2008). More prosaically, it might also be a result of both the duchy council and the council learned meeting regularly in the same location in Westminster, leading to their records being bound up together: Sean Cunningham 'Henry VII's Council Learned in the Law', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition, article due to be released September 2011). I am grateful to Dr. Cunningham for an advance copy.

³ TNA, DL 5/4, f. 138v.

⁴ TNA, DL 3/4, N1 and a-d. All quotations relating to the Norwich case unless otherwise stated are from this source, printed in full in the Appendix below. The documents are reverse order of receipt, the letter from the mayor of Norwich being N1, Henry VII's privy seal letter N1 a, Lucas's missive N1 b, the

two learned historians, Robert Somerville and Margaret Condon, neither case has been expanded upon in detail until now, not least as the accusations of treasonable words that formed the basis for the initial proceedings against the prior and the cordwainers were so patently ridiculous.⁵ Yet these cases do illustrate two features characteristic of Henry VII's reign. There was a febrile atmosphere of suspicion: words exchanged by two cordwainers in a shop in Norwich ultimately occupied the time of men as busy as the mayor of Norwich, one of the king's leading magnate supporters, the earl of Oxford, Richard Empson, the king's factotum in so many areas of governance, and others of the king's council. Furthermore, both cases exemplify what Sean Cunningham, when discussing this with the author, described as 'the exercise of an Englishman's God-given right to shop another Englishman for cash so prevalent in the last years of Henry VII'.

Edmund de la Pole, the subject of the allegedly seditious comments, did not initially appear to threaten Henry's tenure of the throne. Although there must have been an awareness of his Yorkist blood, not least as a result of his elder brother's treason and death at the battle of Stoke in 1487, de la Pole did nothing to worry Henry in the first few years after his accession to his father's dignity in 1492, despite the resentment that must have been generated by the downgrading of his title from a dukedom to an earldom. De la Pole fought for Henry at Blackheath in 1497, but thereafter Henry, perhaps seeking to end any dynastic threat to himself and his children, succeeded only in doing the opposite. The king put unnecessary and counter-productive pressure, both financial and legal, on Edmund, which twice drove him abroad, the second time (in 1501) for good.⁶ De la Pole took up the Yorkist claim to the throne, and fled with his brother

report made to Lucas (formerly enclosed with Lucas's letter) N1 c and Oxford's reply N1 d. All are transcribed below in the Appendix. Only the report is dated by year, but the internal evidence in the letters by Oxford and Lucas very strongly suggests the same year, and the privy seal letter is dated from Greenwich on 10 April; Henry VII appears to have been at nearby Knole house on 8 and 11 April 1508, and a trip to Greenwich was entirely feasible: *CPR 1494–1509*, pp. 568, 580. Additionally, the mayor of Norwich who replied to the privy seal letter was Thomas Aldrich, who was in office between May 1507 and 1508: B. Cozens-Hardy and E.A. Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich, 1403–1835*, Norwich 1938, pp. 11, 39–40. The only issue with the dating of the Norwich report is that although it states that the inquisition took place on 6 May 19 Henry VII (1504), it mentions as present the two sheriffs of the city, naming them as Geoffrey Styward and John Crome, who were sheriffs in 1500–1: *List of Sheriffs for England and Wales*, List and Index Society, vol. 9, 1898, p. 213. One can only assume that the original report mentioned just the presence of the sheriffs without naming them, and a clerk copying the document in 1508 inserted the wrong names.

⁵ Both cases are mentioned by Robert Somerville, 'Henry VII's "council learned in the law"', *EHR*, vol. 54 (1939), pp. 434, 441; the Norwich case is referenced in the context of relations between council members in M.M. Condon, 'An anachronism with intent? Henry VII's council ordinance of 1491/2', in *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages. A Tribute to Charles Ross*, ed. R.A. Griffiths and James Sherborne, Gloucester 1986, p. 234.

⁶ For Edmund de la Pole more generally see Sean Cunningham, 'The last Yorkist rebellion? Henry VII and the earl of Suffolk, 1499–1501' in *Richard III and East Anglia. Magnates, Gilds and Learned Men*, ed. L. Visser-Fuchs, Richard III Society, London 2010, pp. 69–89; idem, *Henry VII*, Abingdon 2007, pp. 112–13, 186–92; Alison Hanham, 'Edmund de la Pole, defector', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 2 (1988), pp. 240–50; W. E. Hampton, 'Edmund de la Pole', *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 98 (Sept. 1987), pp. 464–478.

Richard to the court of Emperor Maximilian, whom he hoped would support his claim. From Aachen, Suffolk began to plan for an invasion of England. However, with East Anglia secure under the earl of Oxford's watchful eye and after the king mobilized a network of spies and informers, probably including Sir Robert Curzon and Sir William Waldegrave, to infiltrate de la Pole's supporters at home and abroad, Suffolk's threat was contained and eventually neutralised. Suffolk thereafter became a pawn of international politics; in July 1502 Maximilian agreed by the treaty of Augsburg not to harbour English rebels within his territories, although he did maintain the financially desperate earl at Aachen for several more months. Huge payments to Maximilian and the Archduke Philip made in Henry VII's later years may have been intended to buy their co-operation against the de la Poles. Eventually Suffolk and some of his followers left at Easter 1504, with Richard de la Pole remaining behind as hostage for his brother's debts. Suffolk, disillusioned by his lack of support on the continent, finally instructed two of his servants to negotiate with Henry for his return to England. Having received an undertaking that his life would not be forfeit, Edmund was delivered to Henry VII at Calais and imprisoned in the Tower on 24 April 1506. He was eventually executed by Henry VIII in May 1513.

What happened in Shouldham and Norwich, however, had little to do with high politics or diplomatic machinations on the continent. The Norwich case is more illuminating and will be considered first. According to an examination taken on 6 May 1504 before the mayor, four aldermen and the sheriffs in the Norwich Guildhall, about a month earlier two cordwainers, Thomas Gooch and William Rippes, were working in the house of their master Geoffrey Jowell. Gooch, who brought the accusations to the town authorities, stated that Rippes, talking of the subsidy granted to Henry VII in the last parliament, had said that 'the kyng dothe wele to take that he may for he shall not take it long', adding that 'he trusted that he shuld se Edmund de la Pole were the croune or he died'. Rippes told a different story, however, one which, as a result of its humorous nature, has more of a truthful ring about it. As they sat at their work, Gooch boasted that he had done service to lords and gentlemen. Rippes' witty retort was that as Gooch had 'but one cote to your bak it semyth ye haue be one of Edmund de la Pole's seruants'. This was probably not based on knowledge of de la Pole's then dire financial straits on the continent, but on the fact that he had been dispossessed of his estates and had fled. It is worth emphasising that Pole, often seen as a serious threat to Henry's crown, could also be a figure of ridicule, worthy of mockery for his poverty and subsequent lack of lordship; this may have had its roots in Edmund's financial problems dating from his accession to his ducal title (and subsequent demotion on this basis), and perhaps predated his flight abroad. Rippes then stated that he and Gooch had later got into an argument about a wager made on a tennis game that Gooch claimed was owed to him and Rippes refused to acknowledge. Gooch, in revenge for the non-payment of the debt, complained to the mayor, making accusations based on Rippes' reference to de

la Pole. Geoffrey Jowell, their master and the owner of the house, was examined on these premises, but denied hearing any seditious words. Jowell was released, but nonetheless, since if words had been said, they had been said in his house by his employees, he was released only on bail, to come before the Norwich authorities whenever he was asked to do. Gooch and Rippes were committed to ward and were apparently still there four years later. Less of a formal punishment than now, this incarceration must still have been a serious inconvenience for those involved. The committal of the two men to prison might indicate that the accusations were more serious than it first appeared, or simply that, in the absence of further evidence, there was little more that could be done but the potential spectre of treason meant the Norwich authorities did not feel able to release the men.

There the matter rested for nearly four years. The surprising rebirth of the case as a live issue and its impact on the consciousness of the great men of the realm was a matter of chance. In early March 1508, one John Russell of Soham, Cambridgeshire, was passing through Castle Hedingham from London. It is not clear where he was going to, as Hedingham was not on the most direct route from London to Soham. At Hedingham, the seat of the earl of Oxford, Russell met William Wafyn, Oxford's tenant there. Wafyn described how Gooch, still in the sheriff's custody in Norwich, had told his story to him and one Carde, formerly a clerk to Ralph Josselyn, who was the earl's secretary. Gooch's story had altered somewhat in the meantime, expanding to accuse his master, Geoffrey Jowell, of direct criticism of Henry VII: 'the king is but a pillor of his people and my lord of Oxford an extorcioner'. Wafyn, examined later, backed only part of Russell's story, exonerating Jowell himself of any treasonous words but confirming that one of Gooch's fellows (neither even knew Rippes' name) had a case to answer. It seems likely that at some point previously Oxford had sent Wafyn and Carde to Norwich to investigate the possible link with de la Pole, and that his servants had been rather too free with whatever information they had obtained, perhaps in a tavern in Castle Hedingham, allowing Russell to acquire what ought to have been fairly confidential information. Oxford may have taken action against his delinquent servants: by March 1508 Carde was described as being late the clerk of Ralph Josselyn and of Sudbury in Suffolk, indicating he was no longer in the employ of the earl or Josselyn nor resident at one of the earl's manors, and Oxford was later scathing in his assessment of Wafyn's character. It is not clear when Carde and Wafyn were in Norwich, but it may have been some time before, and certainly there is no hint in Oxford's letter of 29 March 1508 that he was intending to act upon any information acquired from Wafyn or Carde.

Whatever the quality of the information, John Russell took his chance. Two weeks after the conversation in Hedingham he met with Thomas Lucas, the king's solicitor-general, and showed him 'diuerse maters concerning the king's highnesse'. Lucas then wrote to the earl of Oxford, largely responsible throughout Henry VII's reign for matters of political security in East Anglia, suggesting that the earl call

all the parties before him.⁷ Oxford did so, but his response is fascinating; perceptive yet cynical, weary and perhaps slightly frustrated as, presumably through a lack of evidence, he was unable to dismiss the matter entirely. It illuminates how tiresome the constant rumours and plots of Henry VII's reign, real and imagined, must have been for someone as deeply involved as the earl. Oxford responded that 'I know the same Russell and Wafen to be symple personnes and of small reputation and little credens: so as I entend not to busy myself in that bihalve upon their enformation'. However, the earl sent Russell (who had been the bearer of Lucas's letter) back to the solicitor-general, to be examined by the king's council if they saw fit. Oxford added contemptuously 'I fear me that bycause the said Russel and Wafen thorough folly and mysgouernance be now dekaied and haue but small substance whereupon to lyve: they do busy their selfs in such causis to the trouble of the king's pouer subgetts forto haue a bribe'. Oxford may well have been correct on this score. Russell's allegations to Lucas a few days earlier had been clever. Although the original discussion between Gooch and Rippes had mentioned Edmund de la Pole by name, Russell, conscious that Edmund had been in prison for two years by the spring of 1508, simply alleged that Gooch and Rippes had said that 'ther was oon be yond the see which he trusted shuld wer the crown of England'; the vagueness allowed this to refer to Richard de la Pole, Edmund's brother, still at liberty on the continent and therefore a continuing threat to Henry VII's tenure of the throne.

Oxford's dismissal of the matter forced Lucas, perhaps less convinced that it should be dropped, to take the matter to his colleague Richard Empson, another of the council learned in the law, chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, and someone with greater clout and influence than he. Lucas suggested that a summons under the privy seal should be issued to the parties involved. Probably as a direct result, a letter of privy seal was issued within eight days of Lucas's letter to the mayor of Norwich. It instructed the mayor to put Geoffrey Jowell under sufficient surety to appear before the council learned at the quindene of Easter (four weeks later) and also to certify the council of the 'trouthe and playnesse' of the whole matter. It also criticised the Norwich authorities for not advertising the council of the whole matter when it first arose. In response the mayor, Thomas Aldrich, firmly emphasising that it was one of his predecessors who held the initial inquisition (and thus was to blame for not letting the council know), summarised the findings of the hearing concerning the accusations made by Gooch and rejected by Rippes.⁸

One wonders what the council learned made of the matter. Up to this point

⁷ See the author's *John de Vere, Thirteenth Earl of Oxford, 1442–1513. 'The Foremost Man of the Kingdom'*, Woodbridge 2011, pp. 124–35.

⁸ There is no trace of the original proceedings in 1504 or any discussion in 1508 amongst the Norwich assembly records (Norfolk Record Office, NCR Case 16 c, d), nor of any payments made for holding inquisitions or prisoners amongst the city chamberlains' records (NCR, Case 7 e). However, such a hearing might have been held in the mayor's court, whose books are lost for Henry VII's reign.

Lucas and Empson had only heard Russell and Wafyn's account of the 'seditious words', presumably embellished and embroidered within the loose confines of plausibility in order that the informants might achieve their financial goals. Faced with the prosaic nature of the actual accusations – at worst a few words that might be construed as treasonable by people who knew little and mattered less, at best a joke taken out of context for the purposes of financial revenge – it may have become clear that it was not a matter that ought to have concerned the royal council once they learned the truth, and neither the Norwich authorities nor Oxford had chosen to act on the matter once in full possession of the facts. In the council's appearance books, during the Easter term of 1508, the following was entered:

Norff⁹ – <Th> Gowge a shoemaker of Norwich apperid in the tres septimanas⁹ of Ester the last terme & gave attendaunce al y^e terme & than had day ouer unto the octave¹⁰ of the holy Trinite next etc.¹¹

This might be read as indicating that the case was not heard during the Easter term for pressure of other business. Certainly no hearing was recorded, no trace can be found of Gooch or Russell in the Trinity term entries in the council book, nor of Geoffrey Jowell appearing, nor is there evidence of obligations or recognisances binding any of principals in the last of Henry VII's chamber books or the close rolls.¹² It appears that, not before time, the matter was dropped.

The second case, less illuminating in its evidence, can be told more swiftly. The sole record of the case comes from the records of the council learned, and more specifically from the point of view of Edmund Dudley, who probably had custody of, and was responsible for, the council's proceedings and appearance book.¹³ On 15 April 1508 the book recorded that one Roland Bowbank of Shouldham in Norfolk, a yeoman aged forty-four years, confessed of his free will that three years earlier he had been in service with John Bray, the (new) prior of the Gilbertine house of canons and nuns at Shouldham.¹⁴ On 28 April 1505, at dinner, Bowbank alleged that the prior began to complain of the king's taxation. A clerical subsidy of £12,542 from Canterbury province had been granted to the king at a convocation at St. Paul's in London in May 1504, and the two collection dates of 29 September 1504 and 23 March 1505 for the moieties of this subsidy would have been fresh in the memory of the prior.¹⁵ However, Bowbank alleged that the prior

⁹ 'tres septimanas', the legal return day three weeks after Easter [15 May 1508]

¹⁰ 'Octave', the legal return day eight days after the feast of Trinity [23 June 1508].

¹¹ TNA, DL 5/4, f. 134r.

¹² TNA, E 36/214; *CCR 1500–1509*.

¹³ Somerville, 'Henry VII's "council learned"', pp. 438–39; all quotations relating to this case unless otherwise stated are from TNA, DL 5/4, f. 138v., printed in full below.

¹⁴ The previous prior had died in 1504, so Bray can have been prior little more than a year: Victoria County History, *Norfolk*, ed. H.A. Doubleday and W. Page, 2 vols., London 1901–6, vol. 2, pp. 412–14.

¹⁵ The sum was meant to be equivalent to a clerical tenth and it is described as the 'dymes' or 'dimes' in the document, from 'dime', to pay a tenth.

complained not only 'that the king's grace thus polleth us'¹⁶ but also that rather than being 'thus polled, that yon gentilman be yound the see, Edmond de la Pole, shuld come in and I wold spend with hym my body and my goodes'. Three of the priory's canons, named by Bowbank as present when the prior spoke these words, were summoned to appear before the council to give evidence, and all rejected the claim: 'they neuer herd the prior abouenamed utter any suche words'. However, the prior was bound by obligation in the sum of £100 to appear before the council learned in the following Michaelmas term, and a different hand added a later note in the appearance book that the prior confessed to criticising the king's taxation, though not (presumably) the words regarding Edmund de la Pole.

Once again, though, it was the context in which the allegation was made that is most important, not the fact that the prior did what so many Englishmen down the centuries did – grumble about over-taxation. The prior's words were spoken in April 1505; Bowbank went to the council learned in April 1508. If it was a pressing matter of treasonable words, then why the three-year delay? There are more likely explanations than treason. Bowbank had seemingly left the prior's employ (the past tense is used of his 'service') – was this revenge for being dismissed? Or did Bowbank sense an opportunity for financial gain? The latter accusation was levelled by the earl of Oxford against Russell and Wafyn. The murky world of informers under Henry VII is one that needs further investigation, but clearly there were some men who found it rewarding enough to make a profession – Henry Toft is the most notorious – and in 1509 as many as twelve informers were arrested in Henry VIII's name, as one of a number of gestures after his accession to ease the political pressure caused by his father's harsh regime.¹⁷ However, these men used penal statutes, where set sums were allocated for the promoter if the prosecution was successful. For the less formalised process of accusations of treason and disloyalty, it is not known what the going rate might be, and whether the allegation had to be proved for any payment to be made, but Oxford's charge that Russell and Wafyn were acting as they were 'forto haue a bribe' has a ring of truth to it.

It is interesting that it was the Westminster men, perhaps lacking local knowledge, who took both cases more seriously.¹⁸ The East Anglian establishment,

¹⁶ 'Polleth', from the verb 'to poll', defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, Oxford 1989, as 'to plunder by ... means of excessive taxation; to practise extortion, commit depredations.'

¹⁷ For Toft: *Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, London 1938, pp. 258, 365; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, ed. C.G. Bayne and W.H. Dunham, Selden Society, vol. 75 (1956), pp. lvi-lviii, lx-lxi. For the others: TNA, C 82/343/1/615 (release of the informers in December 1509 on bail). For discussion of these sources see J.P. Cooper, 'Henry VII's last years reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 2 (1959), pp. 117, 126; G.R. Elton, 'Henry VII: a restatement', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 4 (1961), pp. 6, 21, and more generally P.R. Cavill, *The English Parliaments of Henry VII, 1485–1504*, Oxford 2009, pp. 92–100; M.R. Horowitz, '"Agree with the king": Henry VII, Edmund Dudley and the strange case of Thomas Sunnyff', *Historical Research*, vol. 79 (2006), pp. 344–45.

¹⁸ Thomas Lucas was an East Anglian, coming from a west Suffolk family, and he built Little Saxham Hall (near Bury St Edmunds) between 1505 and 1513, but as a privy councillor and legal officer (after 1503), he must have spent most of his time at court.

embodied here by Oxford and the Norwich authorities, found the (vague) threat of the Norwich case of little concern. Both the then mayor and the earl investigated initially but then refused to take further action; more attuned to regional conditions, they seem to have perceived much quicker that it was not a serious security threat. This is supported by the surviving evidence – Gooch, Rippes, Jowell and the prior of Shouldham cannot be linked in any way to Edmund de la Pole,¹⁹ nor was there the least suggestion of any of them travelling to the continent, or acting as spies or agent provocateurs.²⁰ Edmund de la Pole had been in prison for two years by the time either of these accusations were brought forward in 1508. One can understand the initial investigation of Gooch and Rippes in 1504 by the Norwich authorities; Edmund de la Pole was still at liberty then. In 1508, however, the threat from Edmund, securely imprisoned in the Tower, was non-existent, and the threat from his brother was more limited while Edmund lived; interestingly, neither accusation mentioned Richard de la Pole directly. While the royal council had a duty to investigate possible cases of treason (and Oxford, a royal councillor, had done so in the Norwich case), did the eagerness of the council learned in the law to investigate both matters perhaps also spring from the scent of an opportunity to make money through punitive fines from the prior and Master Jowell, or to restrict their freedom of action by placing them under a heavy obligation? No bond or fine has been found, other than the two enforcing the appearance of Jowell and the prior, but the sources are not complete, and certainly it seems likely that the prior's admission that he had criticised the king's taxation would have resulted in a fine.²¹

These cases leave a rather sordid impression of men such as Gooch and Bowbank taking advantage of both the atmosphere of dynastic insecurity and the regime's acquisitive tendencies for the purpose of revenge, and Russell and Wafyn acting as they did to make money. Oxford's view of the latter two as men who 'do busy their selfs in such causis to the trouble of the king's pouer subgetts forto haue

¹⁹ They were not among the duke's servants and associates bound over for their allegiance before the earl of Oxford and Lord Willoughby immediately after the duke's second flight in 1501: *CPR 1494–1509*, p. 287; TNA, C 54/376, mm. 32–6. There is no mention of any of the men in the two cases discussed in this paper in Suffolk's surviving correspondence from his period in exile: TNA, SC 1/52/2–5, 7–29, 48–51, 67; SC 1/58/67, 69; SC 1/60/18, the majority of which have been published in *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reign of Richard III and Henry VII*, ed. James Gairdner, 2 vols., Rolls Series 1861; *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, ed. Henry Ellis, third series, London 1846, vol. 1, pp. 117–42.

²⁰ A case among the Star Chamber records involving the examination of one Alexander Symson, who had travelled to see de la Pole in Aachen in 1503, either as a agent for his master's treason or as a spy, was politely debated in I.S. Leadam, 'An unknown conspiracy against Henry VII', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 16 (1902), pp. 133–58; James Gairdner, 'A supposed conspiracy against Henry VII', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 18 (1904), pp. 157–94.

²¹ Sources searched include TNA, E 36/214 (recognition section), and the various obligations and recognisance files in TNA, C 255/8/5, 8–10 and E 114. The conversion of conditional obligations into actual debts to the king was a not infrequent practice at the end of Henry's reign: Horowitz, 'Agree with the king', p. 339 and n. 45, and for a lengthy discussion of Henry's use of bonds as a political tool throughout his reign see M.R. Horowitz, 'Policy and prosecution in the reign of Henry VII', *Historical Research*, vol. 82 (2009), pp. 412–58.

a bribe' shows it is not just modern cynicism but a contemporary perception. While Edmund de la Pole embodied a genuine dynastic threat when he was at liberty, when in prison it appears his name was exploited in the hope of personal or financial gain by, at the very least, several men in the cases outlined here, and perhaps also by the notoriously avaricious servants of a grasping king.

Appendix

In what follows, abbreviations have been silently expanded, capitalisation modernised, and some punctuation added (except in the earl of Oxford's letter, N1 d below, where the idiosyncratic punctuation of the original is kept). Quotation marks for what appears to be reported speech have been supplied in some instances for better sense for the modern reader, though none are given in the original documents. Other occasional editorial interventions are within square brackets.

The National Archives, Duchy of Lancaster, DL 3/4, N1

[*Endorsed*] The certificat of ye maire of Norwich concernyng oon Gowge a shoemaker for speking words versus Henricus Rex anno xix H vij.

To the most honorable counsell of oure souereigne lord the kyng.
Certifie on to your moost noble wysdoms Thomas Aldrych, maire of the kyng's cite of Norwich, that the vi day of May in the xix yere [1504] of oure most souereigne lord's reigne in the tyme of Thomas Cam, than maire of the seid cite, predecessour to the seid nowe maire, Thomas Gooche of Norwich, cordwaner, and William Ryppes of the same, cordwaner, were examyned in the counsell chambre in the Guyldehall of the seid cite a fore the same late maire, Robert Burgh, Robert Gardener, Thomas Aldryche and John Randolff, aldermen of the seid cite, and Jeffrey Styward and John Crome, shirrews of the same cite, of ceditious langage between them too had, as it apperith in bokes there in the tyme of the seid late maire.

[*Marginated*] The seyng of Thomas Gooche, cordwaner.

It was soo that the seid Thomas Goche and William Ryppes sate at there occupation with in the house of Jeffrey Jowell, cordwaner, duellyng in the paryssh of Seynt Symond and Jude, and the seid Jeffrey and William Rypps talked of the ayde that is nowe granted to the kyng's grace at the last parliament, and the seid Jeffrey seid he toke thought for money for the world was so hard, than the seid William Ryppys seid 'mary the kyng dothe wele to take that he may for he shall not take it long', and also the seid William Ryppes seid that he trusted that he shuld se Edmund de la Pole were the croune or he died, than the seid Thomas Goche this heryng blamyd and rebukyd hym for his so seyng. These words wer spoken on the Thursday in Estre weke in the xix yere of the reigne of Kyng Herry the vijth [4 April 1504]

This is the answer of the seid William Ryppes. He seith he had neuer no suche wordes nor neuer thought them, except that they satte at there work on a certeyn day the seid Thomas Goche boostid of hym selff that he had doon seruyse bothe to lordes and jentylmen and the seid William seid ageyn 'it semed wele by your arraye for you have but one cote to your bak, it semyth ye haue be one of Edmund de la Pole's seruants.' Than afterward the seid Thomas Goche mette with the seid Ryppys and asked of hym certeyn money that he had lost to hym at the tenyse, and the seid Ryppes bad hym 'gette it where thou can get it for thou gettist nounce of me', than the seid Thomas seid he shuld displese hym or nyght, and so he cam and compleyned to the Maier, whereupon the seid Goche and Ryppys wer comytred to warde and there styll remayn.

And the seid Jeffray Jowell was examyned and he demyed that he herd neuer any of the sedicious words be twen the seid Gooche and Ryppys but be cause the seid wordys wer spoken in his house he was late to bayll to be forth commyng when so euer he wer callid or warnyd.

N1 a

[*Seal tag*] To oure trusty and welbeloued the Maire of our cite of Norwich

By the King

Trusty and welbelovid we grete you wele. Lating you to wite that it is shewid [unto]²² us and our counsell howe that of late ye or oon of youre predecessors late maire of our cite of Norwiche comytred to warde oon Thomas Gowge, a cordyuer, and his maister within oure said cite for certain cediciouse langage hadde bitwene them contrarie to the duetis of their alligeaunce, and aftir that ye or oon of your said predecessors lete to baille the maistre of the said Thomas Gowge, and we nor our said counsell not aduertised therof, to our merveil if it so be. Wherfor we woll and charge you that incontynent upon the sight herof ye doo putte under goode and soufficient suretiee the said maister of the said Thomas Gowge so that he doo personelly appere before oure counsell lerned in our lawes at our palois of Westminster in the xv^{me} ²³ of Ester next commyng, and ouer this we woll that ye at the same daie doo certifie unto our said counsell of the trouthe and playnesse of the circumstaunces of the said demeanyng of the hole rehersed mater, to thentent our said counsell maye ferther doo and procede herin as shall accorde with good justice and thaquite of our lawes in this particular. Not failing herof as ye woll aunswer unto us at youre perill and upon the payne of CCli. Yeuen under oure priue seall at our manor of Grenewiche the xth day of Aprill.

Bolman SS

²² Text damaged, 'unto' interpolated.

²³ 'Quindene'.

N1 b

[*Endorsed*] To the right worshipfull Sir Richard Emson, knight, chaunceller of the duchie of Lancastre.

Master chaunceller I recommaund me unto you, and so as it that oon John Russel of Soham, parcell of the duchie of Lancastre within the countie of Cambrege, came unto me the xxiiijth day of Marche last passed and showed unto me diuerse maters concernyng the kings highnesse, shewyng me ferther that oon William Wafyn of Hedyngham, my lord of Oxenford's tenaunt, and oon Curde, late clerk unto his secretary Rauff Josselyn, wold afferm the same, whefor I sent the said Russel with my writing to my said lord, aduertising his lordship to call the parties afor hym for the ordryng of this mater, whoes mynd therin ye shal perceiue by his letre enclosed herin. Ye shal also se the mater at large confessed by the said Russel and Wayfn in another bill within this my writing, for the tryng out of the trouth wherof if it like you to send for the parties by privey seale ye shal undrestand the mater as it is and this I besech ~~you~~ Jhu alweies to preserue you to your moost herts pleasure. Writen at Hemgrave²⁴ the second day of Aprill with thand of youre assured [word erased] to his litil power.

T Lucas

N1 c

xxiiij die marcii anno xxiiij^o [1508]

John Russell of Soham shewed that as he cam thorow Hedyngham from London afortnyght passed oon William Wafyn of the same shewed unto hym how that oon Thomas Gowge, then being in the shereffs's ward of Norwich, shewed unto the said William and unto oon Carde, now of Sudbury and late clerk to Rauf Josselyn, upon a two yeres past how that a fellow of the said Gowge, whoes name this deponent knoweth nat, thei being both seruants with a cordyuer of Norwich, whoes name this deponent nethir knoweth, shuld say that ther was oon be yond the see which he trusted shuld wer the crown of England, unto whome Gowge answered 'be ware what thou saist, I wold my lord of Oxenford or any of his seruants herd the'. And then answered their master 'what sayst thow of my lord of Oxenford? The king is but a pillor of his people and my lord of Oxenford an extortioner.' William Wayfn of Hedyngham, examined upon the premisses the second day of Aprill anno xxiiij^o [1508], accorded with the said Russell in euery thing, saufing he saith that Gowges master uttered no words ayenst the king as Russell speketh but he sayth that Gowge went to compleyn to the Mair both of his master and of his fellowe, wherfor thei wold haue beten hym and so the mair commytted them both to ward wher the said Gowge yet remayneth and, as this deponent supposeth, the master is enlarged upon suertie.

²⁴ Hengrave in Suffolk was held by Margaret Beaufort in jointure during Henry VII's reign: W.A. Copinger, *The Manors of Suffolk*, 7 vols., London/Manchester 1905-11, vol. 7, pp. 49-50.

N1 d

[*Endorsed*] To my right welbiloued frend Thomas Lucas esquier be this delivered.

Right welbiloued I commande me unto you. And haue receyued your lettre by John Russell this berar and seen the full contynins therin especified: and as towching suche mattier as the same Russell of late hathe shewed unto you ageynst aman of Norwiche upon the oonly report of oon Willyam Wafen. For which mattier to be examyned and orderd by me: ye sent the said Russell unto me with your said letter. So is it that I know the same Russell and Wafen to be symple personnes and of small reputation and little credens: so as I entend not to busy myself in that bihalve upon their enformation. But forasmoche as yee be oon of the kings counsell aswell as I and oder: I send the said Russell eftsounes²⁵ unto you herwith for thexamiacion and direction to be had and taken in and upon the mattier forsaid like as ye and oder of the said counsell shall seme expedient in that partie: and I fear me that bycause the said Russel and Wafen thorough folly and mys gouernance be now dekaied and haue but ~~small~~ small substance whereupon to lyve: they do busy their selfs in such causis to the trouble of the king's pouer subgetts forto haue a bribe. And almyghty God haue you in his keeping. Written at my manoir of Wyuenho the xxix of Marche.

[*signed in a different hand*]

yower
Oxynford

DL 5/4, f. 138v

xxv^o die Aprilis anno xxviii^o [1508]

[*Marginated*] Usque priorem de Shudham

Rowland Bowbank of Shuldham in the countie of Norff' yoman, of thage of xliiiij^{ti} yeres or therabout, of his owne voluntary will confessith and saith that he was in service with dame [i.e. Don] John Bray, then and yet prior of the house and chanons of Shuldham in the said countie, and that upon the Monday in the Rogation weke was thre yere as he remembreth [28 April 1505] the said prior being set to his dener at Shuldham aforesaid and diuers his bretheren at the samie bourde, whose names amongst other ben called Dame Richard Stevenson, Dame Robert Wollisbe and Damp Robert Feman, the said Prior began to counten what charge he had for the payment of the dymes and then uttered these words following: 'I marveill the king's grace thus polleth us. I had lever²⁶ than we shuld be thus polled that yon gentilman be yound the see Edmond de la Pole shuld come in and I wold spend with hym my body and my goodes.'

[*later note in different hand*] Memorandum that the said prior hath confessed that he spoke thies words: 'I marvel the king's grace pillith us thus with thies dismes.'

²⁵ 'Eftsoones' in the sense of 'again'.

²⁶ i.e. 'liefer', rather.

Canonical Book vi^o die Julij anno xxiii^o [1508]

Memorandum that Robert Wollesby, Richard Stevenson and Robert Feman abouewriten haue been sent for by priue seale and sworn and examyned to sey the trowth of this matter aboue specified, and by their othe they say and depose that they neuer herd the prior abouenamed utter any suche words as in this bill is supposed, and so the said Robert Wollesby, Richard and Robert haue licence to depart.

And afir that the ixth day of August the said prior was bound by obligation that undir the convent seale of the priory of Shulldham he shuld bynd heself and his successors in C li to apper at Westminster in the tres septimanas²⁷ of Saint Mighell tharchangel next etc and fether as in the same obligation appereth more at large etc.

²⁷ 'tres^{ep}'

stretched was the culture of glossing, according to Caesarius, that even when men had been admitted many times they have desisted from their good studies'. This critical view survived into the nineteenth, and – albeit in a more measured form – even the twentieth century,²⁸ and it is only thanks to the detailed prosopographical work undertaken in the last few years by scholars such as David Leprie that a fuller picture of the intellectual achievements of the cathedral canons of late medieval England has begun to emerge.²⁹

Yet, problems of evidence remain. With the exception of the intellectual elite whose writings have come down to us, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess accurately the educational background or learning of many individual clergymen. The registers of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and their colleges record matriculations and admissions to degrees, but beyond this provide no evidence of an individual's scholarly attainments or interests. For this, we must look to more circumstantial evidence, such as that of book ownership. That in itself is not without difficulty. Pre-modern library catalogues survive for some institutions, but not for many individuals. The evidence of colophons and signatures is too patchy to allow for the reconstruction of the libraries of any but the greatest of

²⁸ An excellent starting point for a discussion of the education of the clergy in the late middle ages is provided by the article collected in Caesarius Baron and Janet St. John, eds., *The Church and Learning in Late Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of Richard E. B. Dobson* (Harvard Medieval Studies VI, Cambridge 1991), esp. Benjamin Thorpe, 'The academic and apologetic workroom in the medieval church: Archbishop John Peckham, 1282–1300', in Caesarius Baron, 'Clerical scholarship in the late middle ages', in Baron and St. John, eds., *Church and Learning*, pp. 231–52, which concludes that this conclusion was 'misleading'.

²⁹ See e.g. Virginia Davis, 'The cultivation of individual-collected private libraries in the pastoral life of the English church', in Baron and St. John, eds., *Church and Learning*, pp. 231–52, which concludes that this conclusion was 'misleading'.

³⁰ D.N. Leprie, 'The origins and nature of the culture of English cathedral, 1200–1500', in C. Harper-Bill, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Britain and Post-medieval Cambridge: The Proceedings of the Conference held at Canterbury, 1991*, E.K. Rieu, ed., Woodbridge 1992, pp. 37–52, esp. 'Lower clergy', the majority of the higher clergy in the late middle ages', in Virginia Davis, ed., *Proceedings of the Conference on the Middle Ages*, Harlow Medieval Studies XV, Donington 2000, pp. 104–26, at pp. 105–10, where 'The evidence that of their way'. The issue of the late medieval higher clergy, in Janet St. John and Virginia Davis, eds., *Recovering Medieval Lives*, Harlow Medieval Studies XVII, Donington 2000, pp. 29–40.