

The Self-Education of a Fifteenth-Century Sheriff and Justice of the Peace: Sir Nicholas Bowet's Book of Legal Precedents

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Recent accounts of fifteenth-century England have laid considerable emphasis on the importance of the gentry who served as justices of the peace and sheriffs to the political economy of the country:

To employ loyal men from among the county gentry or less in offices in their own localities would facilitate the co-ordination of the realm's administration, ensure an effective and resident officialdom, and encourage obedience to instructions – considerations that were important to the central government and took account of the needs of the locality itself.

Such appointments were also important to the people of the county:

The people of Lincolnshire ... may have cared very little whether their king was a Henry, an Edward or a Richard, but they were intensely interested in whoever it might be the king appointed to be their sheriff.¹

Most attention has been given to those gentry who got caught up in the conflicts of interest of the greater nobility or in armed riots; this is where the evidence in court records, administrative sources and correspondence lies. So details of one of those 'local gentlemen who ... did not belong to an identifiable faction or single partisan circle,'² but yet who served as a justice of the peace (JP) for many years and acted as sheriff in his county on more than one occasion must be welcome. Such a man was Sir Nicholas Bowet, JP for more than thirty years and sheriff of Lincolnshire three times; and the evidence lies in a book of legal precedents which he created and used, now British Library (BL) Harleian MS 773.

¹ R.A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI*, Stroud 2004, p. 333; R.L. Storey, 'Lincolnshire and the Wars of the Roses', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 14 (1970), p. 82. The most important study of the sheriff in the fifteenth century is Robin Jeffs, 'The Later Medieval Sheriff and the Royal Household, 1437-1547', unpublished Oxford DPhil thesis, 1960.

² Griffiths, *Henry VI*, p. 102.

British Library Harleian MS 773

This manuscript is a fifteenth century collection which has been given a title of 'Legal Tracts' on its modern binding. The text has been known for some time among legal historians, and two extracts have been printed.³ It was discussed by Bertha Putnam in 1938 and attributed to Robert de Repynghale, clerk of the peace in a number of counties in the mid-fifteenth century.⁴ But Putnam noted 'the puzzling fact of the presence of many precedents dealing with matters outside the jurisdiction of the justices of the peace'. It is the contention of this paper that this collection was compiled for and almost certainly in large part by Sir Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale, Lincs, JP for Kesteven from 1439 to 1473 and sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1440, 1447 and 1452; and that the texts which Putnam found 'puzzling' relate to the Bowet family or the village of Rippingale.

The volume comprises two separate compilations which may be referred to as Part I and Part II. Part I consists of the first 14 folios; Part II of folios 15 to the end.⁵

Part I is different in size and hand from the second part. It consists of two short extracts (six folios and eight folios) of a textbook on property law; both are incomplete. These folios contain copies of different forms of legal action relating to conveyancing and property transactions – contractual clauses, bonds, acquittances, letters of attorney, wills and other items – exempla of different kinds of transactions. Some are full copies but most are sections of the documents, sometimes greatly abbreviated, just the opening words of each clause to show the number of clauses there should be and their sequence.

These two fragments come from a well-known fourteenth-century textbook by Thomas Sampson. This copy however has been brought up to date by the copyist, and can be dated fairly precisely to 1444. Dates to the documents are not always given but when they are (15 items), they lie between August 1441 and November 1444.⁶ The contents are almost entirely Oxford-based. When

³ For an edition of folios 50r-51r, see *Proceedings before the Justices of the Peace in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Edward III to Richard III*, ed B.H. Putnam, Ames Foundation, Harvard 1938, pp. 10-20, 'Le Charge et Enquere pour Jurours en Cession du Paix, devant Justices du Paix etc'. For ff. 39r-40v, see *English Historical Documents, 1327-1485*, ed A. R. Myers, London 1969, pp. 548-53, 'The manner of holding a [manor] court with view of frankpledge' (translated). The manuscript has been cited occasionally, for example in A.R. and E.B. DeWindt, *Ramsey: The Lives of an English Fenland Town, 1200-1600*, Washington DC 2007, and in R.B. Goheen, 'Village community and the Crown', *American Historical Review*, vol. 96, part 1 (1991), pp. 42-62.

⁴ B.H. Putnam, *Early Treatises on the practice of the Justices of the Peace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries*, Oxford 1924, pp. 57-58, 102-04; *Proceedings*, ed Putnam, pp. 20-25. For Robert Repynghale as clerk of the peace in Lincolnshire, see J. Varley, *The Parts of Kesteven: Studies in Law and Local Government*, Kesteven County Council 1974, p. 141.

⁵ This is the modern foliation; there were several contemporary attempts at foliation.

⁶ H.G. Richardson, 'An Oxford teacher of the fifteenth century', *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, vol. 23, part 2, (1939), pp. 452-55; John H. Baker, 'Oral instruction in

offices, parishes, churches, properties or other locations are given, they are almost all in Oxford city or county. Some of the property boundaries and street names appear to be real, especially Catte Street, the home of scriveners and teachers of diplomatic,⁷ although other placenames appear to be fictional. Some of the personal names used are also fictitious, and often initials are used. But there are enough real names to prove its Oxford location. Thomas Coventry and William Brampton, both mayors of Oxford on more than one occasion in the fifteenth century, are named several times; John Spekyngton (of Salisbury Hall, one of the two proctors of the university in 1434) is a party to one deed, and Richard Spakyngdon, said to be master of the hall or college of Ballicia (a thinly disguised Baliol College?) of the University of Oxford is party to another. On the other hand, some of the names have been used with a range of different occupations; Nicholas Norton, for example, is mentioned as clerk, as brewer of Oxford, and as husbandman.⁸

We have here two discrete fragments from a single textbook. A mid-fifteenth century copyist has updated an Oxford textbook of precedents, mainly of land conveyancing, and someone has obtained a couple of fragments of this recently updated version. The hand is the same throughout. The text does not appear to have been used intensively but it has been studied. The first and last pages are dirty as if exposed before binding into the present collection.⁹

Part II differs from Part I in that it is clearly a working document, where folios could be removed for other purposes. In Part I, the copy was made all at one time; in Part II, items were added at different times, but it seems that most of the entries were by the same hand. Its sixty-five folios contain a much wider range of items – some exempla but also copies of original documents, charters, court rolls and a number of personal documents. The exempla are often abbreviated but other documents, including two legal treatises, are copied in full and may represent faithfully the originals. In order to understand this collection, it is necessary to analyse its make-up.

Part II is made up of four sections with two additional short sections. The first section consists of two parchment quires of eight and twelve folios (ff. 16r-23v, ff. 24r-35v) bound together and enclosed within a single bifolium acting as a cover sheet (f. 15r-v/f. 36r-v). The first folio of the quire (f. 16) opens with a copy of a treatise on charters ‘intended for the education of young people’ (ff. 16r-18r). This is followed by charter and other exempla, many relating to Chesterfield, dating from the reigns of Edward III and Richard II, including

land law and conveyancing, 1250-1500’, in *Learning the Law: Teaching and the Transmission of Law in England, 1150-1900*, ed J.A. Bush and A. Wijffels, London 1999, pp. 163-67.

⁷ Catte Street is mentioned several times in Richardson, ‘Oxford teacher’, pp. 452-55.

⁸ Anthony à Wood, *History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*, Oxford 1790. For Spekyngton, see *Historical Register of the University of Oxford completed to the End of Trinity term*, Oxford 1888.

⁹ A contemporary note at the end, ‘xiv fo’, indicates the fourteen folios were complete at the time of writing.

some writs and charters of Philippa, Edward III's queen: the only document of Queen Philippa which is dated is of 1368 (f. 34v), a year before she died. We have here a copy of a textbook on conveyancing compiled by the Yorkshire chancery clerk, William de Horbury, who is known to have had extensive interests in Chesterfield; he is named several times.¹⁰ But the copyist did not update the items to the 1440s as the Oxford copyist did. The earliest date is 1347 (f. 26) and the latest is 1391 (f. 23), a year or so before Horbury died. This textbook ends at the top of folio 35r, and the remaining space is filled with miscellaneous material of a much later date.¹¹

The cover bifolium is different; it contains on all four pages (f. 15r-v, and f. 36r-v) a number of miscellaneous items dated 1462-63 and 1472-77; these are not part of the textbook.

The Horbury textbook is followed by a single parchment bifolium (ff. 37r-38v) with a draft of a contract of marriage (1465), written in English, and a copy of a local title deed.

The next main section consists of a parchment quire of eleven folios and the stub of one folio removed (ff. 39r-49v). It starts with a manual on the holding of manor courts, including the summons of Thomas Bassett, chief steward of John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, to Robert Power, bailiff of the earl's manor of H, followed by a full court roll (1439) from the manor of Hastings (Sussex) and court items drawn from a variety of sources, especially from Essex.¹² The end of this quire is again filled with miscellaneous items.

The third main section (ff. 50-58) follows, again a parchment quire of nine folios and three stubs from removed folios. It starts with a copy of a treatise on 'The charge to be administered at sessions of Justices of the Peace' in English;¹³ this has been dated by Putnam to c. 1404. The rest of this section is again filled by items that are drawn from various sources but substantially from Lincolnshire.

¹⁰ Richardson, 'Oxford teacher', p. 455, suggested that Horbury simply copied Sampson's textbook and put his name on it; but this is clearly a separate compilation with different exempla drawn from chancery and household records, not from Oxford. Horbury was a chancery clerk under Richard II, *CPR 1381-85*, pp. 402, 405; his will of 1393 was printed in *Some Oxfordshire Wills Proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury*, ed J.R.H. Weaver and A. Beardwood, Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. 39 (1958); he was one of a number of feoffees who founded a gild in Chesterfield in 1392, The National Archives (TNA), C143/421/3.

¹¹ All the items in this section, including the cover sheet and the bifolium which follows, are separately numbered by the copyist – only the treatise (ff. 16-18) is omitted. The items in the following sections are not numbered.

¹² There is a note about more modern ways of writing these documents.

¹³ This has been published in *Proceedings*, ed Putnam; see note 3 above.

A final section follows: this is larger and different in character, consisting of twenty-two folios of paper (ff. 60-76A¹⁴) bound together within a parchment cover sheet (f. 59r-v/f. 79 stub). The cover sheet was put in place from the beginning, for the text on the parchment cover sheet runs onto the first folio of the paper quire. This last section is a formulary of various commissions, warrants and writs. Like the other sections, it starts with a major item (ff. 59r-60r), copies in full of two commissions, one of the peace and one of gaol delivery; both come from Dorset and are dated September 1447. Most of the rest of the contents of this quire come from Dorset court rolls also of 1447 (ff. 61-69), with Lincolnshire items filling spaces. This is followed by what is claimed to be a copy of (perhaps extracts from) an ancient parchment roll of Kesteven sessions material (ff. 70-76) of varying dates ranging from 1353 to 1428-29. Where this roll came from cannot now be ascertained. A final bifolium (ff. 77r-78v) with a copy of the Statute of Westminster (Statute of Labourers) 23 Henry VI, ch. 12 [1445] is bound inside the cover sheet.

I would like to suggest that in Part II we have what with justification can be called a set of four notebooks, three created from parchment bifolia centre sewn and the fourth from a paper quire with a parchment cover. They each had their own function. At some stage, the four notebooks were brought together; for, as with Part I, the first folio (15r) and the final folio (78v) are dirty as if exposed uncovered for some time.

BL Harleian MS 773 taken as a whole shows that someone collected two small fragments of a recently copied legal textbook and bound them together without a cover. Secondly, someone copied into separate 'notebooks' various items of legal precedents, and eventually bound them together and numbered the pages. Each 'notebook' had a different theme. This second compilation was clearly a working copy, for some folios were cut out from time to time for other uses; some of the blank spaces in the text were used for new entries as need arose, and an attempt was made to add notations to a few of the items. Finally, the two sections were bound together, including two separate bifolia, one with a draft marriage contract and one with a copy of the Statute of Labourers. This leads us to ask who did all this and why?

Authorship and Ownership: Bowet or Repynghale?

Bertha Putnam proposed that the second part of BL Harleian MS 773 is the work of Robert (de) Repynghale, a well-known official who held (among other offices) the position of clerk of the peace for Kesteven, Holland and Lindsey, Lincolnshire, for life in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁵ His name appears attached

¹⁴ In the modern foliation, one folio was omitted in error and has recently been assigned the number 76A.

¹⁵ Putnam, *Early Treatises*, pp. 20-21, provides biographical information on Repynghale. Repynghale's name is usually given as 'Robert de Repynghale', and that is the form used here except when quoting. The village is known as Rippingale.

to a number of items in the volume: at the head of the court roll from Hastings, 1439 (f. 40v); at the beginning and end of a collection of forms from Middlesex and Kesteven, mostly 1444-51 (ff. 51v-55v); on an inserted item from Kesteven dated 1453-54 (f. 57v), and another from Kesteven dated 1448 (f. 68v). It is thus probable that these items came from his collection of archives. But the names of other clerks of the peace also occur, John Bluet of Kesteven, and notably John Baret of Dorset who appears more frequently than Repynghale.

On the other hand, the name that occurs most frequently either in full or abbreviated is that of Sir Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale, Lincs. That Bowet should be closely associated with Robert de Repynghale, clerk of the peace, should not cause any surprise, for Bowet was JP for thirty-four years, 1439-73, and sheriff of Lincolnshire three times, 1440, 1447 and 1452.¹⁶ Repynghale seems to have had access to much of the Essex material, for his name is attached to one of the court rolls. Whether he had access to any Dorset material is less certain. It is just as likely that Bowet had links with Dorset, and we know Bowet had interests in Essex as feoffee for the Ferrers family (see below). It may be of significance that the year of the Dorset rolls was 1447-48, a year when Bowet was sheriff of Lincolnshire.

When we look at the Bowet entries, it is hard to resist the suggestion that Bowet rather than Repynghale compiled these notebooks. All four sections contain Bowet material, some of them very personal items relating to Nicholas and his family in which Repynghale would have had little, if any, interest or concern – for example, the copy of the draft marriage contract of Bowet's son, William, to the daughter of a neighbouring landowner (ff. 37r-38r). And there are other entries which name the village of Rippingale or reveal interests outside the work of a JP. Several items do not refer to him by name, but may relate to Bowet, for they are local. Many are gathered together (e.g. four items on f. 15r-v; 18 items on ff. 34v-38r) but others are scattered (ff. 48r-v, 51v, 56v, 63r, 63v, 65v, 68v, 69r), inserted into empty spaces and added over a long period.

Fourteen items, almost all 1447-8, name him or his neighbourhood (ff. 35r to 38r). Those that relate to his activities as sheriff or JP include an arrest warrant from 'NB kt, sheriff'; the appointment by Nicholas Bowet, sheriff of Lincolnshire, of a bailiff of three wapentakes, 'given under my seal at Rippingale'; a warrant concerning vagabonds, 1445, and eight other writs in exemplum form; a bond, an acquittance and a receipt by Bowet 'late sheriff'; a quitclaim of 1449, and a plea by a widow asking for judgment against her husband's murderer whom she had arrested, 1450. Three more writs follow,

¹⁶ There is no evidence I have found to suggest Robert de Repynghale lived at Rippingale, but it is possible. A Repynghale family lived in Rippingale as an influential family from the fourteenth century until at least 1445, see N. Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy, c1214-1968: A Biographical Register, Part I: Aslacoe and Aveland*, Lincoln Record Society, vol. 103 (2013), pp. 313-14.

and then an unusual and late (1472) item whereby Bowet granted a hermit a licence to occupy a chapel in the fields of Rippingale. Folio 38r contains the draft marriage contract (1465), followed by the title deed of property in Dunsby by Rippingale dating from 1348 which probably relates to the marriage contract. Two later entries can be seen, a writ dated 1444-45 (f. 56) in the middle of a copy of a court roll from Dorset, and four Kesteven items which have been inserted on folio 63r-v at the end of further Dorset material. Nicholas Bowet is named in one of these items, the others all concern Kesteven JPs.

Other items represent the interests of Nicholas Bowet. On folio 15r is a grant of a corrody for a hermitage in Newbo abbey (in Sedgebrook, Lincolnshire, just west of Grantham), 1462, which may reflect Bowet's interest in hermits; the manumission of a serf on Temple Bruer¹⁷ manor (Lincs), 1466-73 (f. 15r); and two items relating to Rippingale church, 1476-77 (f. 15v). There is a small collection of writs, receipts and bonds, most dated to 1448 (ff. 35v-36v), all Kesteven material, inserted into blank spaces.

Some further items could have come from either Robert de Repynghale or Bowet: for example, the Kalendar of sessions for Kesteven (f. 48r-v) and the parchment roll of extracts from Kesteven Quarter Sessions' records on folios 70-75. There is a note concerning an inquisition into the goods, lands and tenements which Mauncer Marmyon, late sheriff of Lincolnshire, held when he died (f. 48v), dated 1453, a year when Bowet was sheriff:¹⁸ Marmyon lived at Ringston in Rippingale parish and was MP for Lincolnshire in 1447. Folio 51v has a list of wapentakes of Lincolnshire; folio 63 has three undated Kesteven writs, one signed by Bluett,¹⁹ a former clerk of the peace for Kesteven; folio 65v reports the inception of JPs in Kesteven, and folios 68v to 70 contain more Kesteven sessions records. All of these could have come from Repynghale but they are in the context of a book held by and written in by Nicholas Bowet, and they have Bowet items inserted into blank spaces.

It is very unlikely that the copyist was Robert de Repynghale, a busy clerk of the peace of various counties, since it was written over such a long period (1440s to 1470s), and some of the documents are extensive. It must have been either Bowet himself or his amanuensis. And it was a straight copy; there was no attempt to update any of the items, as the copyist of the Oxford textbook did. Even the 'Charge to jurors' (ff. 50-51), which Putnam dated to *c.* 1404, was

¹⁷ The Templars held lands in Dunsby next door to Rippingale, which may account for Bowet's interest: *Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids*, London 1899, vol. 6, p. 162.

¹⁸ BL Harleian MS 773, f. 48v. For Mauncer Marmyon in Ringston in Rippingale, see *Feudal Aids*, vol. 3, p. 480; BL Additional MS 21113. Marmyon was MP for Lincolnshire in the infamous parliament at Bury St Edmunds, February 1447, *History of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1422-1461*, ed L. Clark, Cambridge 2019, vol. 5, pp. 404-07; his election took place before Bowet became sheriff later in 1447.

¹⁹ John Bluett was clerk of the peace in Lincolnshire, 1391 to 1428, Varley, *Parts of Kesteven*, p. 141; TNA, E101/569/40, m. 1.

not updated with later legislation, although Putnam says that it was out-of-date by the time it was entered into this collection.

The conclusion then must be that Sir Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale, JP and sheriff of Lincolnshire, obtained (probably from Robert de Repynghale, clerk of the peace of Kesteven and other parts of Lincolnshire) before, during or after his second shrievalty 1447-8, copies of records relating to the offices of sheriff and JP. He obtained material from Essex, Middlesex and Sussex, some of which contain Repynghale's name. He copied them or had them copied into a series of separate 'notebooks'. At the same time, he obtained material from Dorset. Into blank spaces, he inserted some more personal items. He added a few further items to this collection later in his life. Eventually he bound them together with a couple of extracts from an Oxford textbook. He clearly had considerable interest in religious matters, especially his parish church and hermits, but his main interest in this record was in the work of a JP and sheriff and the working of the courts. What then is known about Sir Nicholas Bowet?

Sir Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale, Lincolnshire, flourishing 1423 to *circa* 1477

Bowet came from a large family centred on Cumberland; it is not always possible to distinguish between the members of the branches. One branch was centred on Penrith with Henry Bowet (later Bishop of Bath and Wells and then Archbishop of York), Thomas, Adam and John, his brothers and probably Gilbert and Roger.²⁰ Another branch was centred on Bothil,²¹ headed by Thomas Bowet (senior) and sons Thomas (junior), Nicholas, perhaps Richard²² and probably other children. Thomas senior married (as a second or later wife) Margaret daughter of Sir Richard Parvyng, constable of Carlisle castle (Henry Bowet was feoffee at the marriage); from her descended the Bowets of

²⁰ Gilbert was chaplain, Carlisle Record Office, DMUS/2/2/48; Roger Bowet, legacy by Henry Bowet archbishop, 1423, will of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, James Raine, *Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, 3 volumes, London 1879-94, vol. 2, p. 299ff.

²¹ The estates are listed as 'ye third part of ye manoir of Bothil and of al ye lands ten[emen]ts rents possessions and inheritaments with yeire appurten' in Bothil Dereham Bownes Cardwick Bronskayth and Karhill in ye Counte of Cumbreland'; Joseph Nicolson, Richard Burn, William Nicolson, *History and Antiquities of the Counties of Westmoreland and Cumberland*, 2 volumes, London 1777, vol. 2, p. 123.

²² Richard Bowet archer was in France in 1438; for members of the Bowet family and their military service, see M.G.A. Vale, *English Gascony, 1399-1453*, Oxford 1970, pp. 9, 24-25, 180, 237, and the Universities of Reading and Southampton website, www.medievalsoldiers.org.

Wrentham, Suffolk, Sir William who inherited the Parvyng estates and Richard.²³

They were a very tight-knit family – both branches co-operated frequently.²⁴ Above all, they were a military family – almost every member can be seen on military campaigns. Richard and Thomas senior served in the Carlisle garrison under Parvyng; John²⁵ served from 1398 in Gascony with the Beaufort earls of Somerset, and later was regent of the constable of Bordeaux, 1403, and controller of Ombrière (Bordeaux), 1401-25. Henry Bowet was in France between 1378 and 1384 with the duke of Norfolk and later John of Gaunt; he served as constable of Bordeaux between 1396 and 1401 when he became bishop of Bath and Wells, and acquired property and offices there.²⁶ Thomas served in France with Somerset in 1401, and Thomas, John and Bishop Henry went to Wales with Somerset, 1403. William was with Clarence in Calais and Guines in 1412, and William, Nicholas and Thomas (junior) were at Agincourt in 1415. John, William, Nicholas and Thomas all served in the campaign of 1417, and in 1419, William and Thomas were again in Clarence's company. Later Bowets fought in France, 1438-44.²⁷

Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale was probably the son of the Nicholas Bowet of Cumberland. In 1402, the older Nicholas had a commission in Bordeaux which Henry Bowet had just left. He and Thomas Bowet, esquires,²⁸ were members of the king's household troops in the 1415 Agincourt campaign, each

²³ CFR 1399-1405, p. 313; *Foedera, conventiones, literae, et cujuscumque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliae*, etc, ed Thomas Rymer, 20 volumes, London 1704-17, vol. 9, pp. 145, 283; CFR 1405-13, pp. 23-24; CFR 1416-22, pp. 400, 437-8; TNA, C1/19/40.

²⁴ For example, Thomas Bowet of Cumberland, *consanguineus* of the bishop, was involved with the bishop in a dispute with Parvyng, 1402; *The Registers of Walter Giffard, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1265-6, and of Henry Bowett, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1401*, ed T. Scott Holmes, London 1899 (cited below as *Giffard, Registers*), pp. 29-30.

²⁵ This John Bowet is associated with the Bowet Book of Hours, a work from Bruges, 1410-1420, which contains details of the Bowet family: Joan Yong, widow, (d. 1470?); Elizabeth, wife of John Bowet, (d. 1471?); Elizabeth, wife of John Bowet, (d. 1470); Katherine, wife of John Bowet, (d. 1446); John Bowet, (d. 21 November 1427); Alicia de Neuby, (d. 1422). Christie's catalogue suggests 'these Bowets were connected to the family of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York 1407-1423, who came from Cumbria.' Christies' sale catalogue, <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/the-bowet-hours-use-of-sarum-in-5749298-details.aspx>.

²⁶ A lawyer, Henry became chief justice of the court superior of Aquitaine, 1397, and one of the four royal regents or proctors in the south of France in 1400; see *Foedera*, vol. 7, p. 743; vol. 8, pp. 7, 43, 116, 141-42; vol. 9, pp. 41, 145, 245-46; Vale, *English Gascony*, pp. 24-25, 208.

²⁷ This list has been compiled mainly from the website, www.medievalsoldiers.org; *Foedera*, passim; *Giffard, Registers*; and from Vale, *Gascony*. See also CPR 1381-85, pp. 182-83; TNA, E199/7/11 m.7.

²⁸ For Thomas 'uncle' of Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale, see draft marriage contract of 1465 discussed below.

with three archers.²⁹ In 1417, as Nicholas Bowet knight, he was sued for lands in Guyenne.³⁰ In 1418, Sir Nicholas was again in France, in the company of Henry FitzHugh, and Thomas Bowet (also knighted) had his own company. There is then a gap in the military record until 1427 when a Sir Nicholas Bowet was at Fronsac castle with Sir John Radcliffe of Norfolk (Radcliffe had been constable of Bordeaux from 1419-23). The Guyenne properties descended to Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale: in 1437, he was speaking of 'all lands, rents and services to his use in Gascony and Guyenne'.³¹

In 1426, Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale was described as *consanguineus et proprinquior haeres* of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, being, according to the escheator of Lincolnshire, the son of Elizabeth, daughter of Adam Bowet, brother of Henry Bowet the archbishop. Little is known about the family background of Henry Bowet. His father (unnamed) was buried at Penrith, his mother (also unnamed) was buried at Topholme abbey, Lincolnshire.³² The marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of Adam Bowet, to Nicholas Bowet senior thus brought the two branches together, and Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale would seem to have been the issue of that marriage, for he inherited through his mother the Bordeaux property which Henry Bowet accumulated and through his father the Bothil estates in Cumberland.

Nicholas Bowet of Rippingale was thus closely connected to, and eventual heir of, Henry Bowet, Bishop and Archbishop. At some uncertain date, Sir Nicholas Bowet of Lincolnshire gave a silver chain to the shrine of Richard Scope Archbishop of York; on the death of Henry Bowet, Archbishop, in 1423, Nicholas Bowet owed £40 to Henry's executors;³³ and he continued to have a

²⁹ N.H. Nicolas, *History of the Battle of Agincourt and the Expedition of Henry V into France in 1415*, London 1833, p. 81; TNA, E101/69/3/371; E101/407/10 m. 2; TNA, E101/47/5.

³⁰ Bernat de Lesparre, knight, lord of Labarde and former sub-seneschal of Bordeaux, was petitioning for the restitution of lands in Gascony which Nicholas Bowet knight was detaining from him, Vale, *Gascony*, p. 247; in 1415, Bernard Lesparre was suing the Archbishop of York, *Foedera*, vol. 9, pp. 245-46.

³¹ CCR 1435-41, pp. 158-59; TNA, C61/105 m. 7; SC8/182/9073; TNA, SC8/289/14441; SC8/217/10849, 10844; TNA, C61/122 m. 4 (I owe this and other references to Professor M.C.E. Jones of Nottingham University).

³² Adam Bowet of Northumberland was pardoned for debt, 1383, CPR 1381-85, p. 208; in 1386, Adam Bowet was a member of the Brest garrison under Sir John Roches. Henry Bowet left a legacy to Adam, Raine, *Historians of York*, vol. 2, p. 301; *Foedera*, vol. 10, pp. 363-64; CPR 1435-41, pp. 165-66; the properties are listed in *Foedera*, vol. 8, pp. 127-28, and vol. 10, pp. 363-64; these were still being named as the archbishop's property in December 1450, Vale, *Gascony*, pp. 24-25. That Henry Bowet's mother chose to be buried apart from her Bowet husband suggests that she had formerly been married to someone who was buried in Lincolnshire and (as was customary) she chose to be buried with him.

³³ Raine, *Historians of York*, vol. 3, pp. 322, 402: *Una cathena aurea cum le essez pond' j unc quart' et di quart' ex dono domini Nicholas Bowet de com Linc militis ad feretrum Ricardi Scrope.*

title to the archbishop's properties in Bordeaux as his heir. In 1456, Nicholas was suing Robert Ufford of Barking, Suffolk, on some matter concerning Henry Bowet clerk;³⁴ for the then archbishop of Canterbury wrote to John Paston asking him to persuade the sheriff not to execute Bowet's writs, as the archbishop had written to Bowet seeking to have the matter settled by arbitration.³⁵

The Rippingale Estate

How Nicholas acquired his south Lincolnshire estate is not known. The only previous connection with the county which can be seen is that his grandmother was buried at 'Tupholme in north Lincolnshire. In 1412, this estate was described as one knight's fee in Rippingale and Haconby held of the honor of Bourne, Lincolnshire, valued at £20 a year; in 1443, when the honor of Bourne, along with other lands which Joan, Countess of Kent, held, was given to one of her co-heirs, John, Earl of Somerset, it was described as one knight's fee in Rippingale, Haconby and Stainthwayte, Lincolnshire, held of the honor of Bourne, formerly of Nicholas Bowet and worth 100s per annum. In a later inquisition (1502), the Rippingale estate was said to be worth £40 per annum.³⁶

³⁴ I suspect that this Henry Bowet clerk was the archdeacon of Richmond, one of the executors of the archbishop of York in 1423; he had letters of protection going to France, 1435, *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. J. Raine, *et al.*, 6 vols, Surtees Society vols 4, 30, 45, 53, 79, 106 (1836-1902), vol. 4, p. 399; Raine, *Historians of York*, vol. 2, pp. 300-303; *Foedera*, vol. 10, p. 614.

³⁵ *Paston Letters*, edited J. Gairdner, New Complete Library Edition 6 vols, London 1904, vol. 3, letter 344: Archbishop Bouchier to John Paston 7 Sept [1456]: 'To our right truste and right welbeloved John Paston, Esquier, and William Norwiche and to either of theym. Right truste and right welbeloved, we grete you hertly wel. And where as Sir Nichol Bowet, Knight, sueth an appeelle in the countee of Norffolk ayenst oon Robert Offord of Berking for the deeth of oon Sir Henry Bowet, clerke, we being enformed that the matier is pitevous, praie you hertly that ye wul in our behalve moeve and entreete the Shirreve of the saide countee to surceese of the execucion of any processe upon the exigent to hym directed in that behalve unto the next terme, so that resonable meanes maye be founden to save the saide Robert harmelesse; lating hym wite that we have written to the saide Sir Nichol for a convenient treetie to be taken in that behalve, as shalbe thought according to right. And God have you ever in his keping. Written in our Manoir of Mortelake, the vij daie of September T Archbysshopp of Canterbury'. The outcome of this letter to Paston is not known. The connection here is that a Richard Bowet married Ela daughter of Robert Lord Ufford, and Ela was buried in Wrentham church about 1400, a parish where William Bowet, Nicholas's uncle, held property, N. Pevsner and E. Radcliffe, *Buildings of England, Suffolk*, Yale, New Haven, CT, 1974, p. 509: brass to Ele Bowet, *c.* 1400.

³⁶ *Fendal Aids*, vol. 6, p. 480; *CCR 1441-47*, p. 104-05; see note 52 below. The descent of the manors in Rippingale is described briefly in Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish*

In the fourteenth century, the knight's fee in Rippingale had been held successively by the Gobaud and Coleville families, both prominent in Lincolnshire; it had come into the hands of the Gernoun family by the early fifteenth century. Joan Gernoun, second wife of Sir Robert Swinburne, passed it to her younger son, Sir William Swinburne, who was holding it in 1412.³⁷ It may be significant that Swinburne was very active in the French expeditions in which Nicholas (senior) and Thomas Bowet took part. Swinburne died in 1422 and his possessions passed to his younger brother John, from whom Rippingale would seem to have passed to Bowet.³⁸ By 1427, Sir Nicholas Bowet was in possession of the estate. (It may be significant to note that Sir Thomas Stonor sold his manor of Uphall in Rippingale to John Lord Beaumont in 1425; was the manor of Rippingale sold by Swinburne to Bowet at about the same time?). Bowet was assessed for the subsidy on lands, annuities and offices of 1435-36 at £40 a year from property in London, Lincolnshire and Northumberland and elsewhere.³⁹ Is this perhaps a case of 'the investment of the profits of war',⁴⁰ a suggestion supported by the fact that Thomas Bowet, clearly a close relation, had become possessed of an estate in Dowsby nearby?⁴¹ There are no signs of royal patronage for the Bowets.⁴²

Bowet's residence in Rippingale was convenient for his many tasks. It was a large and wealthy parish⁴³ on the main road from Lincoln to Bourne (three miles to the south of the village) with easy access to the south and London. The main road to Boston also ran through the eastern side of Rippingale, giving access to the coast. The parish contained three other settlements, Downhall, Uphall and Ringston (with its own chapel); the whole was assessed in the fourteenth century as at least two knights' fees, belonging to the Marmyon, Grey and Colville families.⁴⁴

Clergy, pp. 313-14, but Bowet's possession of the main manor and advowson of two-thirds of the church is not mentioned. See below at note 70.

³⁷ *Feudal Aids*, vol. 3, pp. 162, 174, 212; *Feudal Aids*, vol. 6, p. 480.

³⁸ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1386-1421*, ed J.S. Roskell, L. Clarke and C. Rawcliffe, Stroud 1992, vol. 4, pp. 545, 550-51.

³⁹ TNA, C61/122, m. 4; Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy*, p. 314; *Stonor Letters and Papers*, ed. C.L. Kingsford, 2 vols, Camden Society vols 29-30 (1919), vol. 2, p. 173; TNA, E179/134/198; H.L. Gray, 'Incomes from land in England in 1436', *English Historical Review*, vol. 49 (1934), p. 635.

⁴⁰ K.B. McFarlane, 'The investment of Sir John Fastolf's profits of war', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 7 (1957), pp. 91-116.

⁴¹ See draft marriage contract discussed below.

⁴² The only signs of royal connection are that Nicholas and Thomas Bowet served in the household troops in 1415, and that one Sir Nicholas Bowet (more likely the father) served under Henry FitzHugh, king's chamberlain, in 1418, TNA, E101/49/9 m. 2.

⁴³ The parish church was almost equal in wealth to Bourne abbey church, *Feudal Aids*, vol. 3, p. 359.

⁴⁴ *Feudal Aids*, vol. 3, pp. 139, 149, 162, 174, 198, 203, 209; *Feudal Aids*, vol. 6, p. 480.

Rippingale was surrounded by the strongholds of greater nobles. Immediately to the south was Bourne castle, the centre of the honor of Bourne held successively by the Wakes, the Hollands, earls of Kent, and the Beauforts, earls (later dukes) of Somerset. Bowet held his knight's fee in Rippingale of this honor. To the south-west lay Castle Bytham, the home of the Basset family of Sapcote and then of the Greys of Codnor; they had landed interests in Rippingale and claimed and at times exercised the advowson to two-thirds of Rippingale parish church. Immediately to the north stood Folkingham castle, home of the Beaumont family, one of the most powerful of all families in Lincolnshire in the second quarter of the fifteenth century; they held the manor of Uphall in Rippingale and the advowson of the third part of the parish church. Further north lay the bishop of Lincoln's castle at Sleaford; the Marmyon family held the manor of Ringsdon in Rippingale of the bishop.⁴⁵ Such nobles could be used to further one's ambitions but one needed to walk carefully between them.

Bowet's Connections

Bowet owed his position in Lincolnshire not so much to his estate as to his connections. These centred around two groups – those to whom he became related by marriage, and others with whom he formed close or less close relationships. Bowet married three times, first Elizabeth daughter of Sir John Zouche of Kirklington, Nottinghamshire, secondly Anne who was related to William Lord Ferrers of Groby, and thirdly Jane (or Joan) daughter of Sir Laurence Barkeley of Wymondham, Leicestershire.

Bowet married Elizabeth Zouche perhaps about 1423.⁴⁶ Sir John was the second son of William, third Lord Zouche of Harringworth, who died in 1396; Sir John had married Margaret, daughter of Sir John Burgh of Kirklington who had estates in Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire, and through her, he came to have interests in the extensive Lowdham estates in Nottinghamshire.⁴⁷

Elizabeth Zouche died before 1437, when Nicholas married again, to Anne probably the daughter of William Lord Ferrers of Groby, Leicestershire. On 4

⁴⁵ *Feudal Aids*, vol. 3, p. 198; *Feudal Aids*, vol. 6, p. 480.

⁴⁶ *Hist. Parl. 1386-1421*, vol. 4, p. 942; *Testamenta Eboracensia*, vol. 2, pp. 153-7. The evidence for the date 1423 is that when Henry, Archbishop of York, died in 1423, Sir John Zouche owed him £266 13s 4d (400 marks) and Nicholas Bowet owed £40, Raine, *Historians of York*, vol. 3, p. 322. The latest biographer of Zouche suggests these may be repayments of loans needed for making the marriage settlement, for the senior branch of the Zouche family were cut out of the reversions and (he suggests) needed to be compensated. While this is possible, there is no evidence for this; *Hist. Parl., 1422-1461*, vol. 7, pp. 701-703.

⁴⁷ Robert Thoroton, *History of Nottinghamshire*, 3 vols, London 1796, vol. 3, pp. 25-30; see S.J. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England. The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire*, Oxford 1991, pp. 131, 191-92.

November 1437, William Lord Ferrers made a bond to Sir Nicholas Bowet in the sum of £300. There is no indication how that obligation arose, but attached to the bond is an undated reciprocal bond by which Nicholas bound himself to Ferrers in the very large sum of £1000 conditional on Bowet settling on himself and his wife Anne his estate in Rippingale (including the advowson of two thirds of the church there), together with his estate in Bothill and elsewhere in Cumberland, and ‘all lands, rents and services held to the use of Nicholas in Gascoyne and Gyan ... so that the same shall remain to the said Anne for life in case she shall be thrust out of the same manor of Rippingale’; it would seem that Bowet’s title to Rippingale was not unchallenged.⁴⁸

Exactly who this Anne is cannot now be determined – perhaps a daughter, granddaughter or ward of William Lord Ferrers (Ferrers was sixty-five in 1437). Bowet now developed other links with the Ferrers family. In 1451, he was one of the feoffees of Thomas Ferrers along with the Duke of York and others for lands in Essex, and in 1464, Bowet and other feoffees settled on new trustees lands in Essex which they held by grant of Thomas Ferrers, esquire, son and heir male of William Lord Ferrers of Groby. This transaction needs to be linked to an obscure reference to the Ferrers family. In 1465, when Bowet planned to marry his son, William, to the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman, he listed among the remainders, should William and his new wife die without immediate heirs, one ‘Henry Ferriers’.⁴⁹ One can only assume that his name is included in this list by virtue of this marriage to Anne. There is confirmatory evidence that Anne was a Ferrers. Holles, in his *Church Notes*, describes the effigy which still stands in Rippingale church of a man with two consorts bearing the arms of Zouche and Quincy, but the description of the alleged ‘Quincy’ arms show them to be the arms of Ferrers of Groby. Bowet seems to have taken precipitate action and erected a memorial for himself and his two wives, Zouche and Ferrers. When his third wife, Jane Barkeley, died in 1472, he erected a separate *lapideus tumulus* for her with an inscription in French rather than Latin.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *CCR 1435-4*, pp. 158-59.

⁴⁹ See draft marriage contract discussed below. Who this Henry Ferrers was is not clear except that he was a royal servant. For Ferrers, see Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *Hastings*, London 1928, vol. 1, p. 300; E. Acheson, *A Gentry Community; Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c. 1425-c. 1485*, Cambridge 1992, p. 137; *CFR 1454-61*, p. 324; Lichfield Record Office, D187/1/5: Grant by Nicholas Bowet and other feoffees to John Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, William Lord Hastings, William Vernon knight, Richard Hastings, Edmund Vernon esquire and others, of the manor of Champeyne and all lands, manors and tenements in Essex which they have of the feoffment of Thomas Ferrers esquire, son and heir male of William de Ferrers, sometime Lord of Groby, 14 February, 4 Edward IV [1464].

⁵⁰ *Holles’ Church Notes, 1634-42*, edited R. E. G. Cole, Lincoln Record Society, vol. 1, 1911, pp. 193-94; Nicholas Pevsner and John Harris, *Buildings of Lincolnshire*, rev. edition, London 1989, p. 612, (following Holles) ascribe this chest tomb to Roger de Quincy

How long that second marriage lasted, we do not know, but Bowet married Jane Barkeley sometime before 1465. This marriage, like the Ferrers connection, introduced him to a circle of gentry in Leicestershire as well as south Lincolnshire. The Wymondham (Leicestershire) Barkeleys were the younger branch of the Berkeleys of Raglan and Berkeley, represented at the time by Sir James Berkeley 'the Just'. Laurence was related to the Ferrers family and had connections with many prominent gentry of the region (Woodvilles, Folvilles, Brokesbys and Busshys of Hougham), including Sir William Hussey of Sleaford, Lincs, one of the most prominent lawyers and administrators of his day and later chief justice of the king's bench, and Mauncer, presumably a second son of the MP, Mauncer Marmyon. Hussey was to act as feoffee for Bowet in 1465, and the Marmyons were closely linked to Bowet through the family's residence in Rippingale.⁵¹

Thus Nicholas married into three ancient families in neighbouring counties, Zouche, Ferrers and Barkeley. The alliances he made for his children were equally prestigious. Bowet had children by each of his marriages. By Elizabeth Zouche, he had two daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret, who became heirs to her mother Margaret, daughter of Sir John Burgh of Kirklington, Nottinghamshire, and eventually heirs of Sir John Zouche himself. It would seem that by Anne, Bowet had a son William; and it is very likely that by Jane Barkeley Nicholas had a further son in his old age (c. 1472) who was an 'idiot' but who came to hold Rippingale. For in 1502, an inquiry found that Henry Blouet [*sic*] 'is a fool and natural idiot, not having ability or discretion to manage himself or his lands. He is seised in fee of the manor of Rippyngale, worth £40, held of the king as of his honor of Burne [Bourne, Lincs] after the death of Nicholas Blouet [*sic*] knight his father. He is 30 years of age'. Henry was born, and Jane Barkeley died, in 1472⁵² – perhaps she died in childbirth?

Through Zouche, Nicholas Bowet became acquainted with the Chaworths of Wiverton, Nottinghamshire, and married both his daughters to the two sons of

but the College of Arms (personal communication) have confirmed that the arms listed by Holles are those of the Ferrers family.

⁵¹ Jane Barkeley's sisters married into the Brokesby and Busshy (of Hougham) families; and her nieces, Elizabeth and Edith, daughters of Jane's brother, Sir Thomas Barkeley of Wymondham, were married respectively to Sir William Hussey of Sleaford, Lincs, and to Mauncer Marmyon; *Hist. Parl., 1386-1421*, vol. 2, pp. 200-01; *Hist. Parl., 1422-1461*, vol. 5, pp. 404-407; A.R. Maddison, *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, Harleian Society, vol. 50 (1902), vol. 1, pp. 127-28; *Holles' Church Notes*, p. 193.

⁵² *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other Analogous Documents preserved in the Public Record Office, Henry VII (CIPM HVII)*, 3 vols, London 1898-1956, vol. 3, p. 406; *Holles' Church Notes*, pp. 193-94: inscription *Issy gyst dame Jane Bowet jadis feme au Sr Nicholas Bowet chivaler et file de Sr Laurence Barkeley que trepassa cest mortel vie en le fest du Conversion St Pol lan de grace 1471*. See also *Monson's Church Notes*, ed John Lord Monson, Lincoln Record Society, vol. 31 (1936), pp. 302-03.

Sir Thomas Chaworth.⁵³ Sir Thomas Chaworth was steward of some of the lands of the Earl of Warwick, *c.* 1445, and had close links with Richard and Henry, Lords Grey of Codnor, who came to hold Castle Bytham. Members of the Chaworth family had strong Lincolnshire connections and had disputes with the Lincolnshire thug, William Tailboys. They served as sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1408 and 1418, and were closely associated with William Lord Ferrers of Groby and with Ralph Lord Cromwell of Lincolnshire.⁵⁴

In 1465, Bowet planned to marry William, probably his son by his second marriage, to Elizabeth daughter of Thomas Roos, esquire, of Dowsby by Rippingale. This prospective marriage, though at first sight less advantageous, brought Nicholas into contact with two eminent families, Quartermayns and Englefield of Berkshire.⁵⁵ The Roos (Ros, Rous) family had been in Dowsby since the early years of the fourteenth century. In the 1430s, Nicholas Bowet had been a witness to a grant in Huntingdonshire and Lincolnshire to Thomas Roos, esquire, but by 1465, Roos was dead,⁵⁶ and the wardship of his daughter lay with Richard Quartermayns, her uncle. In the 1460s, Quartermayns was a key figure in the royal administration, and took Bowet's connections into Oxfordshire. Like Chaworth, Quartermayns had served as steward for some estates of the earl of Warwick in the early 1420s and was an associate of Ralph Lord Cromwell in 1434. He had been in the service of Richard, Duke of York, before 1460. He can be seen accumulating estates in Rutland from the executors of Cromwell, but in 1467, at the king's request, he passed these to Henry Ferrers, king's servant, getting in return some of Lord Beaumont's forfeited property. This Henry Ferrers was presumably the Henry Ferrers involved in the marriage negotiations in 1465. But the marriage did not take

⁵³ TNA, CP 25(1)/293/71/314; BL Additional Charters, 20542. Elizabeth the elder daughter married Sir John Dunham after the death of Sir William Chaworth, her first husband; and Margaret the younger daughter later married Humphrey Pearsall, esquire, of Staffordshire, whom she seems to have divorced, TNA, C140/82/12: inquisition post mortem, 1482-3 of Margaret Pearsall and Chaworth; VCH, *Staffordshire*, ed A.P. Baggs *et al*, London 1996, vol. 7, pp. 13, 243; there were two Humphrey Pearsalls, one died 1471, the other 1498, *CFR 1471-85* p. 3; *CFR 1485-1509*, p. 592.

⁵⁴ TNA, C259/7 m. 5; *Hist. Parl.*, 1386-1421, vol. 2, pp. 533-36; *Hist. Parl. 1422-1461*, vol. 3, pp 835-38; Payling, *Nottinghamshire*, pp. 131, 192-93.

⁵⁵ Quartermayns's sister Elizabeth married into the Englefield family and Richard Rous her grandson became one of the coheirs of Quartermayns in 1477, *Hist. Parl.*, 1422-1461, vol. 6, pp 275-287.

⁵⁶ *CFR 1435-41*, p. 393; one Roos, armiger, son of Sir Thomas Roos, Lord of Dowsby and patron of the parish church there, died 9 May 1452, *Holles' Church Notes*, p.193. In 1453, John Roos of Laxton made a release of some (unspecified) lands to Nicholas Bowet, probably as feoffee, HMC, *Hastings*, vol. 1, p. 118. In the early 16th century, 'Jayne' heiress of Roos of Dowsby married David Cecil of Stamford as his second wife, Alan Rogers, 'The parliamentary representation of Stamford, 1467-1509', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 58 (2014), pp. 210-18; Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy*, pp. 214, 216-17.

place: William apparently died early, since, while the draft contract of 1465 settled the manor of Bothill, Cumberland, on the young couple, Nicholas sold Bothill manor in 1468.⁵⁷

For a newcomer in the region to make such alliances and to break quickly into Lincolnshire county society as feoffee, JP and sheriff, seems to call for some local powerful connection. This could perhaps have centred round the Holland earls/dukes of Somerset for, as we have seen, members of the Bowet family served Somerset in France and Wales, and Bowet held his knight's fee from Somerset's honor of Bourne. Swinburne, who held Rippingale, had early links with the Beaufort Somerset family.⁵⁸ It may also be significant that John Stoughton esquire, a member of the royal household in 1452 and in the retinue of Edmund, Duke of Somerset, had an estate in Hacconby, the other part of Nicholas' knight's fee.⁵⁹ But no links can be seen between Bowet and Stoughton; nor can any connection be established between Bowet and Somerset. Nor can anything definite be said about any link with the de Vere family, earls of Oxford, except that Bowet obtained a copy of one of de Vere's manorial accounts for his notebook. Swinburne's sister-in-law was the wife of John de Vere, Earl of Oxford,⁶⁰ and de Vere had been active in the French campaigns – but that is all.

One of the most important influences on Bowet would have been John, Viscount Beaumont. Not only was Beaumont resident at Folkingham castle a few miles north of Rippingale, but he held the manor of Uphall in Rippingale. The Marmyon family were tenants of Beaumont in their main manor of Keisby, Lincolnshire, close by Rippingale, and Mauncer Marmyon's father served in France in 1406 in the retinue of Henry Lord Beaumont (died 1413). But Beaumont was a young ward at court when Nicholas Bowet first came on the Lincolnshire scene. While he may have put Bowet's name forward for various commissions and offices (as JP and sheriff) which started in 1431 when Beaumont would have been about twenty-two years old, his was not the influence which helped Bowet to become established in south Lincolnshire in the early 1420s.⁶¹

The influence may have come from one of three connections (or some combination of them) – the Zouche family, the Ferrers family and the Marmyon family. In each case, the initial impetus appears to have been fighting in France or Gascony. Nicholas's father-in-law, Sir John Zouche, does not seem to have fought abroad but the senior branch of the family certainly did. The Zouche family of Harringworth, Northamptonshire, spent much of their

⁵⁷ Nicolson *et al.*, *Westmoreland*, vol. 2, p. 123. No source is given for this statement.

⁵⁸ *Hist. Parl. 1386-1421*, vol. 4, pp. 550-51.

⁵⁹ *CPR 1446-5*, pp. 512, 549.

⁶⁰ *Hist. Parl. 1386-1421*, vol. 4, pp. 550-51.

⁶¹ For Beaumont, *Feudal Aids*, vol. 3, p. 250; Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy*, pp. 313-14. See also Griffiths, *Henry VI*, and J. Mackman, 'The Lincolnshire Gentry and the Wars of the Roses', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 1999.

time fighting and administering the territories they won. William Lord Zouche (c. 1402-62) was closely related to the Scrope family, and married his son William (c. 1426-78) into the family of Lord Grey of Codnor. It may have been Lord Zouche who facilitated the marriage of Nicholas Bowet's son to the daughter of the junior branch of his family.

But perhaps the main influence on Bowet's decision to settle in Rippingale was the Marmyon family. They had been resident in the manor of Ringsdon in Rippingale for several generations as minor gentry; their estate was valued in 1436 at £40. They too were soldiers and through this service, and through a marriage with the family of Wolf in Leicestershire, their status rose, and Mauncer Marmyon of Ringsdon became JP, sheriff (1448) and MP (1447) for Lincolnshire; his son John also became sheriff (1459). Marmyon as sheriff was accused of favouring one of the duke of Suffolk's party, and he was also accused of other irregularities; in the mid-1440s, he was in dispute with Bowet over intercommoning in Rippingale.⁶²

One name connects several of these together and again strengthens the supposition that it was fighting in France and Gascony that created the network. Zouche, Marmyon and especially Chaworth all had links with Sir Thomas Rempston of Nottinghamshire (c. 1390-1458), one of the most notable soldiers of this period and steward of Guyenne.⁶³ Thus it may have been through military links that Bowet came to Rippingale. Once there, he joined a small group of county gentry across the borders of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and south Lincolnshire. Ferrers, Beaumont and Zouche all shared wastes in Charnwood Forest, and were closely connected by marriage. All were staunch Lancastrians. The Ferrers' inheritance passed to the Greys of Codnor (later of Castle Bytham); Beaumont's lands passed to the Hastings family.⁶⁴ But Bowet never became associated with any one of the factions in Lincolnshire, or more widely, at this time. Although the Chaworths were close friends of Ralph Lord Cromwell, Bowet had limited contact with this Lincolnshire noble, acting as a witness to a deed of Cromwell in 1443.⁶⁵ He frequently served on commissions with Thomas Meres, one of Cromwell's outer ring of associates, but this would have been inevitable with Meres' many Lincolnshire commissions. Bowet was no Lancastrian adherent.

Most of these early connections came to an end by the early 1460s. Elizabeth Zouche, Bowet's first wife, died early, before 1437. Sir John Zouche died in 1445, William Lord Ferrers of Groby died in 1445, Marmyon in 1451. Sir Thomas Chaworth, father of Bowet's two sons-in-law, died in 1459, Beaumont

⁶² Gray, 'Incomes', p. 634; *Hist. Parl., 1422-1461*, vol. 5, pp. 404-407.

⁶³ *Hist. Parl., 1422-61*, vol. 4, pp. 192-94; Vale, *Gascony*, p. 245; for Chaworth and Rempston, see will of Chaworth, 1455, in *Testamenta Eboracensia*, vol. 2, pp. 220-29.

⁶⁴ Acheson, *Leicestershire*, p. 9n.

⁶⁵ Lincolnshire Archives, Holywell 71/15b: witness to a deed of feoffment by the sole surviving feoffee of Sir William Mallory to new feoffees including Ralph Lord Cromwell, manor of Careby, Lincolnshire, 29 April 1443.

in 1460. Only the Ferrers connection continued into the reign of Edward IV through the son and male heir of Lord Ferrers. Lord Hastings took over the Beaumont lands but there is only one sign of any connection with Hastings.⁶⁶ Bowet's main links were with the family of Barkeley of Leicestershire and a short-lived one with Quartermayns who had the wardship of the daughter of Bowet's neighbour, Thomas Roos, esquire, of Dowsby by Rippingale.

The Draft Marriage Contract 1465

The draft marriage contract of October 1465 brings together Nicholas Bowet's estates, family lines and feoffees, and it is therefore worth discussing in some detail. Under the terms of the contract, Nicholas would enfeof all his Lincolnshire lands (Rippingale manor with lands in eight neighbouring parishes and the advowson to two thirds of Rippingale church) and all his Cumberland estates (Bothill manor with outliers in five other places) to feoffees, John Smyth clerk and William Bate, parson of Dunsby.⁶⁷ They are first to grant from these estates an annuity of £10 to Bowet's trustees, Robert Willoughby,⁶⁸ William Hussey and Thomas Bowet, to settle on Jane wife of Nicholas Bowet for her life if she survive Nicholas, then to remain to Nicholas Bowet for his life.

Smyth and Bate are then to grant all the Lincolnshire lands to Nicholas for life with remainder to his son, William and his (intended) bride Elizabeth Roos; then in successive remainders to Elizabeth and Margaret, daughters of Nicholas Bowet by his first wife, and their heirs, to Sir William Bowet his 'uncle' and his heirs, then to Henry 'Ferriers' and his heirs, and finally back to the right heirs of Sir Nicholas Bowet. Bowet's heir by his second wife thus took precedence over his two co-heiresses by his first wife, probably because they had their own inheritances from their mother and had made very advantageous marriages.

Smyth and Bate are thirdly to settle Bothill and all the Cumberland lands on Robert Fitzelys, Robert Willoughby, Richard Foulmer and Thomas Bowet of Dowsby to the profit of the young couple for two or three years and then these estates are to be sold or exchanged for other lands at the pleasure of William Bowet and his council, these to be settled on William and Elizabeth and their heirs with remainder to the right heirs of Nicholas Bowet as above. All of this

⁶⁶ For Hastings link, see note 49 above. One of Nicholas Bowet's title deeds came into the possession of the Hastings family, see note 56 above.

⁶⁷ Priest in Dunsby 1444 until death in 1473, Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy*, p. 227.

⁶⁸ This is Robert Willoughby of Wollaton, Notts, c. 1427-1474, rather than Robert Willoughby of Parham, Suffolk, who united the families of Willoughby and d'Eresby and died in 1465 or 1466; see Alan Cameron, 'Sir Henry Willoughby of Wollaton', *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, 74 (1970), pp. 10-21. The Willoughby family of Wollaton were closely connected to the Ferrers family; see Payling, *Nottinghamshire*, p. 85. In 1412, a Willoughby family related to the Willoughbys of Wollaton was living in Dunsby, *Feudal Aids*, vol. 6, p. 480; *Holles' Church Notes*, p. 195.

at the cost of Richard Quartermayns, who is to maintain Elizabeth for one year and also William Bowet when he visits her.

But the marriage never came about and we hear no more of Quartermayns in Bowet's life history, although the grandson of Roos was one of the coheirs of Quartermayns. The Lincolnshire lands descended to Henry, Bowet's son born in his old age (c. 1472), and, as we have seen, Bowet sold the Bothill estate and the outliers in 1468.

Nicholas Bowet's claim to hold the advowson of two thirds of the parish church is also revealing. The two-thirds parts of the advowson was shared between the manor of Ringston (successively Gobaud, Colville, Bassett and Grey; Swinburne contested the advowson in 1394-1406) and the manor of Downhall (Shelford Priory), and was exercised alternately.⁶⁹ The advowson of the other one third part belonged to the holders of Uphall manor in Rippingale, held by the Stonor family; it came to Beaumont and passed with his estates to the Hastings family. But there are no recorded presentations between 1406 and 1484. Does this suggest some controversy between Bowet (who with his knight's fee in Rippingale now possessed the Swinburne interests) on the one hand, and the Castle Bytham families and Shelford Priory over that part of the advowson? We know that Bowet was keenly interested in his parish church; he copied some of the correspondence relating to it into his notebooks and it is likely he presented at least one incumbent.⁷⁰

It is important to remember, when dealing with families like Bowet, where documentary sources are relatively thin, that a single reference (for example in a feoffee transaction) does not imply a close friendship, nor does a dispute (for example over church presentments with the lords of Castle Bytham or over intercommoning with Marmyon) imply permanent hostility. But it is possible to draw some general conclusions. Bowet's initial connections were with Zouche and then Chaworth, and with Marmyon in Rippingale; then came a second phase with Beaumont of Folkingham and Ferrers of Groby; finally from about 1460 onwards, the connections were with Barkeley and later with Roos and Quartermayns. The Ferrers link clearly continued. All of them operated across the county boundaries of Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire.

⁶⁹ The Greys came into Castle Bytham late in the century, through the marriage of Richard Grey of Codnor, c. 1371-1418, to Elizabeth, daughter of Ralph Basset of Sapcote (died 1446). Lord Grey of Codnor was more active in Ireland than in France, Griffiths, *Henry VI*, pp. 165-66, 175.

⁷⁰ Bennett, *Lincolnshire Parish Clergy*, pp. 313-17. Bennett suggests (personal communication) that Bowet's claim to the advowson of two-thirds of the church was non-existent or not effective, but in 1533, Sir John Dunham of Kirklington exercised the patronage, and Dunham was eventual heir to Bowet through Elizabeth, one of Bowet's daughters and coheirs. Bowet included in his collection a letter from Master Thomas Hilton, rector of two thirds of Rippingale parish church and William Adamson, his parochial chaplain, BL Harleian MS 773, f. 15r. This creates a strong presumption that Bowet presented Hilton to the two thirds part of Rippingale church.

Bowet could still call on influential families like Willoughby of Wollaton and Hussey of Sleaford but rarely did so. Bowet's horizons seem to have been shrinking. Just as his public service did also.

Public Service in Lincolnshire

Apart from his debt to the executors of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, in 1423, the first we hear of our Nicholas Bowet is in 1426 when he was holding the property in Bordeaux of the archbishop. A Sir Nicholas Bowet served in the garrison at Fronsac castle in 1427, and in 1431, Nicholas Bowet (described as controller of Bordeaux) was holding the deceased archbishop's property in Bordeaux.⁷¹ But this is the last we hear of Nicholas Bowet in France or Gascony, and 1431 is the first we find him employed in Lincolnshire.

In 1431, Sir Nicholas Bowet had a commission in Lincolnshire to raise a loan for the king; in 1432, he was commissioner of sewers in Kesteven; in 1434, he took the oath of royal support among the gentry of Lincolnshire.⁷² He served as JP in Kesteven for thirty-four years (1439 to 1473) with one short break (1458-60); he was sheriff of the county three times, 1440-41, 1447-8 and 1452-53, but he is not recorded as having attended any of the county court sessions in Lincoln for the election of MPs during his lifetime.⁷³ His service as sheriff in 1452 was particularly difficult, for he had to supervise the trials of the alleged rebels of Stamford and Grantham at which two bailiffs of the duke of York were sentenced to be executed for treason. In 1457, he received a royal pardon for his time as sheriff;⁷⁴ he did not serve as sheriff again.

But he did serve on local commissions in Kesteven and Lincolnshire – to arrest 1448, to raise a loan 1449, to assign numbers of archers to each part of Lincolnshire 1457, and of array 1458 and 1459 (against the duke of York). Commissions to inquire into smuggling 1445, and into shipping sailing to Denmark 1451, suggest a trading dimension to his activities; in 1435, he was suing Thomas Messen, gentleman of Doncaster, for two bonds, and in 1450-51, he was being sued for debt by John Brut and Joan his wife in Yorkshire. He

⁷¹ The Gascon Rolls Project (1317-1468), <http://www.gasconrolls.org/en/research-tools/duchy-office-holders/constables-of-bordeaux-1273-1453>.

⁷² *CPR 1429-36*, pp. 126, 273, 382.

⁷³ *CFR 1445-52*, pp. 81, 89; *CPR 1436-41*, p. 585; he was appointed sheriff on 4 November 1440 but on 6 November, he had a revised farm by surety of William Ormesby of Lincs and Robert Boteler of Cawood, Yorks, *CFR 1437-45*, pp. 177, 193; *CPR 1452-61*, p. 670. Alan Rogers, 'The Lincolnshire county court in the fifteenth century', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, vol. 1 (1966), pp. 64-78.

⁷⁴ TNA, KB9/65A; see Alan Rogers, 'Stamford and the Wars of the Roses', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 53 (2009), pp. 73-108; *CPR 1452-61*, p. 351: inquisition into the lands of Nicholas Bowet kt, late sheriff, in Hacconby taken between 1 September 1454 and 31 August 1455; the wording suggests the suit arose from his shrievalty of 1452-53; for pardon as sheriff, see TNA, E199/23/36.

had other interests in Yorkshire; sometime before July 1450, he settled some lands on the hospital at Ripon, perhaps as a feoffee. In 1456, he was pursuing his court case against Robert Ufford over the will of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York.⁷⁵

After the accession of Edward IV, his duties reduced. He was appointed to commissions of array, May and September 1461, to assess and raise the royal taxes, 1463, and of array in 1472 – that is all.⁷⁶ He seems to have kept his head low in the crisis of 1470-71, retaining his seat on all commissions of the peace during this period:

The crisis of 1470-1 suggests ... that more than half of the Lincolnshire gentry JPs might be regarded as known though not over-zealous political partisans, while the rest of their colleagues did not compromise themselves at all.⁷⁷

Nicholas Bowet then became a Lincolnshire gentleman from a military background, not of county gentlemen stock; there are no signs the Bowets held county offices in the north west or elsewhere.⁷⁸ So how did he learn about his tasks as JP, sheriff and local commissioner? He had little family experience to draw upon – and yet his duties were both wide and important; and the legal as well as the political tasks of a gentleman-commissioner-official without the experience of family to back it up must have appeared daunting. As a member of the bench of justices of the peace, with their ‘statutory powers to imprison and punish’, he was part of the ‘delegation of royal authority to the local gentry’. And as sheriff:

Administratively the sheriff and his undersheriff were the king’s local men-of-all-work, serving writs, empanelling juries, collecting debts, holding elections to parliament etc, and raising the fencible men of the county for the king’s service.

⁷⁵ CPR 1429-36, p. 477; CPR 1441-46, p. 369; CPR 1446-52, pp. 188, 299, 334, 479; CPR 1452-61, pp. 409, 490, 494, 560; TNA, CP40/758/803d: John Brut and Joan *versus* Nicholas Bowet *nuper* of Rippingale kt for £9 11s 2d debt; he came not, was distrained; the sheriff of Lincolnshire said he had no lands etc on which distraint could be levied; prorogued to Michaelmas and then to Hillary 1451.

⁷⁶ CPR 1461-67, p. 567; CFR 1461-71, pp. 100, 105; CPR 1467-77, p. 352. He is unlikely to be the Nicholas Bowet of Walton on the Hill, Surrey, sued by John Iwardeby (a Lincolnshire name) for failure to fulfil the condition of a bond, 1465-1471, TNA, C1/32/364.

⁷⁷ Storey, ‘Lincolnshire and Wars of Roses’, p. 81.

⁷⁸ For sheriffs, see G. Duckett, ‘Sheriffs of Westmoreland with the early sheriffs of Cumberland’, *Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society Transactions*, vol. 4 (1880), pp. 285-317.

It is true that

the later-medieval sheriff, the king's only server of writs and empaneller of juries, was emasculated as an effective, impartial agent of central government by a diminishing financial role, by his being deprived of control of the crown lands within the area of his shrievalty and by parliament's insistence on his annual appointment and prohibition of reappointment within three years;⁷⁹

and in Lincolnshire, the large duchy of Lancaster estates and other lands which had by now come into the possession of the crown reduced the areas of the sheriff's mandate substantially. But his duties remained multiple and onerous. His appointments as long-term JP and as sheriff and commissioner proclaim him one of the 'known and reliable knights and esquires' with 'influential connections and a tradition of service', men of 'loyalty and proven service', a member of that group 'with status and authority in the shires' who organised parliamentary elections and maintained order, who were sufficiently important during the period of Henry VI's personal reign from 1437 to 1453 for many of them to be drawn from the royal household.⁸⁰ Yet Bowet did not belong to the royal household and is not known to have had any links with it – his interests seem to have been purely local, in Lincolnshire with outlying interests in Cumberland. It has been pointed out that Bowet was one of very few gentlemen in that county who held office for such a long time, and that – like others – he left no dynasty; and that therefore he had less incentive than other officials to increase his wealth by the exploitation and extortion which was apparent in other counties in the later 1440s and 1450s. In a county which seems to have had relatively little disorder compared with other regions, he 'successfully negotiated the entire period without incident', including the trial for treason of two of the duke of York's officials.⁸¹

He would seem to have fulfilled his duties as JP as well as most JPs of his time. He was paid for attendance at quarter sessions on each of the three occasions after his appointment in 1439 when payments by the sheriff have been recorded – 1441 (6 days), 1443-44 (7 days), and 1455 (2 days).⁸² And his notebooks reveal something of the extent of his activities as JP: at least eighteen writs and other documents issued over his signature, almost all between the years 1445 and 1450, and a further twelve items copied from other JPs, all relating to his work as justice and as sheriff.

He appears to have died in the late 1470s. His commissions of the peace ended in 1473 but items in this volume were added up to 1477, which indicates

⁷⁹ B. Wolffe, *Henry VI*, New Haven and London, 2001 edition, pp. 99, 117.

⁸⁰ Griffiths, *Henry VI*, pp. 68, 96, 99, 334-37; see Jeffs, 'Sheriffs'.

⁸¹ Mackman, 'Lincolnshire', pp. 105, 222; Griffiths, *Henry VI*, p. 595.

⁸² TNA, E101/569/40: I am grateful to an anonymous reader for this reference.

that he remained alive for a few years after the end of his term of office.⁸³ He left two daughters and apparently a son with learning difficulties who inherited his estate in Rippingale.⁸⁴ The effigy of a knight with two wives and the arms of Zouche and Ferrers, which still stands in the church of Rippingale, reveals something of his social aspirations. Arms attributed to the family were displayed in the church: ‘Argent a cinquefoyle pierced between three reindeers’ heads, caboosed and attired sable’.⁸⁵

BL Harleian MS 773 provides a remarkable example of how an inexperienced rural JP sought to educate himself for his tasks as justice and as sheriff. He collected fragments of two relatively ancient textbooks on conveyancing (the Oxford fragments and the Horbury textbook); he obtained two other teaching texts, on the forms of holding courts and the instructions to be given to jurors and officials. He was fortunate in having access to Robert de Repynghale, clerk of the peace for the various parts of Lincolnshire and other regions, and (perhaps through him) to records from other parts of the country. But he also obtained material from other clerks of the peace, especially John Baret (Dorset). His four notebooks, each dealing with a separate topic and each starting with a major text, were originally separate, as can be seen from the fact that they all end with blank spaces, some of which were filled with copies of documents relating to his family and his village, others were never completely filled. That he took his duties seriously, using textbooks intended for formal instruction, is clear.

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⁸³ There is no reason for items to be added to this collection after his death, for his successors were coheiresses and/or an infant ‘idiot’ son.

⁸⁴ There is an odd reference to a suit against Nicholas Bowet and Richard Chiselden concerning the seizure of cattle in Rippingale, undated but recorded in the reign of Henry VIII, TNA, STAC 2/31/94; might this be a throw-back to the dispute with Marmyon in the 1440s?

⁸⁵ *Holles’ Church Notes*, p. 193.