

**Gentry Identity and the Politics of Vernacular
Letter Writing in the Fifteenth Century**

Julia Cruse

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ABSTRACT

The individual authorial voice of the late-medieval gentry letter-writer as heard in the context of private, familial or public land disputes is the focus of this thesis. It uses as its main sources two fifteenth-century letter collections which arise out of legal challenges: the Armburgh Roll and the letters of John Shillingford, a mayor of Exeter. The Armburgh Roll, c.1417-c.1453, focuses on a disputed inheritance claim and the affairs of the claimants Joan Armburgh and her husband Robert. The Shillingford letters detail a public dispute between the city of Exeter and the ecclesiastical authorities in the 1440s.

The aim of this thesis is to further the understanding of the social and cultural attitudes of the fifteenth-century gentry through the analysis of the language and composition of their personal writings as well as to advance the historiographical appreciation of those gentry letters where they were written within the framework of conflict.

It is both the deployment of a literary line of enquiry and a comparative study of the language, content and context of the letters that comprises the main strands of the study. It shows how by 'reading between the lines' and examining the individuality of the texts it is possible to reveal the thought processes that sit behind the individual writers' words and therefore to gain a greater insight into the literate gentry strata. It demonstrates the importance of examining the letters with the emphasis on the politics of the writing which in turn reveals the emotional engagement that the

individual gentry writer had with his or her own writing. Primarily, the thesis argues that by appraising the personal writings of the gentry with the emphasis on the creation of the texts against an appreciation of the complex ideological beliefs and concepts of the late-medieval period we can develop our understanding of gentry close personal relationships which in turn enables us to add to our knowledge of that important land-owning class and its evolving social hierarchy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP	<i>The Armburgh Papers: the Brokholes Inheritance in Warwickshire, Hertfordshire and Essex c.1417-c.1453</i> , ed. Christine Carpenter (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998)
BIHR	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
Davis	<i>Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century</i> , ed. Norman Davis, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971 and 1976)
DRO	Devon Records Office, Exeter
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
MED	Middle English Dictionary
Moore	John Shillingford: <i>Letters and Papers of John Shillingford – Mayor of Exeter 1447-50</i> , ed. Stuart A. Moore (London, Camden Society, n.s. ii, 1871)
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OLD	Oxford Latin Dictionary
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis contributes to the study of late-medieval gentry culture through an evaluation of the individual voices of the fifteenth-century gentry letter-writers. The thesis builds on the idea put forward by Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove in the introduction to *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* that what is ‘presented in surviving gentry correspondence is, perhaps a projection of how the writers wished to be seen’ and that this in itself makes the correspondence of value in the study of gentry culture and identity.¹ However, it takes issue with the view that the evidence the letters provide of individual attitudes and beliefs is limited because they were not necessarily exclusive communications between the writer and the recipient.² The argument put forward in this thesis is that gentry letters and personal papers are yet more revealing of both societal and individual attitudes and values, in terms of identity, status and relationships, than has hitherto been allowed for and that in order to evaluate them more fully we need to adopt a more imaginative approach to the analysis.

The thesis asserts that it is through the consideration of the politics of the writing of these letters that a deeper appreciation of the worth of these major extant sources can be achieved. The questions which are at the root of the politics of writing stem from the discipline of *Diplomatics* which Leonard Boyle identifies as a ‘straightforward application of the basic principles of literary criticism to

¹ *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 7.

² *Ibid.* 7.

documentary sources'.³ The criticism depends on the same rhetorical principles regardless of the nature or character of the document: Who wrote it? What does it say? How is it written? Why, when, and where was it written? Who were involved in it besides the principal agent?⁴

The focus here is the authorial voice of the fifteenth-century gentry letter-writers, as heard in the context of private, familial or public land disputes. The thesis will use as its main sources two letter collections that arise from land disputes: the Armburgh Roll c.1417-c.1453 and the letters and papers of John Shillingford, sometime mayor of Exeter, between 1444 and 1448.⁵ Questions that are key to fully evaluating these letters must include those of authorship, purpose, subject, and reception, as well as a detailed and critical analysis of the language used and the construction of the writing. We rarely get the opportunity to ask these questions with any degree of confidence in achieving full or meaningful answers; the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters present this rare opportunity.

Aims

The thesis has three main aims. First, to evaluate how the gentry letter-writers saw and conducted themselves within their close societal relationships in particular where

³ Leonard E. Boyle, 'Diplomatics' in *Medieval Studies, An Introduction, second edition*, ed. James M. Powell (New York: University Press, 1992), 82-113, (see esp. p.89).

⁴ *Ibid.* 89.

⁵ Chetham's Manuscript Mun. E.6. 10(4); *The Armburgh Papers. The Brokhole Inheritance in Warwickshire, Hertfordshire and Essex c.1417-c.1453*, ed. Christine Carpenter (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998); *Letters and Papers of John Shillingford – Mayor of Exeter 1447-50*, ed. Stuart A. Moore (London: Camden Society, o.s. ii, 1871). The extant Shillingford letters and papers are held in the Devon Records Office, Exeter under CS Box Numbers 1859, 1860 & 1861 together with unreferenced loose folder.

these relationships were influenced by conflict over land ownership. Second, to determine how this insight into the gentry's perception of their own identity and their immediate relationships can be used to further the understanding and study of late-medieval gentry society and culture in general. Finally, to widen the historiographical and analytical approach to the understanding and evaluation of late-medieval gentry vernacular letters.

Fifteenth-Century Vernacular Letters as Sources: choice of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford Letters

For the past four decades the study of the gentry has been a significant element of the historiography of late medieval England.⁶ The enquiry into gentry

⁶ K.B. McFarlane is recognised as the greatest influence in the development of this historiography and there is widespread acknowledgement of his ideas in terms of appreciating the governing echelons of late medieval society – the nobility and the gentry. His own published writing was limited but his legacy has been the progress made in evaluating gentry culture and their political importance within the ruling elite. Many historians writing on the late medieval period attest to the value of McFarlane's legacy in the understanding of fifteenth-century English politics: see Colin Richmond, 'After McFarlane' *History* 68 (1983), 46-60. Richmond's article looked at some of the earlier publications in this field and in his conclusion he stressed the need to further investigate 'provincial society' and the power that rested with the gentry: Richmond, 'After McFarlane', 59-60. Further recent evaluations can be found in: Edward Powell, 'After 'After McFarlane': the Poverty of Patronage and the Case for Constitutional History', in *Trade, Devotion and Governance, Papers in Later Medieval History*, ed. Dorothy J. Clayton, Richard G. Davies and Peter McNiven (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994), 1-13; *The McFarlane Legacy – Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). The essays in the latter study explore different aspects of the fifteenth-century political structures and governing elites. See also: Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 1-14; David Grummitt, *A Short History of The Wars of the Roses* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), pp.xx-xxvi. A comprehensive introduction to political society and the framework of governance is found in Gerald Harriss, *Shaping the Nation, England 1360-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). See in particular the chapters - 'The Gentry', pp.136-86 and 'The Local Polity', pp.187-206: both these chapters provide clear and valuable evaluations of gentry culture and gentry concerns. There is also a comprehensive and useful bibliography.

identity and status, alongside the study of their societal relationships, has now developed into a vital consideration of late-medieval gentry culture.⁷ The vernacular letters of the fifteenth-century gentry correspondents are recognised as one of the most valuable sources from which to gain important insights into the gentry's personal, social, economic and political concerns, to see behind the period's formal documentation, even into the 'minds' of the writers.⁸ The most well-known letter collections - those of the Pastons, the Stonors, the Plumpton and the Celys - have received significant scholarly attention, and are regarded as part of the historian's 'stock-in-trade'; their use in determining and writing the historiography of the fifteenth century cannot be underestimated.⁹ The correspondence of the Paston

⁷ *Gentry Culture*, ed. Radulescu and Truelove: this collection of essays presents a comprehensive introduction into the study of gentry culture. See also - Julia Boffey, 'Middle English Lives', in *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 610-34. Boffey assesses the use of letters as a means of writing lives, she stresses the fragmentary nature of them which make them difficult to use but identifies that once they are amalgamated into collections they provide an 'incomparable range' of ideas on the preoccupations and inclinations of the correspondents: Boffey 'Middle English Lives', 611-12.

⁸ *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. Christine Carpenter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31.

⁹ Joel T. Rosenthal, *Telling Tales, Sources and Narration in Late Medieval England* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p.xix; C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 193-227. In his examination of private and official correspondence, Kingsford recognised the importance of the letters as a source for fifteenth-century history commenting: 'the letters of private individuals are among the most fruitful and faithful sources for social history': Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, 193.

The Paston Letters - there is extensive literature on the most famous letter collection of the Pastons. Editions of the Paston Letters include: *The Paston Letters 1422-1509*, ed. James Gairdner, 6 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904); *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, Part I (First published 1971 Clarendon Press republished for EETS by Oxford University Press, 2004); *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, Part II (First published 1976 Clarendon Press republished for EETS by Oxford University Press 2004); *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Part III, ed. Richard Beadle and Colin Richmond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Studies on the Pastons include: H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons*

and their England; *Studies in the Age of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the fifteenth century – The first phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *idem. The Paston Family in the fifteenth century - Fastolf's Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *idem. The Paston Family in the fifteenth century – Endings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Helen Castor, *Blood & Roses – The Paston Family and the Wars of the Roses* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004); Diane Watt, *The Paston Women – Selected Letters* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004); *eadem.* ‘“No Writing for Writing’s Sake”: The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women’, in *Dear Sister – Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 122-38; Joel Rosenthal, *Margaret Paston’s Piety* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Philippa Maddern, ‘Honour among the Pastons: gender and integrity in fifteenth-century English provincial society.’ *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988), 357-71; *eadem.* ‘“Best Trusted Friends”: Concepts and Practices of Friendship among Fifteenth-Century Norfolk Gentry’, in *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1992 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1994), 100-17.

The Stonor Letters - work on the Stonors includes: *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters* ed. Carpenter; Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009); *eadem.* ‘Webs of Significance: Some Reflections on Thomas Stonor II’s Social Networks’, *Medieval Prosopography* 26, (2005), 315-333; Alison Hanham, ‘C.L. Kingsford: The Stonor Letters, and Two Chronicles’, *The Review of English Studies*, 60, (2009), 382- 405; Malcolm Richardson, ‘“A Masterful woman”: Elizabeth Stonor and English Women’s Letters, 1399-c.1530’, in *Women’s Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700, Form and Persuasion*, ed. Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 43-62; Alison Truelove, ‘The Fifteenth Century English Stonor Letters: A Revised Text with notes, a glossary and a collation of those letters edited by C. L. Kingsford in 1919 and 1924’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2001).

The Plumpton Letters - work on the Plumptons includes: *The Plumpton letters and papers*, ed. Joan Kirby, (Camden 5th Series, 8, London: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1996); John Taylor, ‘The Plumpton Letters 1416-1552’, *Northern History*, 10, (1975), 72-87.

The Cely Letters - work on the Cely letters includes: *The Cely Papers*, ed. Henry Elliot Malden (London: Camden Society: Longmans Green & Co., 1900); *The Cely Papers 1472-1488*, ed. Alison Hanham (Oxford: EETS 273, 1975); *eadem. The Celys and their world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). To fully appreciate the Cely papers both these editions need to be considered as Hanham’s EETS edition includes only the epistles (see the comments by Malcolm Richardson, *Middle-class writing in late medieval London* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p.117).

General studies on the letters include: ‘Letters and Letter Collections’, in Joel Rosenthal, *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 72-85; *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); *Dear Sister*, ed. Cherewatuk and Wiethaus; ‘Medieval Family Life’, Adam Matthew Digital, www.amditigal.co.uk (29/09/2010- 04/10/2010 trialled at University of Kent, Canterbury); *The Voice of the Middle Ages*, in

family have dominated the field of enquiry and although the other letter collections (those of the Stonors, Plumptons and Celys) have been subject to less overall consideration nonetheless the study of these letter collections is still significant. The Armburgh Roll and the letters of John Shillingford have not received nearly the same scholarly attention and more research is required to incorporate them into late-medieval historiography.¹⁰ With regard to the Armburgh Roll this lack of scholarly interest is surprising as Christine Carpenter emphasises the importance of the Roll commenting that it is: ‘one of the most remarkable documents for the history of late-medieval England to have been discovered in recent years’.¹¹ The Shillingford letters have been used more extensively in terms of the development of late-medieval urban history but their wider significance in understanding gentry culture has not yet been recognised.¹²

personal letters 1100-1500, ed. Catherine Moriarty (Oxford: Lennard Publishing, 1989); Laetitia Lyell, *A Mediaeval Post-Bag* (London: Jonathon Cape Ltd., 1934); ‘English Letters and the Intellectual Ferment’ in C.L. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1962), 22-47.

¹⁰ The exception to the development of the use of the Armburgh Roll is to be found in Raluca Radulescu’s study of *Morte Darthur* where she uses it, alongside an examination of the other significant gentry letter collections, to support her considerations of gentry culture and society as linked to the literature and content of *Morte Darthur*: Raluca Radulescu *The Gentry Context for Malory’s Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003). Other significant references to the Armburgh Roll are found in: Philip Morgan, ‘Ranks of Society’ in *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* ed. Ralph Griffiths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 59-85 (see esp. pp.82, 85); Carol M. Meale, ‘Women’s Voices and Roles’, in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2007), 74-90 (esp. pp. 77-78); *The Later Middle Ages: a sourcebook*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette, and Harold Garrett-Goodyear (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12, 42-44; S.R. Williams, ‘English Vernacular Letters c.1400-1600’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2001).

¹¹ AP 1.

¹² See for example: Muriel E. Curtis, *Some Disputes between the City and the Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1932); Lorraine Attreed, ‘Urban Identity in Medieval English Towns’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 32, (2002), 571-92; *eadem*.

The importance of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters as texts that enable us to reveal gentry attitudes has, therefore, not been realised. As this thesis will establish, both these sources are of significant value in that they present the potential to look at how late-medieval gentry reacted, within the framework of their relationships, to issues of conflict and dispute over the deeply held and inherent values of land, landownership and property. Equally, the analysis will show how the letters provide examples of direct personal relationships, with the Armburgh letters being especially rich in the detailing of the intimate relationships of family and associates, which expose details of these relationships that are usually hidden to us.

There were two main reasons for my choice of these two letter collections as the main sources for this thesis. They were chosen because they offer the unique opportunity to examine two highly significant but clearly undervalued resources in an area of enquiry into late-medieval culture where such extant sources are rare. They were also selected because of certain integral characteristics which I consider to be of specific value and which I believe enable us to examine more closely the fifteenth-century vernacular letter writers' approaches to their letter writing. Briefly these characteristics are: in the case of the Armburgh Roll the nature, choice, composition and context of the various discrete texts that comprise the overall manuscript. A further important consideration is that certain of the letters in the Roll

'Arbitration and the Growth of Urban Liberties in Late Medieval England', *The Journal of British Studies*, 31, (1992), 205-35; Hannes Kleineke, 'Civic Ritual, Space and Conflict in Fifteenth-Century Exeter' in *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2009 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Frances Andrews (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2011), 165-78.

represent some of the earliest examples of letters written in English.¹³ In the case of the Shillingford letters the important characteristic of the collection is the nature and number of the drafts and copies which are indicative of the processes of composition. As this thesis will demonstrate, this important and intrinsic characteristic of the Shillingford letters moves them as a source beyond simply their historiographical use and value as the documents can provide insights into the processes of vernacular letter-writing. Indeed their value in this respect was recognised by Stuart Moore, but it has never been further developed:

The Philological student will find here much matter of instruction, especially in such of the papers as exist both in draft and fair copy [...] from these he may trace the train of thought which was passing in the mind of the writer, and may observe the changes of the phrases which sprang from the changing

¹³ For the chronology of the earliest Paston letters from the 1420s to 1450s, see *The Paston Letters 1422-1509*, ed. Gairdner, Vol. II. The earliest Stonor letters in English date from c.1424: see *Kingsford's Stonor Letters*, ed. Carpenter, 122-40. It is important to note that the Stonor collection is largely made up of received letters. Noble details the number of letters and documents and suggests that the Stonor Letters have received less attention than they warrant because many of the letters were written to the Stonors rather than by the Stonors: Noble, *World of the Stonors*, 2. For further references to the earliest English letters, see Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, 389-91; Lyell, *Mediaeval Post-Bag*, 76-81, 267-73, 283-301. See also the Marchall Letters in The National Archives, SC1 (calendared in *List of Ancient Correspondence of the Chancery and Exchequer preserved in the Public Record Office*, List and Index Society, xv (1902)); *The Marchall Letters* Re-edited by Jukka Keranen, Terttu Nevalainen and Arja Nurmi. TNA, Special Collections, Ancient Correspondence, SC1. Published in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler* 1999 (CEECS). For recent evaluations of the early correspondence see the Corpus of Early English Correspondence – www.helsinki.fi. See also Malcolm Richardson 'Medieval English Vernacular Correspondence: notes toward an alternative rhetoric' *Allegorica* 10 (1989), 110-18; Edith Rickert 'Some English Personal Letters of 1402' *The Review of English Studies* 8 (1932), 257-63.

ideas of the writer during the composition of his letters, as well as the modification of expression frequently used.¹⁴

The characteristics of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters that I believe to be significant are detailed in chapter two on the sources.

It has been recognised that there are omissions in the way that all of the period's vernacular letters have been used. Noble in her assessment of the Stonor papers highlights how these documents are informative about gentry economic and agricultural activity, but also how the letters, in common with other similar collections, have been largely 'mined' for illustrative or descriptive material to support the study of late-medieval social life. She also comments that the Stonor letters have never been considered in their entirety and that a 'piecemeal' approach has effectively 'masked insights that they may have provided' had they been considered as a whole entity.¹⁵ Alison Truelove, in her thesis on the Stonor Letters, identifies that (apart from Norman Davis's work on the Pastons) a comparative study of the language of other fifteenth-century letter writers is required and there is a great need to investigate the characteristics as well as the diversity of the period's non-literary prose.¹⁶ Likewise, Sarah Williams, in her analysis of fifteenth and

¹⁴ Moore, p.xxi.

¹⁵ Noble, *World of the Stonors*, 1-14, especially pages, 3-4, quote from p.3.

¹⁶ Truelove, 'The Fifteenth Century English Stonor Letters'. 3-8. The work carried out by Norman Davis on the language of the Pastons letters is extensive and set a bench mark for the further analysis of the other letter collections – his many papers and writings on the Pastons include: Norman Davis, 'The Language of the Pastons', *Middle English Literature British Academy Gollancz Lectures*, ed. J.A. Burrow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 43-70; *idem*. 'The Litera Troili and English Letters.' *The Review of English Studies*, NS Vol. 16, (1965), 233-44; *idem*. 'A Paston Hand', *The Review of English Studies*, NS, 3, (1952), 209-21; *idem*. 'Styles in English Prose of the Late Middle

sixteenth-century English vernacular letters, argues that there should be a more ‘rounded approach to letters as a source’, and that it is necessary to adopt a more complete and rigorous use of these sources in the historiography. She considers that the letters should be viewed as material artefacts and that it is necessary to deploy both a literary and linguistic approach in order to fully understand them.¹⁷ Truelove and Williams have demonstrated how close-reading techniques and socio-linguistic approaches can be employed usefully to analyse fifteenth-century letter collections. This thesis aims to develop upon these studies and to address the lacunae by widening the approach to the analysis of early fifteenth-century vernacular letters through a consideration of the texts from the perspective of the politics of their writing. The thesis will show how the Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters, by adopting this approach, can shed new light into the cultural and social historiography of the fifteenth century. It will also illustrate how the adoption of a critical close-reading methodology can, and should, be developed to reconsider all the main gentry letter collections afresh.

Letters as contemporary fifteenth-century evidence

Both the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters arise out of legal challenges and as such they provide the opportunity to explore the direct and immediate language of conflict. They also provide the opportunity to examine the considerations that late-medieval gentry writers gave to the preservation and

and Early Modern Period’, *Langue et Littérature* Vol. 21 Les Congrès et Colloques de l’Université de Liège 1961 165-84; *idem*. ‘Margaret Paston’s uses of ‘Do’’ *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 73 (1972), 55-62; *idem*. ‘Language in Letters from Sir John Fastolf’s Household’, *Medieval Studies for J.A. Bennett*, ed. P.L. Heyworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 329-46; *idem*. ‘Style and Stereotype in Early English Letters’, *Leeds Studies in English* NS, 1 (1967), 7-17.

¹⁷ Williams, ‘English Vernacular Letters c.1400-1600’, 313-14.

protection of important written evidence. The Armburgh Roll, with most of the letters dating from between 1420 and 1450, focuses on the disputed Brokholes inheritance in Warwickshire, Hertfordshire and Essex, and the affairs of the claimants Joan Armburgh and her husband Robert. The copy letters and papers, the majority of which are attributed to Robert Armburgh, provide detailed insights into the processes of private litigation and familial conflict. The Shillingford letters and papers detail a public dispute between the City of Exeter and the church authorities. These documents appear to be largely written by John Shillingford and reveal evidence of how those in positions of civic authority, who were equally members of the political elite and the gentry social group, negotiated and communicated during a period of governmental instability. Both the sources testify to the importance that the gentry attributed to written documentation.

Contemporary confirmation as to the value placed on written evidence comes in a letter written by Margaret Paston to her son, John Paston II, in October 1466. In this letter she cautioned John to take care of his ‘wrytyngys’ and to ensure that they did not fall into the hands of those that might thereafter cause him harm, emphasising how his father was so protective of his written documents:

Youre fadere, wham God assole, in hys trobyll seson set more by hys wrytyngys and evydens than he dede by any of his moveabell godys.¹⁸

Margaret, who was unlikely to have been able to read or write herself, was expounding values that were still developing and upon which the middle strata of

¹⁸ Davis, I, p.333.

late medieval society was becoming culturally dependant.¹⁹ Recent studies determining the cultural significance of the written word in the middle to late Middle Ages have begun to explore these values and it is upon the back of these approaches that this study moves forward.²⁰ In her study of literate practice Rebecca Krug writes:

If we want to know why the written word was central to late medieval culture, it may be less important to concern ourselves with a handful of “great” texts than it is to study medieval people’s daily involvement with writing.²¹

The gentry’s vernacular letters and personal written communications are the most fundamental examples of this daily engagement. Therefore, the analysis of these letters is an essential requirement in fulfilling Krug’s ideas in terms of cultural understanding. The customary use and development of letter writing in English, and the processes behind the writing, present us with the most direct and active forms of social practice. Unravelling ‘medieval people’s daily involvement with writing’ is

¹⁹ Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women’s Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press 2002). Krug in her study of Margaret Paston explores ‘the alacrity with which some women recognized the practical value of writing, despite receiving no instruction in literate modes’, 18-19.

²⁰ M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record England 1066-1307* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993); Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion England in 1381* (Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1994); Richard Firth Green, *Literature and Law in Ricardian England – A Crisis of Truth* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Krug, *Reading Families*; Joel T. Rosenthal, *Telling Tales; The Idea of the Vernacular – An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).

²¹ Krug, *Reading Families*, 16.

complex as studies on late-medieval literacy have revealed.²² The understanding of literacy, of literate engagement, as everyday practice, and of writing and their significance to fifteenth-century individuals comprises many strands of enquiry, of which, as this thesis sets out to confirm, the politics of letter-writing, is a vital one. Alison Truelove, in looking at the literacy practice of the gentry considers how their literate abilities enabled the correspondents to ‘affirm and reinforce their status’ and how letters were an essential means of social interaction which, ultimately, helped to form group identity.²³

Peter Coss in his consideration of gentry culture has emphasised the need to see the cultural history of the gentry as seated within the consideration of social practice:

What I am advocating is the study of gentry culture in its totality: a refocusing that will allow us to move beyond the mere juxtaposition of aspects of gentry culture. In my view a cultural history if it is to be viable has to be embedded in social practice.²⁴

²² Alison Truelove, ‘Literacy’, in *Gentry Culture*, ed. Radulescu and Truelove, 84-99. As Truelove identifies although late-medieval literacy has received wide attention, and there is a considerable corpus of surviving evidence, there is still no definitive study, 84. See also Gillian M. Draper, ‘Literacy and its transmission in the Romney Marsh area c.1150-1550’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Kent, 2003): Draper’s thesis on a local study of literacy in a specific area, the Romney Marshes, confirms that this is a subject which needs further research in many varied fields and methodologies.

²³ *Gentry Culture*, ed. Radulescu and Truelove, 7.

²⁴ Peter Coss, ‘Hilton, Lordship and the Culture of the Gentry’, *P&P*, Supplement 2, (2007), 34-52, (p.50).

As a part of this consideration of social practice Coss highlights how it is necessary to expand our investigations into gentry relationships beyond the historiographically conventional relationships – the vertical relationships with the higher nobility and the horizontal relationships within the gentry society itself. He suggests that it is necessary to consider the broader associations, for example relationships between professionals, the lawyers or administrators, as well as the interactions between the rural and urban elites. His view is that the study of a full range of social contacts is required to strengthen the consideration of gentry culture. He argues that these should be inclusive of the relationships which came about as the result of estate management and the legal protection of those estates.²⁵

In this respect the study of gentry conflict and land disputes and the associations that these involved are integral to our appreciation of societal attitudes and to a deeper understanding of the medieval hierarchy and social structures. In the conclusion of a study on the theme of conflict in medieval Europe, Warren Brown and Piotr Gorecki conclude that: ‘No matter which way we turn, studying conflict in the Middle Ages leads us to the ways that medieval people understood their world’. They postulate that the medieval ‘mental orders’ were different from the modern ones in certain respects but especially in that ‘medieval people saw the world around them as charged with meaning’.²⁶ The language of contemporary personal texts provides the means to discover and recover those inherent meanings. This reinforces the value of an analysis of the direct vocabulary as found in the letters; it is the closest means that we have to get to the unmediated and personal voice of late-

²⁵ Ibid. 50.

²⁶ *Conflict in Medieval Europe – Changing Perspectives on Society and Culture*, ed. Warren C. Brown, and Piotr Gorecki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 276.

medieval individuals. Brown and Gorecki also ascertain that how we evaluate the sources is central to the analysis:

Written records and narratives of conflict were themselves tools in waging conflicts; it is crucial to understand what role the written document itself played in the dispute if we want to understand how to interpret it.²⁷

An understanding, therefore, not just of the content but also the role that the personal letters and papers of the fifteenth-century gentry writer played is central to our appreciation of fifteenth-century conflict over land and the associated legal disputes. This appreciation of the language of conflict in documents produced for everyday communications can in turn only add to our greater knowledge of late-medieval gentry literate culture and most significantly (as this thesis argues) our understanding of their letters in terms of gentry social practice.

This thesis recognises the challenges in determining late-medieval gentry individual or communal identity from the rare sources available to us. However, by adopting a positive approach to the analysis of the extant gentry writing, as this enquiry into just two of these exceptional sources establishes, we can get closer to achieving a broader understanding. A substantial aspect of this thesis is to emphasise that when considering the question of identity, especially from the personal letters, we need to be responsive to the background emotions that the letters might reveal. We need to be perceptive not just to the individuality of the writers but also to the emotion or feeling that frames their writing. Of course, this is not something that sits

²⁷ Ibid. 281.

comfortably with a directly analytical or objective approach to historical research. However, it is one that a more literary style in the reading of the texts can initiate. In this respect the work of David Gary Shaw is influential. In his studies he opens up the ways that we can readdress our approach.²⁸ He determines that part of the problem in recovering medieval ways of thought, which can lead to understanding of the ‘social self’, rests in a failure to interpret the sources in an imaginative way. He proposes that by adopting the practices used in literary or philosophical theories we can get closer to individual identity.²⁹

This thesis argues that by exploring the letters as texts in a creative way through an examination as to how, and from where, the writers drew their ideas can be revealing. Through this approach we can see not only aspects of the method of composition and the associated thought processes that appear to lie behind the writing, but as significantly, I believe that we can begin to glimpse aspects of the self-identity or personality of the writer. This methodology, therefore, opens up challenging channels from which to begin to discover how the individual members of the gentry may have shaped their self identity through their literate approach.

Carpenter’s observation at the beginning of her edition of the Armburgh Roll is pertinent when she comments on the importance of the addition of the Armburgh texts to the corpus of fifteenth-century English prose:

²⁸ David Gary Shaw, *Necessary Conjunctions: The Social Self in Medieval England* (New York/Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); *idem*. ‘Social selves in medieval England: the worshipful Ferroure and Kempe’ in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 3-21.

²⁹ Shaw, *Necessary Conjunctions*, 9-12.

they serve as a reminder, which historians would do well to take to heart, that, even if these people lived centuries ago, and if many of their concerns were alien to ours they were real people, possessed of as powerful emotions as anything we are likely to find today.³⁰

Thesis structure

In Part I of the thesis I consider the politics of the writing by setting out the nature of the disputes, examining the two sources and placing these enquiries against a contextual background of the period. Chapter one outlines the two disputes, the Brokholes inheritance dispute and the Exeter jurisdictional conflict; it is not the purpose of this chapter to incorporate a full description of either of the conflicts as I feel that these have been dealt with adequately in other studies. The aim of the chapter is to establish a foundation from which the analysis of the individual letters can be undertaken. In chapter two on the sources I examine both the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters and set out my reasons for the choice of these two collections. I also consider the two editions, the Carpenter edition on the Armburgh papers and Moore's edition on the Shillingford letters, as well as regarding the material aspects of the extant documentation. In this chapter I specifically provide, and outline, my interpretation of the Armburgh Roll and examine the documents that do not appear to be related to the dispute. I also set out my methodology, a background theoretical discussion and a comparison of the two sources.

In Part II I take a thematic approach to the analysis and through a close-reading and case-study of the letters focus on certain of the main subjects that I

³⁰ AP 2.

believe direct our enquiry into late-medieval society and culture, which include worship, social hierarchy and status, service and reciprocation, trust and friendship. Chapter three is a detailed close-reading of the first document in the Armburgh Roll, a document which I believe is fundamental to our understanding of the Roll in its entirety and to our appreciation of the Armburghs themselves. This chapter, through its interpretation of this document, considers the abuse of power and authority, themes which dominate much of the rest of the copy documents. In chapter four I explore the concept of worship by an examination of the vocabulary that is used by the Armburghs, specifically where this language reflects their concerns over the loss of their worship. Chapter five looks at the questions surrounding identity and status. There are two sections to this chapter, one which looks at private and personal identity and the second, which focuses on John Shillingford's letters and looks at the questions of individual identity within the wider public and civic sphere. Chapter six examines the language that is used in terms of relationships, in particular the relationships of service and friendship through a consideration of the personal voice of Robert Armburgh. Finally, chapter seven specifically looks at the voice of Joan Armburgh and considers the ideologies of trust, morality and retribution, dominant features of her writing as well as of the Armburgh Roll as a whole.

PART I – THE POLITICS OF LETTER WRITING

CHAPTER ONE – THE DISPUTES

This chapter on the Brokholes inheritance dispute and the Exeter jurisdictional dispute provides an outline of the conflicts as a framework for the analysis of the letters and papers that follows. In both cases I include a short contextual historiographical background to the period of the disputes, the early to middle years of the fifteenth century, and in the case of the Exeter dispute give biographical details for John Shillingford.

(i) **The Brokholes Inheritance Dispute**

The disputed Brokholes inheritance centred on land in Warwickshire, Hertfordshire and Essex and the affairs of the claimants Joan Armburgh and her husband Robert.¹ The heart of the dispute lay in Joan's contention that she alone was the main beneficiary to the Brokholes inheritance following the death of her mother, Ellen Brokhole and the deaths of Joan's sister, Margery Sumpter, and Margery's young son, John Sumpter, whom Joan contended left no surviving siblings. Ellen (the widow of Geoffrey Brokhole) died in 1419 and left the Brokhole inheritance to Joan (who was still then Aspall) and to Margery's young son John Sumpter (Margery had predeceased her mother). In December 1419 John Sumpter junior was still under-age and the custody of his part of the inheritance was awarded to the

¹ Carpenter's introduction provides a comprehensive examination of the Brokhole inheritance dispute. However, as can be seen from the evaluation of the chronology and the events of the conflict unravelling it is far from straightforward: *AP* 4-54. The land is identified as coming from three different inheritances, Roos, Brokhole and Mancetter: *AP* 4-5.

Duchy of Lancaster official, John Leventhorpe. In January 1420 it was decided by arbitration that John Sumpter senior (hereafter Sumpter) should deliver part of the manors within the inheritance to Joan. This agreement was not performed. Joan was widowed by early July 1420 (she had married Robert Armburgh by the Michaelmas term 1420). John Sumpter junior died on 4 July that year.²

The death of John Sumpter junior was a vital factor; it acted as a catalyst to the beginnings of the dispute as the chancery officials dealing with the inheritance were not aware of his death. Yet as Carpenter states it is unlikely that this fact was deliberately hidden, rather that the ‘wheels of central officialdom ground too slowly to take cognisance of this crucial event’.³ Sumpter’s hopes then of acquiring his late wife’s and then late son’s half of the Roos and Brokhole property were now extinguished, for, as Joan argued, there were no surviving siblings and the properties should have devolved in their entirety to her. However, two sisters, Christine and Ellen were brought forward as allegedly the daughters of Margery and Sumpter and, therefore, rightful heirs of Margery’s share of the estate. Joan argued that these two girls were in fact the illegitimate children of Sumpter and therefore could not be coheiresses alongside her. She contended that her sister’s two legitimate daughters, Christine and Ellen, had died and had been buried ‘be nyght’ by their father who subsequently ‘toke ij bastardes doughters of his owne and put hem oute to his frendys in to the contre and made the contre beleve that thei were the same that he had by his wyfe’ (*AP* 193).⁴ This alleged deception was the dominant aspect of the

² *AP* 5-7.

³ *AP* 6, n.25.

⁴ Statement of Joan’s claim to other half of Brokholes inheritance c.1428-1432, Carpenter’s dating of this statement is based on the death of John Sumpter junior and death of John Sumpter senior in 1432

Armburghs' defence in the early years of the dispute and it was the impetus for most of the relentless challenges that were made in the pursuit of the various landholdings.

The Essex inquisition *post mortem* on John Sumpter junior did not take place until October 1426 and at this the two alleged daughters, Christine and Ellen, were brought forward and were declared to be the heirs.⁵ Christine was declared to be fifteen and Ellen fourteen years old at this time. By May 1427, when Joan was apparently in possession of her part of the inheritance, it was ordered that the Sumpter part of the estate in Essex be divided and Christine, who by then was of age, be given her share. By November Ellen too had proved her age. As Carpenter concludes the Essex proofs of age date to March 1427 and it is not unreasonable to assume that around this same time proofs of age in the other landholdings in Warwickshire and Hertfordshire were also obtained.⁶ The inquisition established the legitimacy of Christine and Ellen as heirs to the estate and the Armburghs determined that the various and complex issues of deceit and injustice which beset them began with what they considered to be this initial fraudulent act. The short extract from the inquisition *post mortem* that is included in the Roll is preceded by a petition Joan made to chancery dated between 1437 and 1439.⁷ It is an interesting juxtaposition of the evidence as the petition sets out Joan's demands for a proper enquiry into the legitimacy of Ellen. The placement of these two documents is indicative of the careful consideration as to how, it would seem, the evidence was

and the period of time that lapsed before the two alleged daughters were brought forward for identification: *AP* 193, n.491

⁵ TNA C139/21/6, IPM 5 October 1426 before William Flete (escheator of Hertford & Essex from January to December 1426): *AP* 88-89, n.136.

⁶ *AP* 6.

⁷ *AP* 87-88.

being compiled in the Roll. The effect is to add weight to the Armburghs' argument that they were compromised by the dishonesty of the officials who were on the Sumpters' side. In the petition Joan stated that her livelihood 'was wrongfully disherit throw strengthe of lordeschip' (*AP* 88). The extract from the IPM, immediately following this petition, would appear to be placed to accentuate that critical message.

The petition arose out of the remarriage of Ellen to Ralph Holt. Ellen and her second husband were petitioning for the return of land held by her late husband, Ralph Bellers, and other feoffees. Joan took the opportunity to revisit the previous claims to the land and her petition to chancery stated the primary claim that Ellen was not the legitimate heir.⁸ Joan called for a basic examination of the details surrounding Ellen to determine her age, where she was born and christened, who were her godparents, how many brothers and sisters she had on her mother's side and what were their names, as well as the parish where they were born and christened. She requested that the officials 'foche safe to examyne her forthermore of her auncetors', that is her 'grauntsyre and her grauntmoder of her moderside' with the enquiry as to their names, where they were born, died and buried, and how many siblings her mother had. Joan was emphatic: if 'sche be of that stokke, sche is of full age to have knowlech of all this' (*AP* 88). Joan cautioned the chancery officials to make note of Ellen's age claiming that her proof of age had been made in error as his 'gracious lordeschip', the chancellor, by his 'wyse discrecion' would by taking 'hede' of her person be able to establish. Joan requested that until Ellen had been examined 'in your gracious presens in maner and forme as a forn rehersyd' the

⁸ *AP* 29.

matter that Ellen and Ralph Holt were pursuing should be halted (*AP* 88). Ellen's petition was withdrawn on 1 November 1439, possibly because of the ongoing influence that the Bellers' contingent still had with chancery officials, and not as a result of pressure from the Armburghs. Ironically, the Armburghs' opponents were then themselves in contention.

Many of the Roll's documents record events that were peripheral to the main issue of the inheritance, but they establish events that nonetheless had an impact on the Armburghs' ability to acquire the lands. For example, their tenant farmers in Mancetter were continuously drawn into the dispute by actions taken against them by the Armburghs' protagonists, which served as legal irritants. Other aspects which are highlighted during the early years of the conflict, although not directly related to the specific inheritance, underline how the whole conflict impacted upon Joan's family. Several documents relate to the question of the financial dealings of Joan's second husband, Thomas Aspell, and how this affected the responsibilities taken on by Robert Armburgh following his marriage to Joan.

Money was a key issue in all the tangential disagreements from Robert's perspective. A series of documents illustrate how, by marrying Joan, Robert had taken on the financial obligations and debts of Thomas Aspell and indeed Robert was eventually imprisoned for those debts (presumably in the Fleet although the prison is not specified). However, the proceedings for his release came before the London sheriffs and in February 1423 they ordered that Armburgh should be released.⁹ Robert appeared to have had no property except that brought to him by his

⁹ *AP* 86.

marriage to Joan at Michaelmas 1420.¹⁰ This fact could be regarded as a significant spur in his pursuit of the Brokhole claim. Further familial aspects are briefly detailed and interwoven into the Armburgh Roll, such as the conflict over the inheritance due to Joan's two children from her first marriage. A letter written in c.1427-28 by Robert Kedington, Joan's son by her first marriage to Robert Kedington (senior) by whom she had two children Robert and Margaret, details the further dispute over money fraudulently kept by a feoffee and executor to Kedington's estate.¹¹

Joan died in November 1443 and after her death the dispute entered a new phase. Joan's death had been preceded by a settlement of her property.¹² At this point Robert argued that certain portions of the property should be sold to provide for Joan's soul and that he should have this land for a price below the market value.¹³ Carpenter determines that at this juncture and for the next decade Robert had 'five principal areas of concern' which were 'mostly interlinked'.¹⁴ The letters from this period date mainly to the years 1448-51 and detail many of these issues. Robert continued to have serious financial problems; issues over the grant of the advowson of Mancetter and the associated financial issues that this brought into the equation were set alongside the final destination of Joan's estate and Robert's need to implement Joan's will.¹⁵ An additional claim to the inheritance by another branch of the family, the Chancys, complicated the matter even further. Robert petitioned parliament in order to get the Chancys to prove their evidence for their rights to the

¹⁰ *AP* 6, n.33.

¹¹ *AP* 90-91.

¹² *AP* 30.

¹³ *AP* 31.

¹⁴ *AP* 33.

¹⁵ *AP* 35.

inheritance.¹⁶ A further document, almost at the end of the Roll, is an indentured agreement whereby Robert had agreed to prove his right to the lands in Hertfordshire in preparation for the sale of the lands to John Chancy senior. This, as Carpenter states, indicates that Robert ‘did not get the deal [that] he would have wanted.’¹⁷

By July 1453 Robert Armburgh was dead and a final settlement was made concerning the inheritance. Ironically, Ellen Holt nee Sumpter (and in her first marriage, Bellers) was regarded as representative of Joan’s heirs. The Holts, as the representatives of the Brokholes/ Roos line, kept the lands in Warwickshire and Hertfordshire and some of the Essex lands. As Carpenter comments it was ‘sobering to reflect that, without all this expenditure of time, money and effort’ had the Armburghs accepted the rights of the Sumpters at the outset ‘the ways of nature would have decreed that the inheritance ended up exactly where it did.’¹⁸

(ii) The Economic, Legal and Social Context of Gentry Land Disputes

The two disputes which are considered here arose out of conflict over land. The importance of land in the late-medieval period is a commonplace and the letters of the fifteenth-century gentry have been used as means to illustrate this aspect of the period’s historical narrative.¹⁹ This section of the chapter sets out a brief contextual

¹⁶ AP 191-92.

¹⁷ AP 38.

¹⁸ AP 39.

¹⁹ The Paston letters, because of the number of extant documents which cover an extended period and are primarily to do with the Pastons’ landholdings in Norfolk, have been used widely in this aspect of late-medieval historiography. The Paston documents provide good evidence for land and inheritance

economic, legal and social background to fifteenth-century land-based conflicts. A prerequisite of social structure and the social, political and economic hierarchy, landownership was a central feature of societal function.

Land disputes and law

Land, with its inherent economic and social significance, was the most valued of late-medieval assets and the majority of disputes arose from the endeavour to acquire land, in the defence of title or the protection of associated rights. The complexities of inheritance law and issues over title gave rise to the high incidence of gentry familial property disputes. To what extent these land disputes were endemic within the land-controlling strata remains a continuing area of enquiry.²⁰ There was an increased utilisation of enfeoffment-to-use by which landowners could bypass the common law and feudal restrictions of devolving land. However, this means of increased flexibility in the disposition of land gave rise to the difficulties of securing a sound title and a frequent breakdown of trust leading ultimately to a legal

disputes; for a full appraisal of the conflicts experienced by the Pastons, see Richmond's three volume study of the family: *The Paston family in the fifteenth century – The first phase; Fastolf's Will and Endings*. See in particular *Fastolf's Will*.

²⁰ Gerald Harriss, *Shaping the Nation England 1360-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 197; J.G. Bellamy, *Bastard Feudalism and the Law* (London: Routledge, 1989). Bellamy examines the importance of land law and bastard feudalism; through the examination of the causes of litigation he highlights how inheritance disputes and tenurial disagreements were at the centre of many law cases: Bellamy, *Bastard Feudalism*, 57-78. S.J. Payling, 'Murder, Motive and Punishment in Fifteenth Century England: Two Gentry Case-Studies' *EHR*, 113 (1998), 1-17; P.W. Fleming, 'The Lovelace Dispute: Concepts of Property and Inheritance in Fifteenth Century Kent', *Southern History*, 12 (1990), 1-18; Robin Jeffs, 'The Poynings-Percy Dispute: an example of the interplay of open strife and legal action in the fifteenth century', *BIHR*, 34 (1961), 148-64. The three papers by Payling, Fleming and Jeffs highlight some of the more extreme examples of gentry conflict.

conflict.²¹ The retention of personal papers and letters as evidence in legal disputes suggests that litigation over land was a major preoccupation of the gentry.²² A further persuasive argument as to the prevalence of land-related disputes comes from the involvement of the equitable jurisdiction of the court of chancery throughout the first half of the fifteenth century in land disputes. Margaret Avery argues that chancery developed as a result of pressure from the landowning strata and that it ostensibly acted as a tribunal for landowners who wanted to deal with their land as they saw fit and who did not wish to be restricted by common law decisions.²³ The

²¹ Simon Walker, 'Order and Law' in *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91-112. Walker in this analysis looks at various aspects of legal processes, court procedures and issues of justice, on land disputes (see especially, p.95, p.102). J.L. Barton 'The Medieval Use', *Law Quarterly Review*, 81 (1965), 562-77; Peggy Jefferies, 'The Medieval Use as Family Law and Custom: the Berkshire gentry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), 45-69. The common term 'enfeoffment to use' or 'cestui-que-use' (often simplified to 'the use') was the means by which property could be bequeathed without restrictions.

²² Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*: Harriss discusses the nature of endemic disputes in relation to political society and where control rested, 197-206, 202. The Stonor letters were retained in chancery, the Cely papers used as an exhibit in an action to recover part of their business and the Plumpton letters preserved as part of a dispute over family property. Carpenter discusses the survival of the Stonor letters and alludes to the Cely and Plumpton correspondences, commenting that their survival was a lottery and that some of the letter collections had, due to the nineteenth-century archival practices, been broken up: *Kingsford's Stonor Letters*, ed. Carpenter, 8-10. For a brief summary of retention of letters as evidence see Lyell, *A Mediaeval Post-Bag*, 21-22 and Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise*, 30-34.

²³ Margaret E. Avery, 'The History of the Equitable Jurisdiction of Chancery before 1460', *BIHR*, 42 (1969), 129-144, (p.143). For a wider consideration of the historiography and debates surrounding the growth of chancery see P. Tucker, 'The Early History of the Court of Chancery: A Comparative Study', *EHR*, 115 (2000), 791-811 (p.792). See also Nicholas Pronay, 'The Chancellor, the Chancery and the Council at the End of the Fifteenth Century', in *British Government and Administration: Studies presented to S.B. Chrimes*, ed. H. Hearder and H. R. Loyn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974). Pronay disputes the high number of petitions and growth suggested by Avery, he stresses the nature of the petitions and that many up until 1440 were oral or contained in brief notes

use of chancery as a means of resolving commercial or mercantile cases as opposed to private land disputes also increased during this period.²⁴

The development of the court of chancery, a court of equity and conscience, alongside the associated increase in the employment of English within the legal processes, have been important areas of investigation in the understanding of socio-political structure of the early to middle years of the fifteenth century. The literature on chancery is extensive with many differing avenues explored, not least in the appreciation of how the ideology of the court was being reflected by its actions and its language.²⁵ Alongside the historiography of chancery there has been substantive enquiry into understanding the development of common law and the use and influence of arbitration as a means of resolving conflict.²⁶

not formal petitions as later recorded, Pronay, 'The Chancellor', in *British Government* ed. Hearder & Loyn, 85-103 (see especially, pp.88-89, n.2).

²⁴ Tucker, 'The Early History of the Court of Chancery', 792-93.

²⁵ Dennis R. Klinck, *Conscience, Equity and the Court of Chancery in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 13-40; Avery, 'History of Equitable justice', 143; M. Beilby 'The Profits of Expertise: The Rise of the Civil Lawyers and Chancery Equity' in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England* ed. Michael Hicks (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1990), 78-83; Timothy S. Haskett, 'The Medieval English Court of Chancery', *Law and History Review*, 14 (1996), 245-313; Cordelia Beattie, 'Single Women, Work and Family: the Chancery Dispute of Jane Wynde and Margaret Clerk', in *Voices from the Bench: The Narratives of Lesser Folk in Medieval Trials* ed. Michael Goodich (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 177-202. Beattie's study provides a detailed examination of a case in chancery through the use of the petitions and it offers a methodology as to how chancery records can be used to build on social understanding: Beattie, 'Single Women' in *Voices from the Bench* ed. Goodich.

²⁶ Bryce Lyon, *A Constitutional and Legal History of Medieval England*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960): For a discussion on the common law, its restrictions and the consequent development of chancery see especially pages 613-25. J.H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 4th edn., (London: Butterworths, 2002): Baker's work provides a foundation for the study of medieval law and the law courts. Margaret Hastings, *The Court of Common Pleas in Fifteenth Century England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1947; repr. Connecticut: Archon Books, 1971): Hastings work

The impact of the law on everyday life, and the extent to which legal practices or knowledge of legal procedures was an inherent part of contemporary decisions, has been well recognised.²⁷ English society was intensely law-minded with ‘almost instinctive’ litigation and the engagement with legal processes commonplace.²⁸ Anthony Musson states: ‘The law in some form or other touched the

is a seminal study that still has resonance in the current study of the workings of the court and the questions of justice and the attitudes of those who took their cases to law. A. Harding, *The Law Courts of Medieval England*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973); Ian Rowney, ‘Arbitration in Gentry Disputes of the Later Middle Ages’ *History*, 67 (1982), 367-74; Edward Powell, ‘Arbitration and the Law in England in the Late Middle Ages’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser., 33 (1983), 47-67; *idem*. ‘Settlement of Disputes by Arbitration in Fifteenth Century England’, *Law and History Review*, 2 (1984), 21-43; *idem*. *Kingship, Law and Society: Criminal Justice in the Reign of Henry V*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): see in particular ‘Law, Politics and Dispute Settlement in Local Society’, 86-114; Carole Rawcliffe, ‘The Great Lord as Peacekeeper: Arbitration by English Noblemen and their councils in the Later Middle Ages’, in *Law and Social Change in British History* ed. J.A. Guy and H.G. Beale (London, Royal Historical Society 1984), 34-53; David Tilsley, ‘Arbitration in Gentry Disputes: The Case of the Bucklow Hundred in Cheshire, 1400-1465’, in *Courts, counties and the capital in the Middle Ages* ed. Diana E.S. Dunn (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), 53-70. Tilsley’s study stresses the importance of arbitration in gentry disputes and how arbitration may have even been encouraged through the litigation process as a means of resolution, for example through the promotion of ‘lovedays’: Tilsley, ‘Arbitration’, in *Courts, counties* ed. Dunn, 59-60, 62. Michael D. Myers, ‘The Failure of Conflict Resolution and the Limits of Arbitration in King’s Lynn, 1405-1416’, in *Traditions and Transformations in Late Medieval England*, ed. Douglas Biggs, Sharon D. Michalove and A. Compton Reeves (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 81-108.

²⁷ The literature on the topic of late-medieval law is extensive and a review is beyond the remit of this thesis. However, an influential work, which looks specifically at the law and the attitudes of landowners, is that of Christine Carpenter, ‘Law, Justice and Landowners in Late Medieval England’, *Law and History Review*, 1 (1983), 205-37. In this paper Carpenter identifies many of the complexities surrounding the relationship of landowners with law and justice. She poses the questions as to whether landowners desired greater governmental intervention as well as considering whether contemporary attitudes to law and justice were universal. She concludes that: ‘the lawlessness of later medieval England will remain an impenetrable problem unless we make the effort to understand what ‘law’ and ‘justice’ meant to the landowners of the fourteenth and fifteenth century’, 237.

²⁸ E.W. Ives, *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 7, 10.

lives of the entire population of medieval England'. He stresses that it is necessary to see the law as integral to the way in which society functioned and to individual relationships and not as an 'external mechanism' which regulated day to day existence.²⁹

Service and hierarchy: the service relationships and landlord/ tenant relationships

Rosemary Horrox states: 'Service has some claim to be considered the dominant ethic of the middle ages.' Service, based on deeply rooted attitudes with hierarchy and order seen as a 'reflection of the divine order which created and sustained the universe', was central as to how society functioned.³⁰ The master and servant relationship, the 'service relationship' as Horrox describes it, was fundamental and permeated all levels of society.³¹ Honour and status were integral to the service relationship; the performing of a service could enhance the standing and influence of the server as well as benefit the recipient of the service. Service and reciprocation and issues of patronage are, therefore, fundamentals in the historiography of the late-medieval period and as such have received much consideration.

²⁹ Anthony Musson, *Medieval Law in Context: The growth of legal consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 2. Although Musson in *Medieval Law in Context*, looked at an earlier period the assessments he made remain pertinent to the evaluation of law in the century following the Peasants' Revolt.

³⁰ *Fifteenth Century Attitudes: Perceptions of society in late medieval England*, ed. Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 61.

³¹ *Ibid.* 63.

Anthony Pollard identifies the question of the hierarchal relationships stating that: ‘Everyone was defined in relationship to others, either by lordship over their inferiors, or by service to their superiors. Social values were focused on the proper performance of either lordship or service.’³² As significant as these relationships were we do, however, have few, and rare, opportunities to engage directly with the ideals that underpinned them especially that is through the medium of the personal voices of those who were intimately involved in the processes and procedures and the realities of service. In the Armburgh Roll we have a unique opportunity to examine the direct and personal records of what service actually meant in daily life. The Armburgh Roll provides evidence for many different relationships, the interplay between the Armburghs, their family, lords, servants, friends and opponents, giving an exceptional opportunity to examine the ideal of the service relationship. This is nowhere more evident than in the relationship that the Armburghs had with their tenants.

The relationship of landlord and tenant was one of the most fundamental of the medieval affiliations and representative of basic service and reciprocal bonds. A major consideration in our understanding of the social and cultural attitudes of the landholding strata is therefore in interpreting the relationship of the late-medieval gentry with their tenants. Landownership was fundamental to the period’s social, economic and political structure, and being in possession of manorial land was the measure of worship (in itself an essential and integral part of social standing). How these landlord and tenant relationships worked in the day-by-day running of the land

³² A.J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England, 1399-1509* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., & Longman, 2000), 247. For a further discussion on service and relationships see Kathleen E. Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 2-9.

and manors, in the negotiation of tenancies, and within the extended social circle of both the landlord and tenant, is an important area of consideration, but one that the scarcity of records makes difficult to appraise.

The economic context

The analysis of tenurial relationships, both in general, and specifically of the Armburghs' landlord and tenant relationship must be set within the context of an appreciation of the financial concerns of the early to middle years of the fifteenth century. The insecure economic climate of these decades has been much explored and debated. To what extent a severe economic depression was experienced has been a controversial historiographical issue.³³ The fact that 'the existence of the mid-century slump is widely acknowledged' still presents debate for as John Hatcher

³³ The historiographical questions are explored by John Hatcher with the suggestion that by studying the period in shorter time spans a clearer picture could emerge, as opposed to seeing the long fifteenth century as an economic continuum: John Hatcher, 'The great slump of the mid-fifteenth century', in *Progress and problems in medieval England* ed. R. Britnell & J. Hatcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 237-40. Pamela Nightingale, 'England and the European Depression of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', *The Journal of European Economic History* 26 (1997), 631-51: this paper explores to what extent the mid-fifteenth century economic recession had roots in 'local political causes' and 'local factors such as [...] disease [and] England's political instability', the ideas behind the political instability, conflict and the fact that 'the kingdom [was seen to be] suffering from corruption and faction at all levels of society' has an influence on the approach taken in this chapter to tenant/landlord relationships, quotes from Nightingale, 'England and the European Depression', 631. *Agriculture and Rural Society after the Black Death*, ed., Ben Dodds and Richard Britnell (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008): this study determines that there is a 'need to approach the later Middle Ages with a sharper eye to evidence of variations of experience from place to place and from time to time' in order to advance the understanding of the complexities of the period's economy and the comprehension of 'widespread historical changes', xiii, xiv. For a consideration of the linked economic and social problems which beset landlords and the peasant strata within rural society and an overview of the prevailing contemporary attitudes that the difficult economic conditions brought to agricultural society, see Mark Bailey, 'Rural Society', in *Fifteenth Century*, ed. Horrox, 150-68.

determines ‘the severity and pervasiveness of its impact is still contentious’.³⁴ A positive element does appear to be the increased advantage that tenants and farmers had when negotiating with their landlords. The demand for suitable tenants to occupy manors and farms outstripped the number of tenants available and there was a fall in the area of land that was rented out and occupied.³⁵ Studies looking at these economic considerations, and the relationships between the landlord and his tenants, determine that, due to this lack of suitable tenants, landlords were often conciliatory in their approaches to potential tenants and existing ones.³⁶ Christopher Dyer identifies that reductions in rents could be secured sometimes by dint of ‘hard bargaining’ or ultimately threats by the sitting tenants to leave the tenancy.³⁷ Despite the fact that landlords could repossess the land if rent was not paid, in practice farmers were often left to occupy the land despite being seriously in arrears.³⁸ By the middle decades of the century evidence of the weakness of the land market was apparent in the remissions of entry fines by the landlords alongside their reluctance to enforce evictions.³⁹

³⁴ Hatcher, ‘The great slump’, 246. See also J.L. Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy 1150-1500* (London: J.M.Dent, 1980).

³⁵ Hatcher, ‘The great slump’, 247.

³⁶ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 153-95: Carpenter assesses gentry estates by examining what the gentry expected to ‘get out’ of their estates and how they expected to do it (p.153). C. Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming 1349-c.1520* (Oxford: Dugdale Society, 1981). For an overview of the countryside see Christopher Dyer, ‘The countryside, c.1350-c.1520’, in *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520*, ed. Christopher Dyer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 330-62.

³⁷ Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, 9.

³⁸ Hatcher, ‘The great slump’, 260.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 261.

The paucity of extant records, in particular estate records especially for the gentry strata, make it difficult to construct a meaningful economic survey of the gentry class and, therefore, inevitably the associated relationships with their tenants.⁴⁰ The Paston correspondence has, as in so many areas of the fifteenth-century historiography, been held up as the means by which further substance can be added to the debate.⁴¹ From their letters dealing with the tenants' financial difficulties, the Pastons were conciliatory, taking the advice not to press for payment and to avoid the severe enforcement of penalty clauses in their leases.⁴² Colin Richmond talks of tenants being pampered and 'how uniquely disadvantaged mid-fifteenth-century landowners were'.⁴³ The Paston letters reveal that the advice was to accommodate their tenants, even lower the rents, for fear of over-charging and the possibility of destroying the tenancies.⁴⁴ Conversely the Paston letters also indicate a level of suspicion that their tenants were intentionally resisting payment of their rents, a not uncommon situation and one which was especially acute during periods of political unrest which, in the Pastons' case, by the 1470s, encouraged 'an aggressive attitude to rent-collecting'.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century c.1422-c.1485* (Cambridge, 1992), 56. Mark Bailey, *The English Manor, c.1200-c.1500*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). Bailey's consideration of 'Manorial Accounts', gives a comprehensive appraisal of accounting procedures and how manorial accounts changed determining that after the 1420s accounts were less informative and that by '1450 the era of the manorial account [was] effectively over', 97-116 (p.106).

⁴¹ Peter Coss, 'An age of deference', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox & W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31-73 (p.69); Britnell, 'The Pastons And Their Norfolk'.

⁴² Hatcher, 'The great slump', 259

⁴³ Ibid. 260 n.63; Richmond, *The Paston Family: The First Phase*, 29.

⁴⁴ Hatcher, 'The great slump', with references to the letters from Sir James Gloys the Paston's family chaplain and Richard Calle, 260.

⁴⁵ Britnell, 'Pastons and Their Norfolk', 140.

The political context

This has perforce been a brief overview of the economic, legal and social considerations of the early to middle years of the fifteenth century. However, its purpose in terms of this thesis is to provide a background to the analysis of the texts in order that we can begin to assimilate certain of the reasons that influenced the writing. A further consideration, which Carpenter highlights, is the political difficulties of these years and the problems of poor governance brought about by the effects of Henry VI's minority and subsequent failure to rule.⁴⁶ If the historiographical literature which considers the economic, social and legal aspects of the fifteenth-century is extensive the literature on the reign of Henry VI is even more so and I have not attempted to incorporate an outline of the problems of his reign into this contextual resume.⁴⁷ However, it is evident that the effects of poor governance as well as lack of authority or the abuse of authority had a significant

⁴⁶ AP 1-2.

⁴⁷ The literature that was considered on the effects of Henry VI's reign on the control and governance of society in general and especially the impact on the gentry strata includes: Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (London: Ernest Benn, 1981); *Patronage, The Crown and The Provinces In Later Medieval England* ed. Ralph A. Griffiths (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1981); John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Fifteenth-century England 1399-1509 – Studies in politics and society*, ed. S.B. Chrimes, C.D. Ross and R.A. Griffiths (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972); J.R. Lander, *Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth Century England* 3rd edn (London: Hutchinson, 1977); *idem. Government and Community – England 1450-1509* (London: Edward Arnold, 1980); *idem. The Limitations of English Monarchy in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); I.M.W., Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); *The Wars of the Roses*, ed. A.J. Pollard (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1995); Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses, Politics and the constitution in England c.1437-1509* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Helen Castor, *The King, The Crown and The Duchy of Lancaster – Public Authority and Private Power 1399-1461* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509*; David Grummitt, *A Short History of The Wars of the Roses* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

impact and these can be seen as reflected in both the disputes outlined in the thesis. Throughout my analysis of the texts, therefore, I recognise that it is crucial to keep at the forefront of the reading and interpretation of these texts an awareness of this fundamental subject.

(iii) John Shillingford's Voice within the Exeter Civic and Ecclesiastical Jurisdictional Dispute: The St. Stephen's Fee Dispute (also known as the Bishop's Fee)

John Shillingford

John Shillingford was five times mayor of Exeter between 1428 and 1448. His last two terms of office coincided with the city's dispute with Bishop Lacy and the dean and chapter over the jurisdiction of St. Stephen's Fee or, as it was also known, the Bishop's Fee. The biography set out in the *History of Parliament* gives a detailed account of the various appointments Shillingford had held since first being made a freeman in 1418.⁴⁸ From these biographical details it is evident that Shillingford's involvement not only as mayor but also as a Member of Parliament as well as in the civic government of the city of Exeter had been extensive and that he had held many positions of authority over a period of three decades. John Shillingford was a member of the family who held the manor of Shillingford just outside Exeter, many of whom had been actively involved in the city's affairs over a long period of time. He inherited his family lands in the 1430s and was resident in Exeter. He died in 1458.

⁴⁸ *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1386-1421*, J.S. Roskell, Linda Clark & Carole Rawcliffe, ed. 4 vols. (Stroud: Published for the History of Parliament Trust, 1992), iv. pp.361-2.

As the *History of Parliament* entry identifies it would seem Shillingford's 'qualities as an administrator and delegate were much appreciated'.⁴⁹ His personal background, his civic experience and knowledge of the city's affairs indicate that he was a good choice to negotiate on the city authority's behalf to reach a settlement with the cathedral. During the negotiations with Chancellor John Stafford and the two Chief Justices Sir John Fortescue and Sir Richard Newton that took place in the autumn and winter of 1447 and the spring of 1448 Shillingford spent much of his time in London from where he wrote in considerable detail to his peers back in Exeter. He was an assiduous writer and his letters form an exceptional archive. The records presented by his letters indicate that he was well acquainted with the city's case. Further more these letters reveal interesting aspects to his character, in that he had 'an able and vigorous personality' and that he was 'a man skilled and shrewd in debate, intelligent and good humoured, although not given much to modesty'.⁵⁰

Outline of the dispute

The conflict over the jurisdiction of St. Stephen's fee reached a crisis on Thursday 6 May 1445 during the Ascension Day procession to the cathedral. This procession to the divine service was attended by both the civic dignitaries and the cathedral clergy. The solemnity of the occasion was disrupted when an attempt was made by one of the city's sergeants-at-arms to arrest John Vouslegh, a servant of the

⁴⁹ Ibid. 361.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 362. On Shillingford, see *Exeter Freeman 1266-1967*, ed. Margery M. Rowe and Andrew M. Jackson (Devon & Cornwall, Record Society extra series I: Exeter: James Townsend, 1973), 42. See also, the entry in the detailed list of the witnesses in *The Chancery Case Between Nicholas Radford and Thomas Tremayne: the Exeter Depositions of 1439* ed. Hannes Kleineke (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society n.s. vol.55, 2013) p.lxxvii: in the notes to this entry Kleineke identifies an entry for Shillingford in *The Commons 1422-61* ed. Linda Clark, (publication forthcoming).

chancellor of Exeter cathedral.⁵¹ Bishop Lacy and the dean and chapter considered this to be a provocative act by the city's council. It appeared to have been a determined challenge to the cathedral's judicial authority within the ecclesiastical precincts.

There is an account of the incident recorded by Shillingford in which it is stated that the record is a 'pleyn declaracyon of the arestyng John Vouslegh'.⁵² Shillingford asserted that 'the grete hole part of the Comminalte of the Cyte of Exeter [were] wite hym every man yn the most godely wyse and best aray that they coude and of deuocyon' and that he, as mayor, went in worship of the king 'yn the most godely wyse and best aray that he cowde as his lu tenant'.⁵³ The importance of the clothing, the best array that could be worn in respect of the occasion, as Shillingford reflected both supported the dignity of the king as well as the reverence and devotion which they, the Exeter civic officers, were giving to the 'worthy processyn'.⁵⁴ It is also detailed that 'IIII macys' were carried before the mayor by his four serjeants: 'yn worship and reverence of god and oure soverayn lorde'. These maces were the principal symbols of civic power and royal authority and an affront

⁵¹ Moore, p. xiv: Moore details that the difficulties between the city and cathedral authority had a long history and that there were recorded infringements of the jurisdiction as far back as 1432-33. The incident on this occasion was the arrest prompted by the suit of one William Wynslow.

⁵² Curtis, *Disputes*, 24-25: DRO 1861, a paper fragment.

⁵³ Curtis, *Disputes*, 24.

⁵⁴ Gervase Rosser, 'Conflict and Political Community in the Medieval Town: Disputes between Clergy and Laity in Hereford', in *The Church in the Medieval Town*, ed. T.R. Slater and Gervase Rosser (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1998), 20-42. Rosser highlights the significance attached to clothing and the attire worn at these ceremonial occasions by the derogatory comments made by a canon during the Hereford laity/clergy dispute, where the canon he scornfully commented on the civic officers as: 'men in torn hose and broken shoes': Rosser, 'Conflict and Political Community' in *The Church in the Medieval Town*, ed. Slater and Rosser, 30.

against these symbols of influence was a direct and public insult against the city and by extension the royal authority that they represented.⁵⁵

Much is made of the recognition of the ‘holy and solempne feste of the assencion of our lorde’ and the ‘worshyp of the holy feste processyon’. Shillingford’s account gave a clear description of the location in which the assault took place. The procession: ‘went out of the sayde Cathedrall Churche thurgh the palys and out atte close yeate there by nethe y called the Bysshoppys yeate’; it was at this point that Vouslegh, stated to be a canon’s man of the church by commandment of the dean and chapter: ‘made affray upon the sayde Mayer and afterwards another affray upon hym, a litell with oute the sayde close yeate’.⁵⁶ This detailed description was evidently important to Shillingford in his relating of the event, for he continued that despite the fact that the bishop claimed the place where the assault allegedly took place to be one of his own tenements it was not but in the ‘kyngs high wey’. In the mayor’s answers to the bishop’s articles of complaint one of the items, in response to the ‘seconde article of their complayntes’, included a further substantiation of the arrest. This was set alongside the statement that: ‘the saide Maier Bailiffs and Comynalte seyn that they knowen no suche fe called Seynt Stephenys fe with ynne the saide Cite and surburis of the same’ and that: ‘they seyn more ouer that the Maier did areste the forsaid John Vouslegh for affray made upon

⁵⁵ Kleineke, ‘Civic Ritual’, in *Ritual and Space*, ed. Andrews: Kleineke draws on this point as well as looking at the significance of the periodic repairs that had to be undertaken to the maces, 173.

⁵⁶ Curtis, *Disputes*, 24-25.

hym self by the saide John Vousleghe wt ynne the saide Cite openly yn the kyngis high way'.⁵⁷

Locations and boundaries were vital features of the whole disagreement over the fee and are given priority by Shillingford in the writing of the articles, rejoinders and answers which supported the city's argument. It is, therefore, no surprise that in writing of the moment that the conflict erupted Shillingford incorporated and makes much of the where as well as the how.

Whiche John Vousleghe of purpos settinge a blak hatte yn his hed dressed hym self streitely by twene the walle and the seyde Mayer vysaged hym and sholdred hym almost yn to the Canelle yn despite of the seyde Maier and Comminalte and contempe of oure soveraynge lorde the kyng as the grete part of the Chanons men beth woned to do and specially suche as they calleth theyre yeomans and their gromys goynge yn procession of purpos pushinge tham by twene the procession and the seyde mayer and by twene the seyde mayer and the Sergeants berynge the kynges mace dressynge their bak partyes even yn to the mayers lappe and ever vysagyngley the whiche affrayes and mys gouernance hath ofte tymes like to have be cause of grete troble and of surrecion of the Comminalte of the City of Exetre and yet ys like to be wt oute better remedye prayynge.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Curtis, *Disputes*, 79; these were identified by Curtis but they were not incorporated in Moore's edition. She identifies four imperfect drafts which she distinguishes as A, B, C and D. These can be found in DRO 1860 and in the folder. They are formed of paper fragments and paper rolls – pencil marks on three 'B', 'C' & 'D'.

⁵⁸ Curtis, *Disputes*, 25; the detail comes from an incomplete paper fragment - DRO 1861.

The account highlighted the symbolism of the occasion, and the symbolic representation of the civic elite, is also brought very much to the fore.⁵⁹

The picture drawn of the contemptuous behaviour of Vouslegh and the canons' men comes through in the strong language. It seemed as if Vouslegh purposely positioned himself between the wall and the mayor, then with glowering and threatening behaviour, 'vysaged hym', eyed him and nearly shouldered him into the gutter. Shillingford takes every opportunity to emphasise the aggressive nature of the church's men even if the abusive action was not undertaken by the canons themselves. Under instruction their servants, the yeomen and the grooms, disrupted the procession pushing in between the sergeants carrying the maces and the mayor 'dressynge their bak partyes even yn to the mayers lappe and every vysagyngely'. The picture is one of lewd and offensive behaviour against which Shillingford sets out the dutiful nature of the burgesses' attempts to resolve the situation. He stepped in to try and arrest Vouslegh himself after the affray but Vouslegh broke the arrest and 'the mayer for worsshyp of the feste and for drede of and troblynge of the procession and the brekyng of the pees did no more to hym at that tyme'. So Shillingford, it would appear from his recollection of the events, stood back and did not pursue the arrest in order not to further disrupt the procession and, most importantly, he did it out of deference to the sanctity of the occasion.

An added dimension to the understanding of the actual moment of the incident comes from the language used in a grant made on 11 July 1446 to the bishop of Exeter and the dean and chapter of the cathedral church. This stated that:

⁵⁹ Curtis, *Disputes*, 24-25.

‘no escheator, mayor, recorder, coroner, constable, bailiff or other minister of the king enter the said church [...]to execute any office, writ or warrant therein, nor arrest or molest’ any of the clergy or their servants. Significant to the Ascension Day disruption is the passage: ‘the king having heard that his said ministers have exercised such jurisdiction unduly, disturbing divine service, which, through the consequent withdrawal of the clergy, is neglected’.⁶⁰ It is signed by the king. It would seem that despite Shillingford’s alleged endeavours that the procession and service not be further disrupted this had not been the case. The wording stressed the ‘withdrawal of the clergy’ and the fact that not only was the divine service disturbed but the service did not continue as it should have.

There is no dating of Shillingford’s account of the moment of the conflict, but from the comment regarding the answers made to the bishop’s articles, ‘as hit ys answered yn the answeres to the articles of the sayde Bysshop Dean and Chapitre’, it would seem that the account was retrospective and written some considerable time after the event. The most probable date for this account is 1447 as the answers to the articles referred to were being drawn up in the autumn and winter of that year when Shillingford was in London; the drafting of these various documents was recorded in his letters dated around that time.

The sequence of events following the Ascension Day debacle appears to have begun with the bishop applying for and gaining a charter from the king granting the bishop and his successors’ considerable jurisdictional rights.⁶¹ This charter, dated 14 November 1445, was in favour of the cathedral’s position and damaging to the city.

⁶⁰ *CPR 1441-1446*, pp.451-52.

⁶¹ Curtis, *Disputes*, 25, n.3: the charter was subsequently revoked and there is no original at Exeter.

All city officials were prohibited from exercising any rights associated with their office within the fee and, as Curtis comments, even more disturbing was the fact that the bishop had: ‘powers of jurisdiction which were not inferior to those exercised by the mayor in the city court’.⁶² The bishop and his successors were awarded rights that embraced: ‘all trespasses, contracts, agreements, detinues, obligations, debts and other cases therein arising, with the power to hear and determine the same according to the law and custom’ and they could have a right over all cases that could be ‘moved in the king’s courts’. Furthermore the bishop could claim: ‘all the goods and chattels of all felons fugitive, outlawed, condemned or suicides or felons resisting the law [...] without any impediment’. These were substantial rights that must have been inflammatory to the city’s position. The procedures and sequence of events are well explored by Curtis, who points out the errors made in the chronology of the dispute by Moore.⁶³ The dispute is also well considered by Lorraine Attreed and Hannes Kleineke.⁶⁴

What is evident is that the attempted arrest of Vouslegh, and the consequent disruption, was not an isolated case. Shillingford alluded to similar events:

⁶² Curtis, *Disputes*, 25-26.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 20-42, 28, 30; Moore placed the proceedings at common law which occurred in 1448 as occurring 1447 and prior to the privy seal writ issued in spring 1447 (Moore, xiv).

⁶⁴ Lorraine Attreed, ‘Arbitration and the Growth of Urban Liberties in Late Medieval England.’ *The Journal of British Studies*, 31, (1992), 205-35; *eadem.* ‘Urban Identity in Medieval English Towns’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 32, The Productivity of Urban Space in Northern Europe (Spring, 2002), 571-92; *eadem.* *The King’s Towns, Identity and Survival in Late Medieval English Boroughs* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001): see in particular the chapter ‘The Pursuit of Justice’, 264-68; Kleineke, ‘Civic Ritual’ in *Ritual and Space* ed. Andrews, 165-78.

the whiche affrayes and mys gouernance hath ofte tymes like to have be cause of grete troble and of surrecion of the Comminalte of the City of Exetre and yet ys like to be wt oute better remedye prayynge.⁶⁵

One of the key issues was the concept of ‘misgovernance’. Shillingford himself was accused by the bishop of being the cause of all the misgovernance within the city, a charge he roundly refuted in his replications to the bishop.⁶⁶

The dispute was finally concluded with an agreement made between the bishop, dean and chapter and the mayor, bailiffs and commonalty dated 12 December 1448 by the arbitration of Thomas Courtney, earl of Devon and Sir William Bonville. The conclusion was a triumph for the ecclesiastical authorities. Rights over jurisdiction, not only of arrest, but in collecting taxes and holding a court baron, a court leet and a view of frankpledge within the fee were granted to the bishop. However, the earlier charters granted to the bishop were to be revoked. A small triumph for the city was the fact that the city officials and servants were allowed to bear their maces within the cathedral precincts, the cemetery and the cathedral close. The concession over the carrying of the maces was highly significant. It was a concession ‘highly communicative of the power of symbolism and public ceremony’ and furthermore it implies that ‘the city’s theoretical rights within the fee were ultimately undeniable.’⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Curtis, *Disputes*, 25, the detail from the incomplete paper fragment which breaks off at ‘prayynge’: DRO 1861.

⁶⁶ Moore, 104: DRO 1859; Moore, 113-14: DRO 1860.

⁶⁷ Attreed, *The King’s Towns*, 268.

Late Medieval Urban Conflict

Jurisdictional disputes were a defining feature of urban politics in the first decades of the fifteenth century. Conflict over judicial privileges, trading rights and taxation, alongside questions surrounding sanctuary, were central features of these disputes as towns sought to exert their rights over their, usually, ecclesiastical neighbours. The dispute between the citizens of Exeter and the cathedral authorities in the 1440s was one that shared common characteristics with the disputes taking place in other cathedral cities, such as Canterbury, Bristol, Norwich and York. The causes, and how these disputes were played out, have been the subject of several studies focusing on the individual cities.⁶⁸ Peter Fleming recognises the importance of how the protagonists in these disputes ‘represented the events’. Yet the extent to which they made use of these representations in the development of a corporate identity is problematic. Fleming suggests that in the case of Bristol the city elite ‘exploited and interpreted’ the events and the way in which these events were written about was a means of ‘projecting a positive image’ of the ruling elite ‘to the wider community’.⁶⁹ The fact that many instances of dispute occurred during ceremonial occasions is equally noteworthy. It certainly raises the question of audience. Was this imagined as the wider community who would be seen as witnesses to the instigation

⁶⁸ Cities that were subjected to these conflicts include Canterbury, York, Norwich, Bristol, Southampton, Shrewsbury, Hereford: Peter Fleming, ‘Conflict and urban government in later medieval England: St. Augustine’s Abbey and Bristol’, *Urban History* 27 (2000), 325-43; Rosser, ‘Conflict and Political Community’ in *The Church in the Medieval Town*, ed. Slater and Rosser, 20-42; Attreed, ‘Arbitration’, 206-7; *eadem*, ‘Urban Identity’; *eadem*, *The King’s Towns*; Rebecca Warren, ‘Conflict, Compromise and Cooperation: The Civic Government’s Relationship with the Church in Late Medieval Canterbury’ (Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Kent 2010); Curtis, *Disputes*: Curtis outlines the fees that were at the centre of the jurisdiction disputes, as well as providing a detailed history of the long-running conflicts from the first years of the fifteenth-century, 9-42.

⁶⁹ Fleming, ‘Conflict and Urban government’, 325-26.

of the dispute?⁷⁰ The projection of a positive image and how events surrounding conflict and dispute were written of, and thereby how they might have been manipulated for political advantage, are significant considerations when we are evaluating John Shillingford's writing.

The Exeter dispute was a public one that centred on the authoritative and legal control of the city's communal areas with the allied market and trading concerns, all of which had significant financial implications. As with other similar conflicts the probability that this was a deliberate choice of occasion on which to make a jurisdictional challenge is reinforced by the historic background to the rituals surrounding Rogationtide and Ascension Day.⁷¹ It was a symbolic day on which to instigate a dispute that was to do with the both physical, as well as legal, boundaries of the cathedral's fee. That similar conflicts between wrangling church and lay communities occurred at this time in the church's calendar, as well as at other main religious festival occasions, is well documented.⁷²

⁷⁰ Kleineke, 'Civic Ritual' in *Ritual and Space* ed. Andrews, 165-78.

⁷¹ Ascension Day: The formality of walking the boundaries, by the laity and clergy of a parish traditionally took place on Ascension Day or in the preceding week, Rogation week. The boundaries of a parish are reaffirmed by 'beating the bounds', with the protection and blessing of the land.

⁷² For example the conflict in All Hallows by the Tower where the boundary between the Tower of London and All Hallows Church was continuously disputed; on Ascension Day the Beating the Bounds ceremony takes place commemorating a seventeenth-century conflict remembered at a 'confrontational' ceremony www.ahbt.org.uk; Rosser, 'Conflict and Political Communit' in *The Church in the Medieval Town* ed. Slater & Rosser, 20-36: Rosser states that, 'formal processions to high mass at the cathedral gave rise to the occasion to air grievances', 31. Kleineke, 'Civic Ritual' in *Ritual and Space* ed. Andrews, 165-178: Kleineke's study provides a valuable overview of conflict within ritual space and detailed references of work on ceremony and use and abuse of sacred space, in particular see 166-67, n.4 & n.5. See also Mark Addison Amos, "'Somme Lordes & Somme other of Lower Astates": London's Urban Elite and the Symbolic Battle for Status', in *Traditions and Transformations in Late Medieval England* ed. Douglas Biggs, Sharon D. Michalove, A. Compton

The processions that took place in Rogation week and on Ascension Day were great outdoor events going around the city and terminating within the cathedral.⁷³ Similar processions occurred in other cathedral cities, for example, in Coventry the approaches to the cathedral and the circuits around the central area and its churches were known as procession ways and it would seem that this consecrated space represented a ritual area.⁷⁴ The central area of Exeter bore comparison with the topography of Coventry, with its central churchyard, parish churches and cathedral, the bishop's palace and canons' houses and would have had significant customary and ceremonial use. Upon such ground a jurisdictional challenge was a decidedly hostile action.

Shelia Sweetinburgh establishes that it is significant to look at the interactions between individuals, groups and institutions considering specifically how those relationships were forged, sustained or broken. The essays in *Negotiating the Political in Northern European Urban Society, c.1400-c.1600* all attest to the importance of evaluating both individual and communal identity within the public sphere during a period that was witnessing widespread political, social and religious change.⁷⁵ Collectively these essays demonstrate the growing dependence upon the

Reeves, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159-175: this paper looks at public displays and status and the 'symbolic strategies of display', see p.167.

⁷³ Nicholas Orme, 'Access and Exclusion: Exeter Cathedral, 1300-1540', in *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2003 Harlaxton* ed. Peregrine Horden, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 267-86, (p.275).

⁷⁴ Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen: the Communal Year at Coventry, 1450-1550', in *The Medieval Town, A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540*, ed. Richard Holt & Gervase Rosser (London: Longman, 1990), 238-64 (p.259)

⁷⁵ *Negotiating the Political in Northern European Urban Society, c.1400-c.1600*, ed. Shelia Sweetinburgh (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, in collaboration with Brepols, 2013). The introduction to

written word and how the role of written texts was increasingly crucial and influential within the political arena.⁷⁶

This outline to the dispute over the jurisdiction of the St. Stephen's fee highlights some of the significant moments that sparked the controversy, in particular with regard to the issue of who had the control and rights of arrest. Most importantly it is evident that it was the argument over the powerbase of each of the respective courts, the city's court or the ecclesiastical court, that underpinned the conflict. The vital aspects, identified here in terms of authority of arrest and control gave rise to many further issues: rights of way, holding of keys for the city's gates, trading rights, control of traders, collection of taxes, maintenance of fabric, such as the surroundings walls, are detailed in much of the extant documentation.

My conclusion is that Shillingford's influence in the language of all the extant documentation is unmistakable. His skilled manipulation of vocabulary and the approach to the way that the narrative of the dispute was constructed, I suggest, is evidence of his authorial contribution. The sense of the narrative of the conflict arises from the personal input of a skilled writer and negotiator, John Shillingford.

Conclusion

Based on the generally received opinion that land disputes, including the process of taking the disputes to law, were dominant and integral characteristics of

this collection of essays provides not only a good overview of the subject but also gives many useful references: 1-13.

⁷⁶ Caroline M. Barron, 'Afterword – Negotiating the Political: the view from London', in *Negotiating the Political*, ed. Sweetinburgh, 209-13.

land-ownership and control, I contend that it has to be accepted that the two disputes considered in this thesis, the Brokholes inheritance dispute and the Exeter jurisdiction conflict, were not exceptional. It is the fortunate survival of the associated texts that makes the disputes extraordinary. Although the Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters are now rare extant examples of the documentation which may have arisen out of such conflicts I believe it is essential that we recognise that they have a wider relevance in our overall consideration of gentry society and the impact of conflict, specifically over land, upon late-medieval gentry society and culture. The detailed consideration of the letters and papers of the Armburghs and Shillingford, as undertaken in this thesis, is a prerequisite to their future use and inclusion into late-medieval historiography on conflict and dispute.

CHAPTER TWO – THE SOURCES

As I stated in the thesis introduction the Armburgh Roll and the letters of John Shillingford were chosen as the two main sources for this thesis because I believe they offer certain unique opportunities to examine fifteenth-century vernacular letter writers' approaches to their letter writing. The aim of this chapter is to detail the characteristics that support this view as well as to provide a background to my analytical work. In this chapter I consider the physical elements of the manuscripts as well as providing a contextual, methodological and theoretical framework for the analysis of the texts that follows in the chapters in Part II. It gives an assessment of the collections through an examination of the material characteristics of the manuscripts alongside a consideration of late-medieval archival practice and method of retention of documentary evidence. The first two sections present an examination of the Roll and Shillingford archive individually and establish the methodology that I have used to consider the differing manuscripts. In the third section I compare the Roll and Shillingford's letters as well as establishing the methodological and theoretical background. In the final section I consider the verse and the documents that appear to be unrelated to the Armburgh dispute.

(i) The Armburgh Roll

The Armburgh Roll is held at Chetham's Library, Manchester, where it was found in 1991 among some papers which had been donated to the library in the nineteenth century by F.R. Raines. It was edited by Christine Carpenter in 1998 who sets out

the provenance of the manuscript suggesting that the Roll arrived in Manchester when it was erroneously identified as hailing from Manchester and not Mancetter.¹

Compilation and Dating of the Roll

The Roll is formed of nine membranes and it appears to have been written in four different hands. The reading of the Roll and understanding its construction is complicated by the fact that the entries do not follow a chronological order. The first membranes, one to three, (m.1 to m.3) mostly contain copy documents dating to the 1440s and 1450s whereas the later membranes, end of three through to nine, (part way through m.3 to m.9 and including the dorse of m.6, m.7, m.8 and m.9) have documents dated to the 1420s and 1430s.

The Roll may have been written in two separate sections which were then joined. However, Carpenter suggests that, due to the chronology of the entries in Hand 1 this makes the theory of the compilation of the Roll as two separate rolls at two different times harder to accept. Alternatively the Roll could have been written at one time by four different scribes.² My examination of the manuscript suggests that the manuscript was not written all at one time, even in four different hands. There is a difference in the quality of the parchment of the membranes as well as in the neatness and type of the stitching that join the membranes; there are also different styles adopted for the writing of the text, including the margin widths or, in certain places, the lack of right-hand margins.

¹ AP 3-4. There is a digital copy of the Armburgh Roll included in the Rylands Library Special Collections which can be accessed on line through the Manchester University site <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail>.

² AP 56-57.

I suggest that it is more plausible to accept that it was compiled in sections which date from different periods but which were being kept and copied concurrent, or nearly concurrent, with the actual timing of the events to which the texts relate. However, the dating of the compilation is speculative. Carpenter's suggestion is that the Roll could have been written at one time in the late 1440s or early 1450s. It would certainly appear that the manuscript was compiled before 1453 which is when Robert Armburgh died as there are no copy documents dating from post his death.

A further and I believe fundamental consideration in terms of understanding the compilation and the dating of the Roll is the first copy document, which I identify as the Remembrance.³ Carpenter puts the date of this document at before 1448, and suggests that it may well have been written much earlier as it only deals with events up to c.1436. It is also possible that it might well have been written as an *aide-memoire* after Joan's death in 1443 and have been copied in by the writer: 'of the second part of the roll when he began to assemble entries after Joan's death, as an account of the "story so far"'.⁴ Although it is not possible to determine either the date of its composition or its author with any certainty, I think that it is more probable that it was composed during Joan's lifetime. It is plausible that its content was influenced by Joan towards the end of her life to remind 'herself and posterity

³ An anonymous account of the case up to c. 1443-48: *AP* 61-67. For clarity this account is hereafter referenced as the Remembrance. The damage to the beginning precludes an accurate reading of the text but the letters 'ce' appear to form the end of a word and would follow the pattern of wording from, for example, the remembrance made by Robert of money paid to his nephew, 'here is a remembrance' (see *AP* 70), therefore to facilitate ease of referencing during the analysis this first document has been given the heading 'the Remembrance'.

⁴ *AP* 61 n.1.

how the lands were lost.⁵ However, that does not preclude the document being actually incorporated and copied into the Roll after Joan had died. Joan's influence on the Roll and the texts ascribed to her are considered later in the thesis, in particular in chapter seven.

Carpenter's analysis provides details as to which hands appear to have written which membrane.⁶ The script of each hand is variable and Carpenter suggests that it may have been simply one hand using a different pen. However, I believe that the differences in style of the writing are of such significance that this is unlikely. I believe that there was more than one scribe involved in the copying. Carpenter herself does not pursue the idea of one hand and suggests that the manuscript was begun by the scribe of Hand 2 on m.5 and that the second part of the Roll was written at a later date and begins at m.1 in Hand 1.⁷ Another possibility, which Carpenter considers to be the most likely, is that Hand 1 compiled the earlier part of the Roll, then abandoned around 1436, when the first part of the dispute was coming to an end; Hand 2 then used the spare parchment to copy in an inclusion of Middle English verse and Hand 1 started the new compilation attached to the earlier one.⁸ This conclusion would seem the most likely. It certainly corresponds with the idea that the Roll was indeed formed in separate parts which were brought together when Robert was endeavouring to provide a record for posterity of the conflict. My hypothesis would be that the later membranes, containing the copy documents of the earlier dates (c.1420s and 1430s), formed the part of an original roll and that the

⁵ *AP* 61, n.1.

⁶ *AP* 56-57.

⁷ *AP* 55.

⁸ *AP* 57.

membranes, with documents of later dates (c.1440s and 1450s), now form the first part of the final copy Roll were attached at a later date. However, this is complicated by the fact that some of the early dated entries are a continuation on m.3 of later date. These could have been copied in from earlier dated older copy documents at the time that the whole Roll was being assembled after Joan's death and when Robert was endeavouring to secure her estates, finally resolve the inheritance dispute and perform the requests of Joan's Will.⁹ I will be considering the identity of the hands and the questions surrounding who could have possibly been the scribes further on in this analysis.

The Roll's format

The intention behind the creation of a late-medieval roll as a means of retaining records, as well as its purpose and the format, need to be briefly considered when assessing the materiality of the Roll.¹⁰ The use of parchment and joining of the membranes present an artefact that was created for longevity as retained evidence; that rolls were frequently used for judicial and administrative purposes provides an authority to the evidence collected and detailed in this form.¹¹ The Roll is formed in the Chancery style adding to the idea that behind its creation lay the model of a

⁹ There is no extant copy of Joan's Will but Robert's letter dated to 18 April 1450 provide certain details of her requests, as well as the fact that she had made Robert her executor: *AP* 176-78.

¹⁰ Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2007). See especially 'Rolls and Scrolls', pp.250-58. This study provides a detailed analysis of the use of rolls and how the storing of information in roll format can be seen from both practical and symbolic angles; that a roll was portable and provided the means by which a continuous narrative could be recorded and read; the survival of rolls of 'varying formats and purposes' provides proof that the roll continued to perform valued functions throughout the medieval period (p.258). See also Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 135-44.

¹¹ Clemens & Graham, *Manuscript Studies*, 255. Early histories were also presented in roll form: Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 142

document of legal authority.¹² It is possible that this legal connotation could be viewed as a means by which the Armburghs added legitimacy to their contentions. Or, more prosaically, it might just have been that this form of collating documents was cheaper and easier than making individual copies subsequently bound in book form. Practically the roll format would have been easier to store or move as well as being eminently long lasting. Historically rolls were the conventional format for storing records and the ‘techniques of writing records tended to be conservative because conservation was their main purpose’.¹³ If one of the considerations behind the Armburghs’ drawing together this evidence was for it to be conserved for future use then the roll format was the obvious choice. Robert wrote many of his letters from Westminster and it is clear from his writing that he had a good understanding of the law, the courts and legal practices. It would seem obvious, therefore, that if he was putting together a record of the inheritance conflict he would have utilised a method and process with which it is most probable he was fully acquainted.

Contents of the Roll

There are ninety-four full or part copy documents in the Roll the majority of which are letters. Sixty-one of these letters can be attributed to Robert and

¹² Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 140-41: The so-called ‘Chancery style’ is where the ‘membranes are stitched head to tail in a continuous length’. Robert Armburgh wrote many of his letters from Westminster; although there is no clear evidence to suggest that he was a lawyer by training, but the considerable knowledge that he imparts throughout his writings suggest a decided and comprehensive understanding of law procedures and the workings of the various courts. Legal knowledge and awareness of its complexities was not uncommon among lay gentry at this time.

¹³ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 144.

predominantly deal with the Armburghs' affairs over the disputed Brokholes estates, in particular the Mancetter properties in Warwickshire and their strained financial situation. The remaining other documents are three letters that are attributed to Joan Armburgh, and two letters that could be either from Robert or Joan;¹⁴ eight received letters addressed to Robert of which two are from his brother William;¹⁵ two family letters;¹⁶ and three letters that appear not to be related to the dispute;¹⁷ fifteen entries which are not letters but copies of other forms of documents – two of these are documents that originate with the opposing side and relate to the settlement of Ellen and James Bellers' estates; one document that is unrelated to the dispute and is a petition made by a servant of Robert's, Alison Beek.¹⁸ The Roll also contains a lengthy entry of Middle English verse.¹⁹

¹⁴ Joan Armburgh to John Rigges (?) 1443: *AP* 75-76; Joan to Ellen, Lady Ferrers of Chartley, February 1428: *AP* 92-93; Joan to John Horell of Essex 1429/30: *AP* 120-23; two letters from either Joan or Robert to unknown recipients at Radwinter (perhaps tenants or lessees or purchasers of woodland) 1429/30: *AP* 119-20, 123-24.

¹⁵ Two letters from William Armburgh, dated prior to Easter 1443: *AP* 186, 187; one from Margaret Walkerne his stepdaughter, c.1430: *AP* 126-27; one from the co-holders of Mancetter at the abbey of Merevale, Warwickshire 1 December 1451: *AP* 178-79; two from John Rugeley, abbot of Merevale, early to mid 1450 and one probably of similar date: *AP* 179-80, 180-81; two from John Barbour, vicar of Mancetter, 30 September, probably 1450 and 5 October, probably 1452: *AP* 181-82, *AP* 183.

¹⁶ From Joan's son, Robert Kedington to his godfather c.1427-1448: *AP* 90-91; and one from Joan's grandson John Palmer to his mother Sybil Palmer, probably 1440s: *AP* 184-85.

¹⁷ A letter to John Coll bailiff of Huntingdon c. early 1420s: *AP* 96-97. A letter from Robert Trenchemere of West Barry, Glamorgan to Sir Thomas Erpingham, c.1417-1422: *AP* 98-100. A letter to William Swan, c.1419-20: *AP* 100-02. These three letters run in a sequence.

¹⁸ Final concord settling the estate of Ellen and James Bellers on Thomas Pekke Westminster 9 February 1436: *AP* 188-89 and following on from the above final concord, 8 March 1437: *AP* 190-91; petition of Alison Beek, c.1450-1452: *AP* 195-99.

¹⁹ *AP* 155-68.

A significant element of the evaluation of the Roll that I undertake in this chapter, and an argument that underpins the thesis as a whole, is to consider how the evidence that forms the manuscript was assembled and why it was retained. I believe that integral to this must be the question of selectivity and preservation. I firmly believe that the copy documents that make up the Armburgh Roll are not there by way of an unplanned selection or an unintentional preservation. Michael Hicks in his review of Carpenter's edition of the Roll comments about the random nature of the copies of the documents and that this unsystematic collation is therefore suggestive of an arbitrary selection.²⁰ However, my argument determines that this is not the case and the compilation does not represent an *ad hoc* collection but that all the texts, even those unrelated to the dispute, were selected and brought together by the compiler of the Roll, most probably Robert Armburgh, with a clear and identifiable purpose. (I discuss the role of Robert Armburgh as the most probable, or most influential, person in terms of the compilation further on in this section).

Methodology: analysis of the manuscript

In order to facilitate the analysis and close-reading of the separate texts I divided the documents into the following categories: documents, not letters (including the documents which do not appear to be related to the dispute); Robert Armburgh's letters; letters received by Robert Armburgh (including those from his brother William); Joan Armburgh's letters, which include letters which could have been written by either Robert or Joan; other family letters and those letters that appear unrelated to the dispute. The purpose of this division was to provide me with a working format and one which I felt would enable a clearer understanding of the

²⁰ M.A. Hicks, 'Review of *The Armburgh Papers*', *The English Historical Review* 114 (1999), 1296-297 (p.1297).

material, individually and collectively, as well as providing a greater appreciation of the whole manuscript. Effectively, the division that I made provided a framework for researching the methods of writing, language, phraseology and epistolary conventions. It also meant that I was able to make comparisons between the separate letters of each of the authors. This enabled me to appreciate more readily the inherent cultural and moral attitudes that might have been perceptible from literary influences, such as from the inclusion of adages or similes, religious quotations, Latin, legal phraseology and procedural references. The categories also proved to be important as they gave me the opportunity to take a thematic approach to the analysis. By considering the letters and papers from the authorial perspective I was able to consider how key concepts which sit at the heart of the late-medieval social structure, those of worship, identity, status and service, could have been incorporated into the context and content of the various texts.

I analysed the texts with attention to the suggested author and his or her relationship to the recipient alongside considering the main issues that the documents contained and the purpose in writing. In this respect I relied on Carpenter's outlines and indeed throughout the thesis have considered her conclusions and built on her ideas. However, I felt it was necessary to make the individual copy documents more accessible and to provide further clarity to both the content and material examination of the manuscript this I undertook by putting together a comprehensive listing/index, which is to be found in the appendix. The list was compiled using both Carpenter's edition as well as an examination of the original manuscript. Each of the documents was numbered as they appear in order on the manuscript; the index provides a reference location on the membranes as well as a disc location on the digital copy

supplied by Chetham's Library. (I incorporated this locator in order to enable a quick reference to the different texts during my analysis but I also hope that it will facilitate other users of the manuscript; the digital copy and the on-line Rylands Library to access the Roll more effectively). Alongside this I have included the suggested individual document descriptions, possible dating, the suggested hand for each document and Carpenter's page numbers. For ease of referencing between Carpenter's edition and the manuscript the headings as provided by Carpenter to each document have been retained.

I suggest that one of the reasons why the Armburgh Roll has not yet been fully incorporated into the historiography of the fifteenth century is that Carpenter's edition does not provide the reader with the means of making the manuscript and its separate texts readily accessible. The edition is of immense value in that the transcripts follow the manuscript chronologically; they are largely accurate transcriptions, which are essentially faithful to the originals.²¹ The Armburgh Roll is a complicated document and I think that a clearer introduction with a more direct and structured index to the individual texts might have provided a more accessible source. As the edition is set out there is no simple or methodical way to readily access the individual texts or an easy means by which to interpret them and/or to locate the individual authors or recipients or find a way around the various documents as they are transcribed. Carpenter herself recognised certain limitations when she commented:

²¹ See Carpenter's own note on the difficulties involved in the transcription, *AP* 59-60.

This has been a fairly cursory introduction to a rich new addition to the sources for the late-medieval gentry. The roll and its language will repay further careful scrutiny.²²

The scribes and the hands: the role or hand of Robert Armburgh

The identity of the scribes is not known; they could possibly have included Reynold Armburgh who was Robert's nephew and Ralph Beauchamp, a vicar and relative of Robert's, both of whom might have worked for Armburgh in a clerical capacity.²³ A letter from Reynold's father William (Robert's brother) suggests that Reynold was not in London until after 1443.²⁴ Furthermore, a concern over the consideration of Reynold as one of the scribes is the later friction between him and his uncle over money, albeit this occurs later in the conflict from around c.1449.²⁵ However, prior to that Reynold appears to have been sufficiently well qualified in the law to give advice to Robert. All four hands could simply belong to literate servants or one of the hands could have been Robert himself.²⁶ The possibility that Robert could have been one of the scribes is a compelling speculation, and, as I suggest here, quite probably the scribe of Hand 1. The verification for this idea may be found by an examination of the margin entries.

²² *AP* 54.

²³ *AP* 59.

²⁴ Letter from William Armburgh to Robert: *AP* 187 and n.465; Carpenter discusses whether Reynold Armburgh might have written the poetry but this is also complicated by the consideration of his age during the Roll compilation of the earlier part of the Roll: *AP* 58-59.

²⁵ See for example a remembrance dated to late 1450 by Robert detailing the money owed to him from the Mancetter manor which Reynold had wrongly received: *AP* 70-71.

²⁶ *AP* 59.

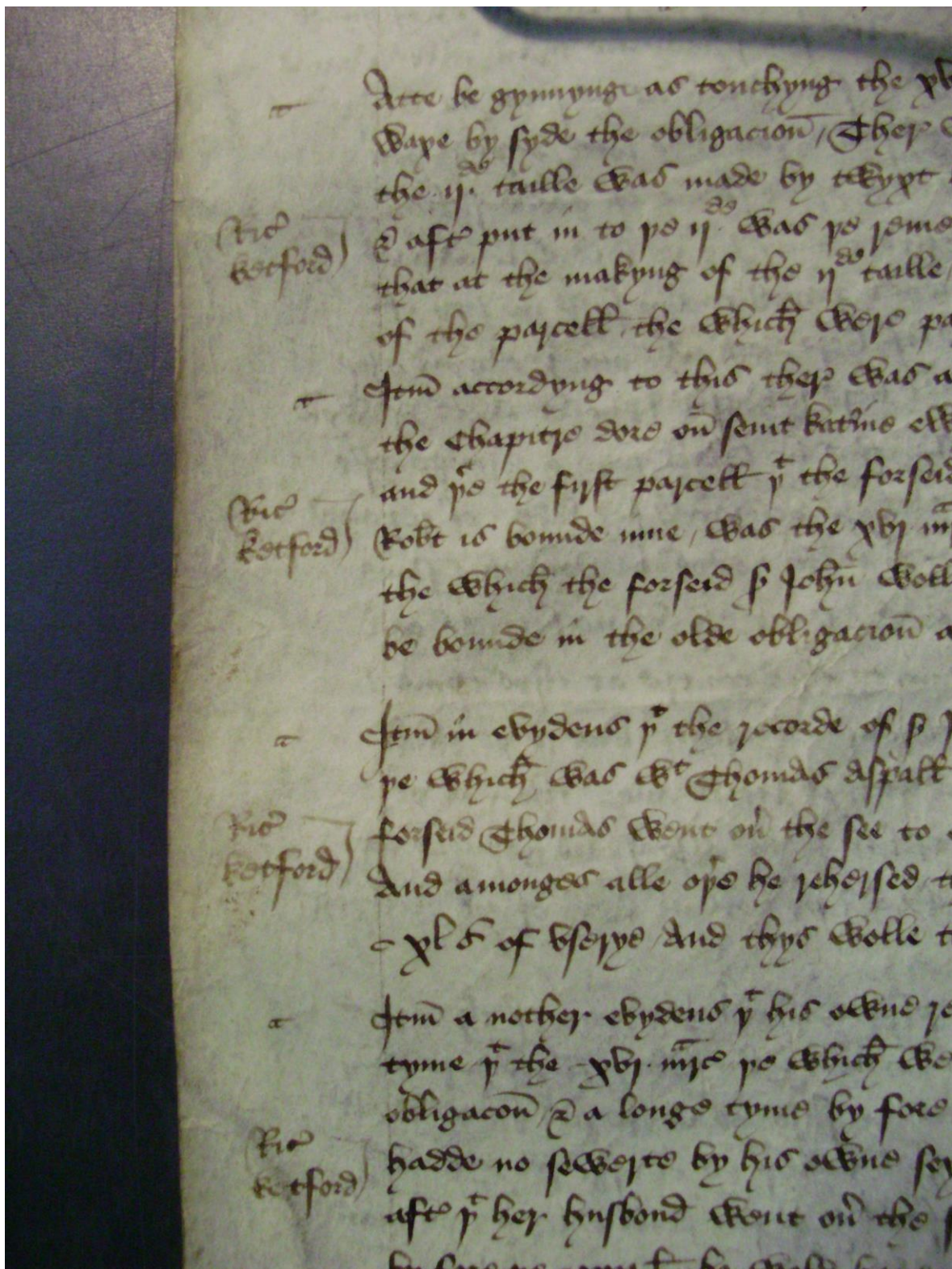


Figure 1: The illustration shows the entries giving details of Richard Ketford's name alongside the details of the Thomas Aspell's financial dealings with Ketford: (AP 79-81). Figure 1 is a good example of what appear to be the later additions of names (in

this case Richard Ketford's) into the Roll's margins and how names were added for clarity in the listing and identification of the individuals involved in the adjacent documents. It suggests that there was a detailed consideration of the Roll after it was written. (The document detailed here is considered in Chapter Four).

The margin entries from the examples on the dorse of m.1 (m.1v) appear to have been added at a different time and in different ink yet in the same hand, Hand 1. The clarity of the script of these marginal notes, in terms of colouring of the ink, is not as good as the script in the main body of the text. However, a comparison of the entry which is 'to William Warlyng', indicates that the script of the marginal note is remarkably similar to the script in the body of the text, suggesting that it is the same hand as seen from the structure of certain of the lettering. For example, the structure of the 'y' is the same.²⁷

The margin entries represent identification of the individual recipients of the letters; Carpenter identifies the names, where they sit alongside the Roll's entries including them in the body of the transcription, but does not identify the scribal hand. The margin entries suggest that Robert was actively involved in the process of the writing. For example, an entry alongside a letter requesting payment of rent appears as 'to my tenantes', illustrated below in Figure 2, the use of the personal pronoun indicates that this is Robert, relating to and identifying his tenants.²⁸

²⁷ C.E.6.10(4); *AP* 170.

²⁸ C.E.6.10(4); *AP* 129. From the chronology of the dating c.1430.

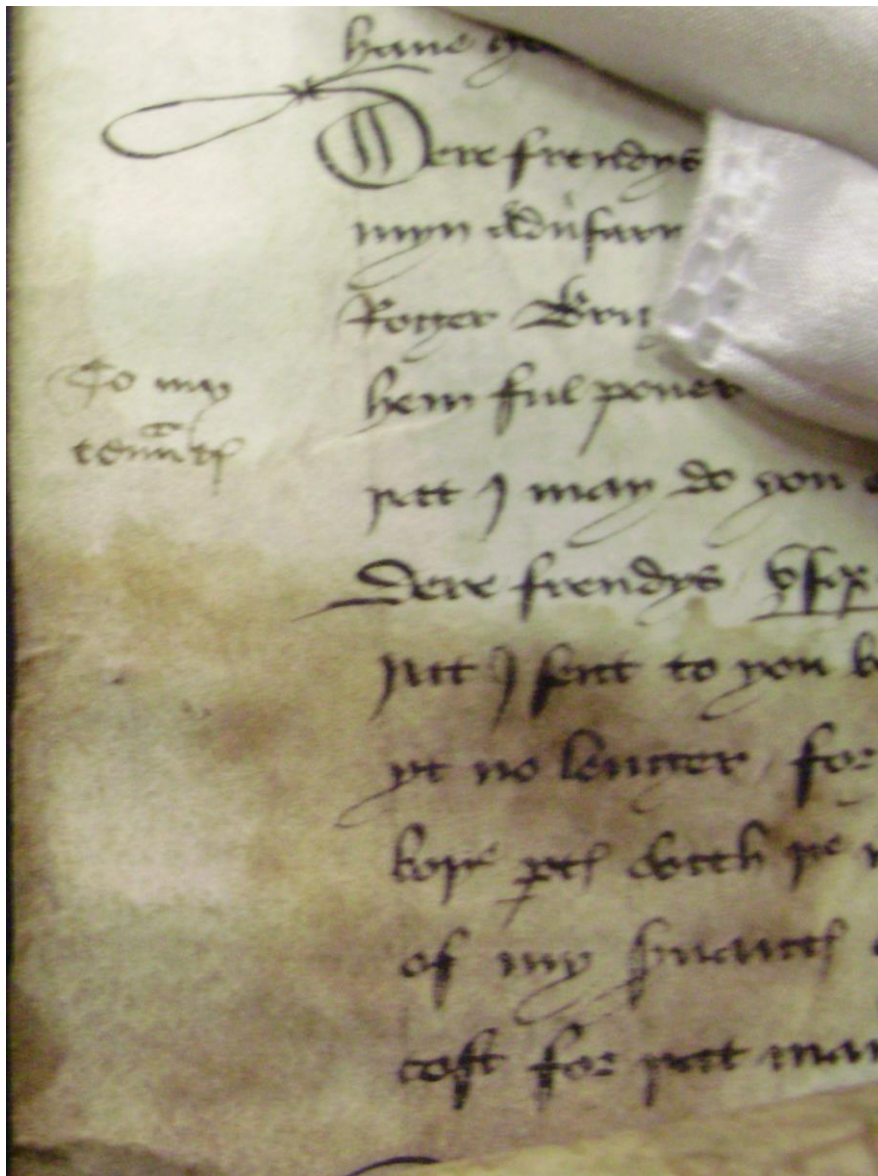


Figure 2: ‘to my tenantes’ (AP 129).

Of course, it does not mean that Robert actually wrote the entry as it could have been under dictation or instruction to a scribe. Nonetheless, what it does indicate is that Robert was actively involved in the construction and compilation of the manuscript and its copy documents, maybe in the final stages of the Roll being completed. The marginal note was added after the main body of the text was complete. In this instance, the script and/or hand of the marginal note is different to that of the accompanying text. The main text is in Hand 2 whereas the margin entry is, almost certainly that of Hand 1. There are other examples where it is evident that

the margin entries were added after the completion of the main body of the script. In these instances the writing of the marginal note, giving the names of the recipients, overlaps the margin of the script within the body of the text. As in the illustration below (Figure 3) which shows the name of John Coll and where he comes from just overlapping the body of the text: (AP 96).

There are, therefore, two possible explanations with regard to Hand 1: Hand 1 did belong to Robert himself, or that it was a scribe who was writing in Robert's presence when Robert was identifying the entries. There is no definitive conclusion from an examination of the hands alone. However, a consideration of the content and context of the copied text that are entered in Hand 1, hold further clues that indicate that Hand 1 could have been Robert. For example the nature and character of the content of the first document in the Roll, the Remembrance, written by Hand 1 suggests an immediacy of expressive writing and an engagement with the story of the conflict that is personal. Was this Robert writing, as Joan's husband, with her influence over what was being said? Of course, it could equally have been dictated or composed by Robert and copied in by the scribe of Hand 1. Hand 1, who is responsible for many of the entries over the whole period of the conflict, is found to have copied documents associated with the earliest point of the dispute as well as later entries, indeed the last entry on the Roll the petition of Alison Beek c.1450-52 is in Hand 1.²⁹ It is quite probable that Robert wrote the petition on Alison's behalf.³⁰ If Hand 1 belonged to a scribe he would have been involved in Robert's employ throughout Robert's marriage to Joan until Robert's death.³¹

²⁹ See the Appendix listing for all the entries written in Hand 1.

³⁰ AP 195, n.496.

³¹ See Carpenter's detailed analysis on the hands: AP 54-59.

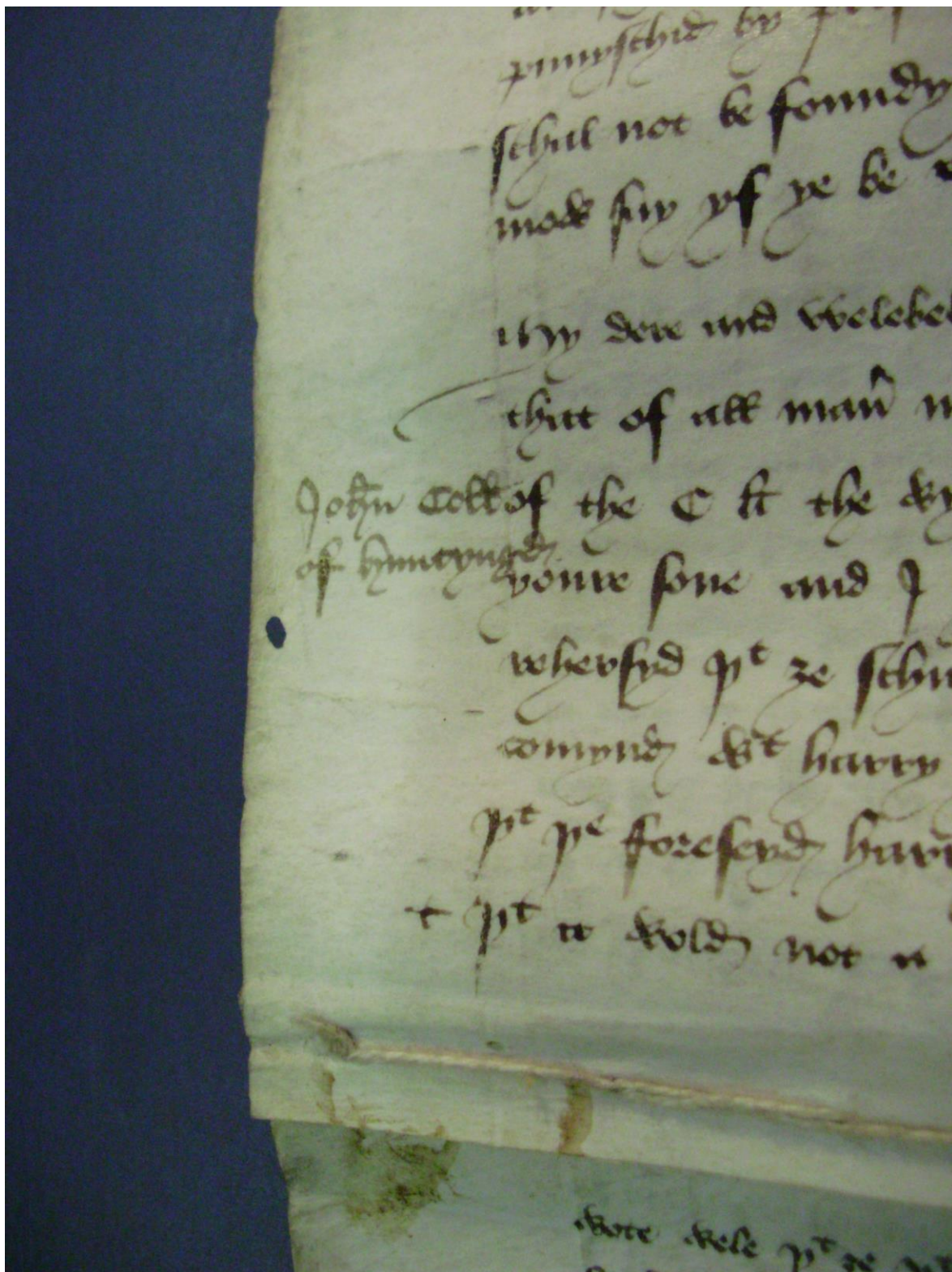


Figure 3: Detail John Coll of Huntingdon (AP 96)

A further complication is the fact that in some documents there are blank spaces where presumably information was to be filled in at a later date. Carpenter

suggests this might have been because a copyist was working from a draft rather than a completed original.³² The blank spaces are left by the scribe of Hand 1 and Hand 2 in different documents. These pose the question if Hand 1 was Robert, would he have left such blanks in the copying: Surely he would have had the relevant information? Therefore, the problem as to the identities of the scribes and whether one was Robert himself cannot be resolved. Nevertheless, there is a sound argument that Robert's actions were integral to the compilation of the Roll and in spite of the fact that we cannot be certain whether or not he was actually involved in the physical copying and entering of the texts, my hypothesis is that the Roll was written and compiled at his personal instruction and under his direction.

My argument is based on Robert and Joan's desire to defend their inheritance. Robert's apparent legal knowledge and involvement in the legal processes must surely have meant that he would have ensured that the evidence that could be used to support their endeavours was retained. The corollary of this would surely have been his commitment in finally bringing the documents together in one completed form. I base my conclusion as to Robert's active engagement in the compilation of the Roll on the assertion that the evidence was purposefully selected.

As a part of the idea of a determined selectivity is the fact that there are gaps in the sequences of the copy documents. For example, there are no copies of the replies to Robert's letters from his tenants. That there were letters sent to Robert, by

³² *AP* 55. Examples of documents with gaps in are: the Remembrance where blanks are left for names to be filled in: *AP* 65, *AP* 66, *AP* 67; an indenture where the sums are left out: *AP* 192-93; letter to John Coll: *AP* 96; Robert's letter to his brother William where he is endeavouring to name an undersheriff, but leaves place of dwelling and name blank: *AP* 110.

his tenants, is confirmed as he referred to these responses or appeals within his own letters, but the letters written to him are not included. The reason for these omissions can only be surmised. Possibly the reason is that these responses would have distorted the tenet of the Roll by putting over a viewpoint that Robert had not agreed with. These letters may well have given another aspect to the dispute, or justified the tenants' actions, which did not accord with Robert's wishes. We cannot know with any certainty but I argue that there is a strong probability that these letters were not included as they did not comply with the message Robert and Joan were wishing to convey. In order to advance this hypothesis it is necessary to consider the letters that were addressed to Robert and which were copied in by posing the question: in contrast what can the letters of which the Armburghs were the recipients and which are copied into the Roll indicate?

There are eight received letters copied into the Armburgh Roll; three from Robert's family, the content of which are certainly positive reflections of Robert's good character (these letters will be considered further on in the thesis). The other copy letters all date from 1450 to 1452 and deal with the concerns over the advowson of Mancetter. They are from John Rugeley, the abbot of Merevale, John Barbour, vicar of Mancetter and the co-holders of Manchester. John Barbour praised Robert for his good mastership and his kindness without which help during a time of illness Barbour commented that he would have died.³³ Likewise, the tone of one of the letters from John Rugeley put Robert in a good light and praised him for his

³³ *AP* 183. John Barbour; Carpenter suggests John Barbour was illegitimate as he was also known as Mountford, although it was more likely that he was the son of Richard Barbour, who had been a tenant on the Mancetter property: *AP* 35, n.162.

goodness.³⁴ The letter from the co-holders of Mancetter and a further letter from Ruggeley which dealt with the distribution of the money which came from the land given in exchange for the advowson would indicate that perhaps from Robert's perspective it would seem that he had been badly dealt with.³⁵ This would be a strong reason for inclusion.

The sequence of letters which concerns the Brokholes' land and Joan's will concludes with a statement which Carpenter dates to 1452, nearly ten years after Joan's death. It sets out the details of a settlement made by Joan and Robert over the Mancetter land and which was being recalled by Robert as he was attempting to execute Joan's will. It emphasises the disputed rights over the land which was received in exchange for the Mancetter advowson.³⁶ I highlight this statement firstly because of its juxtaposition to the preceding letters, as it adds to the significance of the message these previous letters were conveying. But most significantly it is important because of the margin entry found alongside it, which reads: 'By a feoffament of trust but yf he be a tiraunt of an ewyll concyensed man' (*AP* 183).³⁷ The meaning of tiraunt seems evident as a despot or a usurper; 'concyensed' – I took to mean, conscience, and therefore the phrase would mean a man of an evil conscience, and therefore, untrustworthy and deceitful. As the statement detailed

³⁴ *AP* 180-81.

³⁵ *AP* 178-79; *AP* 179-80.

³⁶ *AP* 183-84.

³⁷ The body of the text is written in Hand 1; the margin entry appears to be written by Hand 1, but I suggest added later. It also sits between the two margin entries which detail the names of the recipients of the two letters sitting either side of it, Robert himself and Sybil Palmer. Tiraunt – 1(a) 'a ruler who uses power to oppress'; 2(b) 'a person who seizes power by force'; 3(a) a person who uses power to oppress'; 3(b) 'a person who is wicked, cruel, violent; a bully': MED.

Reynold Armburgh it was presumably a condemnation of him and his deceit over the land at Mancetter.

I do not believe that these letters and this statement can be considered in isolation. They are linked by an evident focus and indicate a clear objective to prove Robert's arguments that he was wronged by the decisions taken by others. They indicate that he was frustrated in his endeavours to execute Joan's estate or receive the money that he argued he had been due. These texts represent one example of a group of texts that indicate the political, and polemical, nature of the Roll and the skill with which the evidence had been brought together.

The emphasis of nearly all the copy documents, and one which the overall focus of the Roll forcefully provides, is the righteousness both of the inheritance claim and the actions taken by the Armburghs at all stages of the dispute. Nothing within the documentation gives any hint of the Armburghs being anything other than in the right. Furthermore, by accepting that there were deliberate omissions in the documents copied into the Roll can only add weight to the argument that the Roll was compiled with a considered degree of selectivity.

An extension of this hypothesis is to consider those documents that appear to be unrelated to the Brokhole inheritance dispute, or any of the peripheral disputes, such as those with the Mancetter tenants. I judge that the analysis of these unrelated letters and copy documents is vital to our understanding of the Roll as a whole and I examine them later in the final section of this chapter.

The Remembrance – the first document in the Roll

The idea behind the both selective character of the separate documents the idea that certain of the entries provide a decisive pattern is considerably advanced by an examination of what I determine is a strategic inclusion, that of the very first entry, the anonymous account – the Remembrance.³⁸ This undated anonymous account of the dispute is a key document in the Armburgh manuscript and its significance is determined not just by its contents but as importantly by its location. It is found on the first membrane and frames and sets the boundaries for the following copied documents and letters by providing a fairly detailed account of the first years of the dispute. It would seem unlikely that the location of this account was anything other than deliberate to place the focus of the evidence directly in the path of any reader of the Roll and to influence how the rest of the letters and documents were to be read and ultimately interpreted. From its location alone it is not an unreasonable hypothesis to determine that this copy document is decidedly political. This political element in terms of its message is further borne out by its composition, its content and the rhetorical writing style.

The Remembrance, as Carpenter comments, is written with a ‘strain of lively and idiosyncratic vituperation’ and bears comparison with Joan’s letter to John Horell.³⁹ I think that the inclusion of this document acts as a signpost by directing the reader of the Roll to the ideas behind the Armburghs’ contention that they had been constantly defeated by the lack of support and the failure of those in authority to support them. The Remembrance appears to establish a foundation to the message and for the interpretation of all the entries that follow.

³⁸ AP 61-67.

³⁹ AP 61, n.1.

Conclusion

One of the main aims of this section was to establish my reasons to use the Armburgh Roll as one of the two sources for this thesis. In this section I have therefore focused on the physical aspects of the manuscript, as well as setting that consideration alongside an evaluation of the content. My methodology has been based on the belief that these two aspects of the character of the Roll, in terms of determining its importance, are inseparable. Therefore, the purpose in my examination of the Armburgh manuscript and my study of Carpenter's edition was to detail many of the characteristics of the manuscript that would provide me with a foundation for my analysis of the texts themselves. The way that the Roll had been formatted, the questions over the writing, the construction and compilation have all been fundamental to my enquiry. Of equal value to the thesis was the need to make the individual texts more readily accessible. This has been facilitated by my separation of the letters and papers into categories, by numbering and listing the individual documents, as well as giving attention to the author, recipient, location of each of the separate texts in the Roll and the hand in which they were written. The many characteristics, both in terms of the physical nature of the Roll as well as its content and which I have identified unquestionably support the argument that this manuscript offers unique opportunities to examine fifteenth-century vernacular letter writers' approaches to their letter writing. My evaluation of the substance of the Roll will be developed throughout the later chapters of the thesis.

Inevitably there are many questions over the Roll's construction remaining and which this examination has not been able to resolve. It does, however, prove that

when all of these components are looked at as a whole that the Armburgh Roll was an exceptionally crafted artefact. This alone justifies my choice as a source for this thesis.

(ii) The Shillingford Letters and Papers

The manuscripts that form the Shillingford archive of letters and papers held at the Devon Record Office (hereafter cited as DRO) were originally found dispersed in the archives of the Corporation of Exeter. Some of the documents were found in cupboards in the old Council Chamber, in the Guildhall, as well as under the tiles of the Guildhall roof. These were brought together by Stuart Moore in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ The documents relate solely to the dispute over St. Stephen's Fee between the Exeter civic authorities and the cathedral and can largely be attributed to John Shillingford. Many of the letters were written during the autumn and winter of 1447 and the spring of 1448, when John Shillingford spent time in London.

There are three boxes at the DRO under reference C.S. Box 1859, Box 1860 and Box 1861 together with a separate flat folder which is unmarked and unnumbered, but stored with the boxes. The individual documents in these boxes and the folder are not catalogued. There is no extant listing of the documents although one was compiled when preparatory work was being undertaken for a new edition in the early part of the twentieth-century. Muriel Curtis in her monograph *Some Disputes between the City and the Cathedral Authorities of Exeter* published in 1932 stated that a complete list of all the Shillingford letters and papers had just been finalised. The detailed list that Curtis refers to is no longer extant. It was most

⁴⁰ Moore, p.xiii.

probably the work of Miss Easterling who had made a comprehensive study of the papers and the hand of Shillingford. Unfortunately none of Miss Easterling's original work survives.⁴¹ Curtis recognised the need for a new edition and preparations were made for this but it was never realised.

Curtis ascertained that the listing comprised details of seventy-six documents, on parchment or paper and that the documents varied from fragments of only a few inches square to rolls of several membranes. She determined that during the period of July 1447 to the autumn of 1448 some nineteen letters were written by Shillingford. Of these, nine were addressed to his peers in Exeter and written from London and seven more contained instructions.⁴²

Work undertaken at the Devon Record Office

At the DRO I undertook a survey of the Shillingford documents. The storage of the letters and papers itself presents a challenge. As already considered the documents are unlisted and uncatalogued and stored in boxes as well as a loose-leafed folder. I compiled a working list of the documents contained in the three boxes and the folder which has enabled me to reference the documents for the purposes of the analysis undertaken here in this thesis to the box number or to the folder in which the document is stored. Some earlier restoration work had been undertaken and the documents contained in the folder have been unrolled or unfolded and laid flat with some remedial work to some of the most fragile. One of

⁴¹ Curtis, *Disputes*: The Preface provides a useful summary of the work carried out on the Shillingford letters up to January 1932. I undertook a search of the records at the DRO, with the help of the archive staff (none of whom had known of Miss Easterling's work) to locate Miss Easterling's research on the Shillingford letters, however without success.

⁴² Curtis, *Disputes*, 76-77.

the problems I encountered with regard to the listing is that some of the rolled manuscripts are too fragile to handle. Therefore, I was not able to fully identify or determine the content of them all especially where several membranes were stitched together. I was satisfied that the work I undertook was sufficient for me to fulfil my aim which was to prepare a foundation and understanding of the collection from which I could develop the analysis of Shillingford's individual letters. The amount of archival work required to provide a complete cataloguing of the extant manuscripts was beyond the remit of this thesis. Clearly this is work that needs to be undertaken in order that the Shillingford collection can be fully appreciated and used more effectively.

The nineteenth-century edition

Stuart Moore edited the documents in 1871 for the Camden Society. This edition is the main source of the texts for the analysis of the dispute to date. I have identified that there were inconsistencies in Moore's edition, not least the fact the numbering in the list of contents is not sequential. Moore himself recognised this issue. Having compiled the edition he added a note to explain the error in the numbering system; following the number 'XXXVI' the next inclusion is printed as 'XXXV' instead of 'XXXVII'. Moore comments: 'this and the following Numbers have been inadvertently wrongly printed in the text. They should be numbered two on.'⁴³ However, I determined that the problem is compounded by a previous error in the numbering, which is not identified in the edition. Listed as, 'XXV', the letter is detailed as, 'Shillingford to his Fellows (?) April 1448. (Draft Letter)' and it should have been numbered 'XXIV' following on from 'XXIII'. The problems with the

⁴³ Moore, p.xi.

numbering alone indicate that the edition has to be treated with some caution. It is important to note that the numbering printed in Moore's index has been maintained in this thesis to avoid further confusion. A further question which leads to questions of accuracy is the fact that Moore specifies the chancellor as being Kempe not Stafford.⁴⁴

Muriel Curtis also highlighted certain problems with Moore's edition. In particular she identified certain omissions which she details in one of the appendices to her study.⁴⁵ The problem with being reliant on Moore's edition for analysing the letters is the fact that Moore collated many of the drafts and the copies of the manuscripts to provide a version of the texts for publication. He acknowledged this editorial decision and made notes at the bottom of the printed documents to this effect. For example, on his transcription of the Mayor's Articles of Complaint against the Bishop, Dean and Chapter (numbered XXX) Moore developed the text from fragments of the two drafts, which he distinguished as A and B for the purpose of collation. A further example is that of a letter Shillingford wrote from London on 2 November 1447. The main manuscript is a paper roll made up of four stitched sheets.⁴⁶ Moore notes that there is the original and draft of this letter and that he has collated these, adding in the words from the draft, which he places in squared brackets, to form the final version for the edition.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Moore, p.xvi.

⁴⁵ Curtis, *Disputes*, 71-76 and 76-85.

⁴⁶ DRO 1859.

⁴⁷ Moore, 8-17, (note at the bottom of p.8).

It is important to recognise that as well as this conflating of text there are changes in the original manuscripts that are not noted in the printed version. There does not appear to be consistency in the editorial decisions. Nor does there appear to be a standardisation of either the process or the notes that Moore makes of where there have been changes within the original text. These changes might have been deletions or additions of words or phrases or where words and phrases have been moved around the text, but Moore does not always include these important alterations.

Summary

An element of my preliminary work on the letters was to consider where the many changes that Shillingford made during the writing, and which are clearly apparent in the original extant manuscripts, were not noted in Moore's final printed version. It highlighted the care that was necessary in interpreting the texts. Where Moore's editorial decisions have had a bearing on my interpretation and analysis I have identified them. I have primarily worked on the texts from the photographs I took of the original manuscripts. However, I have used Moore's edition because I felt it was necessary to locate my work in the only printed source available and which has, and is, being used by other scholars working on the Exeter history and/or Shillingford's writing.

My research confirmed the importance that fifteenth-century producers of written evidence gave to the preservation of their writing. It showed how John Shillingford clearly saw the importance of his records, even in the working drafts

which he evidently produced when he was in London but retained and brought back to Exeter. In contrast to the Armburgh Roll the Shillingford letters and papers do not form one discrete manuscript but represent the lucky survival of many different pieces of written documents. It is this contrast, the fact that both the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters and papers present such a sound opportunity to compare the different forms of late-medieval personally written evidence, that has proved to be of fundamental value in this thesis in terms of our understanding of gentry attitudes towards their written documentation. I conclude, therefore, that understanding the physical artefacts is an essential element of the politics of the writing.

(iii) Theory and Methodology: the Politics of Vernacular Letter Writing

A principle aim of this thesis is to widen our analytical approach to late-medieval gentry vernacular letters and to develop a broader appreciation of their worth in terms of the period's historiography. A key factor in this undertaking is to develop our understanding of the politics of the writing. My purpose here is to set out the theoretical concepts that I see as important within that consideration as well as to further explain the methodology that I have used throughout the enquiry into the two letter collections. I also explore why I think that the comparison of these two particular sources is of value in the overall development of the thesis.

A Comparison of the Two Sources

As I have identified in the separate considerations of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters there are several differences in the character of the two collections. One of the main differences is in the number of personal letters and

papers that can be associated with Robert Armburgh as opposed to those that can be attributed to John Shillingford. This difference has had an impact on the balance of the thesis as I have focussed more on the Armburghs' texts. However, the significance of the Shillingford archive should not be underestimated. The emphasis of this thesis is to examine the individual personal writings and in the case of the Shillingford archive I felt that due consideration could not be given to the other formal documents which form a large part of the extant Exeter documentation (the articles of complaint, answers, replications and rejoinders).

Two further differences add to the appreciation and the analysis of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters: these are the time span over which the letters were written as well as the scope of the various issues that dominate the letters. The letters from John Shillingford to his fellow magistrates in Exeter were written over a period of just a few months at the end of 1447 to the beginning of 1448. This does of course give an immediacy to both their composition and reception which is important and considered in the close-reading. On the other hand the copy documents in the Armburgh Roll span over three decades and deal with many complex problems which can be seen to develop and change during this period. It is important to acknowledge the difference in the timings of the compositions as it allows us to consider how the sources can be used to investigate cultural attitudes towards history, memory and the preservation of textual evidence, over both a short and extended period of time. Equally, the range of familial and personal issues and societal concepts that are covered by the letters in the Armburgh Roll provide a rich source of material from which to enquire into the idea of gentry identity, culture and society. The themes available to consider from the Shillingford letters are limited

simply because the subject matter of the letters themselves is more limited in that they focus on one major concern, that of city and church's jurisdictional dispute.

The immediacy of John Shillingford's experiences is evident. He recorded and described his experiences in great detail, the effect of which was to give to his readers a seemingly accurate report of his activities. It would also seem he took care to ensure that the copies or the drafts were retained as a record of the creation of the recorded accounts. From Shillingford's approach to his writing we can see the practical function of writing letters; this is not just in the retention of the proof of the moment as a record, but in that the letters could also be regarded as a substitute for his presence.⁴⁸ The value of the letters as a means of performance, or conversation or engagement with the recipients, is evident from Shillingford's letters more than it is from the Armburgh letters. Shillingford's direct engagement with the immediate and day to day problems he encountered can be seen in the many alterations he made to his writing. The texts were working documents, not simply copies of the final sent scripts. There is the clear movement of thought processes which can be seen in the many amendments he made and the attention he gave to the choice of his words and phraseology. These alterations add to the sense that the writing was being considered as a record of the moment but far more that it was one that was being notably retained for a future purpose. Equally this detailed composition adds weight to the idea that the letters had a presence of their own that was perhaps thought to represent the writer and sender of the letter. Shillingford's attention to detail and meticulous noting therefore reflects the idea that his letters were indeed a substitute for his

⁴⁸ *Women's Writing in Middle English* ed. Alexandra Barratt (London & New York: Longman, 1992) 239. Barratt's observation on letters as substitute for presence stems from letter written by the Abbess of Denny, a strictly enclosed nun, to John Paston I c.1461-2 (p.257).

actual presence. Since he would not be present to expand or explain himself in person, his letters were carefully constructed to fulfil that role for him.

Late-Medieval Evidence retained as Personal Archives

The Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters indicate that the collection of archive material, within both personal and familial spheres, as well as the public domain, was increasingly important at the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁴⁹ Both of these sources, in different ways, attest to the importance that late-medieval gentry attached to the keeping of written evidence as identified in the appeal that Margaret Paston made to her son.⁵⁰ Indeed, all the letter collections attest to the significance of the creation of an archive, especially perhaps in times of personal conflict or during on-going legal disputes. A good example of the drawing together of written material is that of the collection of documents by John Fastolf.⁵¹ Richmond says that the point

⁴⁹ Two further manuscripts which indicate how texts were assembled and written are Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 and Lincoln MS both personal, private collections and the product of Robert Thornton, a North Yorkshire gentleman, and compiled in the fifteenth century. Erik Kooper, 'Sir Degrevant: Introduction', extract from *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, Robbins Library Digital Projects Middle English Text Series, accessed 11/11/14:

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/kooper-sentimental-and-humorous-romances-sir-degrevant-introduction>

⁵⁰ Davis, I, p.333. The history of a family was important in terms of its status and identity and evidence of the import of being able to secure the genealogy is found in the Pastons story where a royal declaration in 1466 detailing the deeds and ancestry of the Pastons has all the hallmarks of fabrication but it resolved the family's gentility, Davis, II, pp.551-52. For a discussion on the genealogical evidence for the Paston family see Davis, I, pp.xl-xlii, where he details: 'A *Remembraunce of the wurshyful Kyn and Auncetryre of Paston*' (a document compiled in the middle of the fifteenth century by an enemy of the Pastons to refute the Pastons' claims to their social status) and other documents that were recorded but are now lost. See also Helen Castor, *Blood & Roses: The Paston Family and the Wars of the Roses* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), 17.

⁵¹ The Fastolf archive of manuscripts is held at Magdalen College, Oxford.

that Fastolf kept his documents so carefully substantiates the fact that he, Fastolf, ‘constructed a contemporary archive’.⁵²

A further prime example of contemporary archival work is that of John Vale who copied and compiled a wide collection of documents (including personal letters) which had been in the possession or ownership of his employer Thomas Cook.⁵³ The purpose for the compilation remains unclear but the fact that the documents incorporated into the book were accumulated over a period of at least forty years is significant.⁵⁴ The documents that make up the Vale book cover a wide range of subjects and styles of documentation and there is no indication that there was an overall message to be read from the compilation.⁵⁵ It is in the act of compiling the documents into one comprehensive volume that the importance rests – just as it does in the drawing together of the Armburgh documents.

I suggest that the extended period over which the Armburgh letters were written, and the manner in which they were retained as copies, adds yet another dimension to our appreciation as to how fifteenth-century writers, readers and the audience to the personal writings might have regarded their own personal history and memory. This thesis argues that the compiler of the Armburgh Roll had a clear purpose, maybe understood the value of retaining an archive and aimed, in a

⁵² Colin Richmond, ‘Hand and Mouth: Information gathering and use in England in the later middle ages’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 No. 3 (1988), 233-52, (p.239).

⁵³ *The Politics of Fifteenth Century England: John Vale’s Book*, ed. M.L. Kekewich, C. Richmond, A. Sutton, L. Visser-Fuchs & J.L. Watts (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.x.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.x.

purposeful endeavour, to create a constructed, albeit biased, history archive of the Brokholes dispute.

Both the Fastolf and Vale collections have a political slant to the nature of many of the documents saved and therefore these compilations could be regarded as preserved to determine the wider political history, as recognised by their compilers. However, both collections also include many letters which are not on matters of great political concern and deal with more basic business matters which could equally indicate a more pragmatic approach to the preservation. Within the Paston letters there are examples of the letter writers' pragmatism where letters were used as prompts or reminders for work or transactions to be undertaken with notes added to the original letter and which were concurrent with the production of the letters.⁵⁶ What these examples represent are the means by which we can explore the questions of production, preservation and use of the letters, an important consideration in the two sources used here.

Materiality

The recent work carried out by James Daybell on letters from the early-modern period stands as a benchmark as to what can be achieved by considering the materiality of the extant documents alongside an enquiry into the practicalities of letter-writing. One of the fundamental arguments that Daybell puts forward is that

⁵⁶ A unique example of a woman's pragmatic engagement with business and how letters were used as business memoranda is found in the letters written by Margaret Paston to her husband John I regarding the running of the estates and where notes by John and his bailiffs have been added to her original correspondence. For example a series of letters dated to September 1465 of which two letters written on the same day survive and which John numbers as 'iiij' and 'v' bear notes in both English and Latin. Davis, I, pp.318-22 & Davis, I, p.322.

the letters can ‘only be fully understood by also paying attention to the “materiality” of the texts’.⁵⁷

An important aspect of my analysis of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford’s letters has been to consider the materiality of the documents. I have considered the practical elements of their production with the aim of establishing the reasoning behind the conservation. As a part of this I have seen it as essential to realise that not only do we consider the purpose or context of the texts but also be aware as to how this was translated into the physical article through the act of writing and the engagement with the language and choice of vocabulary. This aspect of my deliberation I have thought of as the emotional engagement that the writers may or may not have had with their writing. I have used the meaning of emotional in this context as expressive or communicative, but also sensitive, in that we need to see and regard how insightful the writers were in their compositions. Therefore, this idea of the emotional engagement with the processes of writing, the production of the texts, and the language choice underpins the close-reading of the texts examined in this thesis. To what extent there was an emotional engagement, both in the process of writing and in the ideas that were being expressed, or whether the letters represent an expression of subjective memory, are not questions that have yet been asked of the early letters of the fifteenth century.⁵⁸ This is largely because the fifteenth-century

⁵⁷ James Daybell, *The Material Letter In Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 10. Daybell’s analysis of the letters of the Early Modern period examines the cultural and social practices of letter-writing examining all aspects of the materiality, reception and preservation of the letters.

⁵⁸ The evaluation of the letters of the Early Modern period is more extensive with the work of James Daybell at the forefront, his works include: *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing 1450-1700*; *idem*.

letters remain unexplored in terms of their materiality and, therefore, the opportunity to regard the letters as artefacts which were in part created for memory has not been developed. An important caveat to this is the work carried out by Davis on the Paston letters. His editions of the letters allow us to appreciate the letters as material artefacts in that he provides a meticulous description of each letter and full details as to the nature of the text, vocabulary and scribal changes. In this respect his editions allow us to see the processes of composition behind the letters.⁵⁹

This understanding of the material form opens up the opportunity to consider whether or not the fifteenth-century letter writer engaged in the conceptual ideas of memory and remembrance. There are multiple meanings to the medieval words and concepts of memory and remembrance, but the ones that I consider to be of importance here are those that have a practical bias in terms of keeping a written record or account.⁶⁰

Memory

Women Letter-Writers In Tudor England, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); *idem. The Material Letter*.

⁵⁹ Davis, I, II and *Paston Letters* ed. Beadle and Richmond.

⁶⁰ The meanings of the medieval words - memory and remembrance - which are important to note: 'memorie' as detailed in the MED could be both conceptual as well as practical the meaning given include both: 1 'the faculty of memory'; 2(a) 'memory or recollection, awareness or consciousness, a state of mind, be mindful'; 5 'a written record, a chronical, biographical or historical account or the events in a person's recorded life'; 5 together with the association with writing, 'a record in writing, to write, set down details of a book'. 'remembraunce' – also had a conceptual aspect to it as in 1(a) 'a consideration, a thought or a reflection'; equally it could be 2(a) 'a physical memento, or keepsake' 2(b) 'a commemoration'; 2(c) it could also be used to mean 'a reminder or a warning, as the action of reminding' or 2(d) 'instruction or announcement'; 3 'a written record list or account, or to narrate': MED.

The concepts of memory and remembering, in terms of late-medieval culture and society, are complex and draw into consideration many overlapping questions and concerns. For example, these questions must involve the subjects of literacy, literate practice, literate mentality, as well as the social changes associated with increased reading and writing, writing techniques, language use.⁶¹ Mary Carruthers' study on memory remains a landmark in this field.⁶² She challenged the assumption that a rise in the literate culture and the move away from an oral society would devalue the concept and practice of memory. She examines how writing was recognised as the means to memory as: 'the written page was understood to be a memory device'.⁶³

A comparative analysis of these the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters indicates how we can assess memory by an appraisal of contemporary approaches to remembering and creating of contemporaneous records of recent events. Here, the ideas expressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his seminal work *Truth and Method*, are of exceptional value in helping us in our appreciation of these early innovative

⁶¹ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*: Clanchy explores the ideas of a literate culture and literate mentality where he comments on literacy as not just a question of provision of clerks or education as the effect of increased literate skills but that it gave rise to 'changes in the way people articulated their thoughts, both individually and collectively in society', 185-96, (pp.186-7; p.186).

⁶² Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory, A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). In this study Carruthers explores the complex craft of 'memory' as understood during the Middle Ages. See also, *The Medieval Craft of Memory* ed. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). The general introduction provides a good framework for understanding contemporary thoughts on memory, 1-31. See also M. T. Clanchy, 'Remembering the Past and The Good Old Law', *History*, 55, (1970), 165-76: Clanchy evaluates the way that the move for remembering developed from the oral to the written transmission of law and history and how this challenges our historical interpretation of societies in the transition between the oral and the written.

⁶³ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, Abstract & 10-11.

writings and the writers' desire for an unassailable written record in that, as he states: 'The written word has the tangible quality of something that can be demonstrated and is like a proof'.⁶⁴ In our evaluations this constantly needs to be reaffirmed.

The Context of Letter Writing Practice: Writing and Recording

A vital change which took place in a relatively short period of time from the end of the fourteenth century through the early decades of the fifteenth century was the move from Anglo-Norman to English as the primary language used for the majority of correspondences. Equally as Malcolm Richardson identifies there were changes in the letter-writing practices themselves. He states that the disappearance of the formal structure of letter-writing, the *ars dictaminis*, was brought about because of changing social relationships simultaneous with the widening of the social classes of the actual letter-writers. This, he comments, included the rise of common lawyers, the law-related professions and a weakness in civil law.⁶⁵ It is, I would argue, a crucial consideration in our historiographical understanding to be sensitive to both of these profound changes and consider how they might impact on our attitudes when evaluating the writing.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edn., Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 272.

⁶⁵ Malcolm Richardson, 'The Fading Influence of the Medieval *Ars Dictaminis* in England After 1400.' *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19, (2001), 225-47 (p.246).

⁶⁶ The contemporary recognition of how rapid changes were taking place during this period is classically recalled by the words of William Caxton who recognised and was impressed by the 'shifting currency of words' and Caxton's words of 1490 resonate with an awareness of the politics of language:

'And certainly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that whiche was vsed and spoken whan I was borne. ...And thus bytwene playn, rude, and curyous, I stande abasshed; but in my iudgemente the comyn termes that be dayli vsed ben lyghter to be vnderstonde than the olde and auntyent Englysshe'

Modern society is dependent upon the written word. We live and function within a culture that exists on the foundation of written language and communications, setting great store by the paper, and electronic trail, of written records and not thinking of the spoken language except in relation to its printed or written form.⁶⁷ It is essential, if we are to satisfactorily appreciate the personal writings, that we recognise the considerable changes that have taken place in a world where those who could read and write were in the minority to a world where to read and write is the norm. Chaytor comments:

to disregard the matter and to criticise medieval literature as though it had just been issued by the nearest circulating library is a sure and certain road to a misconception of the medieval spirit.⁶⁸

In 'Remembering the Past', Clanchy comments on the differing attitudes between a literate and illiterate society and their recall or remembering of their history and their laws. He examines how changes from remembering by the process of oral repetition to recording in writing changed both the way that society assessed its history but also how a constant awareness of this is crucial for the historian writing of those societal changes:

Quote taken from Norman Davis, 'The Language of the Pastors', in *Middle English Literature, British Academy Gollancz Lectures* ed. by J.A. Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 45-70, (p. 45).

⁶⁷ H.J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1966), 6.

⁶⁸ Chaytor, *From Script to Print*, 4.

To appreciate the changes which writing brings about the historian has to be aware of the characteristics of the remembered past, just as the student of the industrial revolution has to understand the agricultural past.⁶⁹

Letter-writers' Use of History

Within the Shillingford letters there are examples of when Shillingford recalled and used the history and the records of the city and the manner in which he wrote and incorporated them indicate that these were of importance in the negotiations. There are two aspects to this, first that Shillingford used the history of Exeter to support the city's claims but also that he included, in detail, how he discussed it with the chancellor.⁷⁰ By doing so he reaffirmed both his position and the city's position through the discussions surrounding the city's historic past and therefore incorporating aspects of Exeter's political and social history. Shillingford's ability to both inform and relate the nature of the debates incorporated the many complicated issues surrounding the historic establishment of the fees. When writing his reports of the discussions he had had with the justices and the chancellor he revealed how these were considered. For example, his response when the church's view point had been expressed was to rebut the argument by reference to Domesday:

He seide that they claymed a viw and that they hadde used moche thyng, &c.
and he seide hit was aunsion demene. And y seide nay, and proved hit by

⁶⁹ Clanchy, 'Remembering the Past', 166.

⁷⁰ Attreed, 'Urban Identity', 571-92: 'Both the city and cathedral parties turned to Domesday Book and a mid-thirteenth century custumal to bolster their position. The ambiguous nature of the former's entries for Exeter could have encouraged friction since the 11th century' (quote taken from p. 574, n.4).

Domesday, and so were on grete argamentes by longe tyme, to longe to write: all hit was to tempte me w[ith] laghyng chere.⁷¹

The language Shillingford used in his reporting is of value in helping us to understand how immediate events were being expressed in the correspondence but also how history and historic events could be woven into the fabric of the letters. For example, the word ‘reherced’ or ‘reherce’ is frequently used. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines ‘reherce’ as: ‘a description or to run through a narrative or a history’ as well as also being a legal term meaning ‘to recite aloud a list of charges, a plea or court record’.⁷² These significant words and phrases would have provided without need of further explanations an immediate impression as to how the points were being argued or dealt with, that the matters were being considered correctly and within a legal or formal framework:

Y seide yee, as suche fees as beth ther on towne, and reherced hym of vij.
and that alle were parcell of the cite: and among other y rehersed hym of
Seynt Nicholas fe.⁷³

Understanding the placement of the vocabulary, and the inherent meanings that lie behind such words as ‘reherce’ provide one of the ways by which we can more fully

⁷¹ Moore, 10: DRO 1859.

⁷² ‘reherce’: 1(a) ‘to narrate, report, tell, describe’; 2(a) ‘to impart, explain, give an account of’ : MED. Also see *The Piers Plowman Tradition*, ed. Helen Barr (London: Dent, 1993), 265. From Richard the Redeless, ‘rehercid’ was also a legal term meaning to recite aloud a list of charges, a plea or a court record; J.A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), 130.

⁷³ Moore, 10: DRO 1859.

appreciate the politics of the writing. As an integral part of my methodology and throughout the thesis I examine words that I have considered to be of especial significance to meaning, context and structure.

Gabrielle Spiegel's, *The Past as Text* is of significance when considering Shillingford's attitude towards the city's history.⁷⁴ Spiegel's study provides insights into both how we should interpret medieval texts while at the same time considering how contemporaries were engaging with their histories in their writing. She examines how the medieval chroniclers 'viewed and used the past to explain and legitimate politics' and how the examination of medieval historiographical practice can enlighten our own understanding of medieval culture.⁷⁵ She explores how the writing of the chroniclers of Saint-Denis, who were writing from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, provides a rich resource for looking at attitudes towards historical writing, commenting that: 'the recollection of the past was not just memory; it was also and perhaps more important, the promise of a future'.⁷⁶ Spiegel focuses on earlier writers, such as Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis from the twelfth century, but her ideas have wider relevance, offering an invaluable theoretical and methodological perspective from which to view the practice of letter writing in the later medieval period:

Medieval historiography offers an excellent subject for investigating the function of the past in medieval political life, for surely few complex

⁷⁴ Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁷⁵ Ibid. 83-84; 163-177.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 177.

societies have so clearly regulated their life in accordance with their vision of history. Medieval social life was governed by custom, that is, historical precedent, so much so that even innovations in social and legal practices were given the force of custom. As custom, social practice was both legitimized and made prescriptive: because it was customary it was *ipso facto* good and, because good, to be followed.⁷⁷

In Shillingford's writing we see how his interpretation of the past really could become a 'vehicle for change' and how he endeavoured to recreate the image of the city of Exeter and then claim its 'authority for the legitimation of contemporary practices'.⁷⁸ The concepts as to how history was used, as put forward by Spiegel, can be seen in Shillingford's letters. In his writing Shillingford engaged with, and manipulated, the city's history, recognised its importance and used it to suit the purposes of the city. What is important, however, in terms of the politics of his letter writing, and for us in acknowledging the importance of his letters as a source, is that this use of the history of the city was an integral part of how he nuanced his letters. While we cannot know for certain just how Shillingford's long and personal experiences within the government and politics of Exeter might have influenced him it is important to recognise that his letters do reflect the city's history

⁷⁷ Ibid. 84.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 86: Spiegel's quotations in looking at the analogies in the tradition of the Trojan legends, but it is appropriate to Shillingford and the Exeter authorities who espoused the myth of Vespasian in terms of the Exeter dispute to legitimise their position. The Mayor's Articles of Complaint against the Bishop, Dean and Chapter details the history of Exeter from the time before the 'encarnation of Christ' and how the city was besieged by Vespasian; the story amused the chancellor, 'my lorde seide furste merily of Vaspasianus': Moore, 75-76 (the text in Moore is a collation of fragments of two draft rolls): DRO 1859; Moore, 12: DRO 1859.

and its experiences and that custom and precedent would have been integral to any of the opinions that Shillingford expressed.

Language and Experience

The appreciation of the link between experience and language might seem an obvious one but its value in examining these texts cannot be underestimated. Robert Stein, who presents a comprehensive analysis in the use of literary techniques for the reading of historical texts, states in his essay on literary criticism:

humanity is enmeshed in the webs of significance made from a world constantly spoken about, written about and argued about in language. Experience is thus not something that happens ‘outside’ of language, something that language can follow after in order to give a more or less truthful account. Rather experience ... is something that always occurs in a world already spoken about, a world already saturated with meanings, already filled with language. Language is thus, in the first instance, always implicated in experience.⁷⁹

This thesis is based on a belief that the vocabulary, and the way in which the confrontational ideas were expressed, formed a part of the standard vernacular discourse of conflict. By accepting that there was a high incidence of dispute and that participation in the legal processes was a part of everyday existence, it follows that the associated vocabulary was equally commonplace and used as a matter of routine in legal debate. Although the study of law and literature has been closely

⁷⁹ Robert M. Stein, ‘Literary criticism and the evidence for history’, in *Writing Medieval History* ed. Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 67-87, (p.68).

allied, this is not the case regarding gentry letters and their personal writing.⁸⁰ John Alford's study of the legal language from *Piers Plowman* highlights the need to re-examine vocabulary to see both the subtleties of its use and its inherent meanings.⁸¹ Alford looks at William Langland's language identifying how much of the vocabulary had legal significance. He identifies that the meanings of many words would have been readily recognised as having a status in terms of law but over time they have been absorbed into contemporary commonplace vocabulary which no longer has the resonance this had in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁸² Hence to expand our understanding of late- medieval legal conflicts, the words and innate meanings of the customary legal language must be closely evaluated.

Literary appreciation of the language has become an established route and in his study on the meaning of the Middle English word '*trouthe*', Richard Firth Green sets a methodological bench mark for this form of analysis. He identifies the changes of this word from a primary meaning of integrity to the meaning we would see in 'truth' as establishing or an established fact. He examines the shift in meaning as a part of the development away from an oral towards a written culture set alongside the changes in legal thought and practice.⁸³ Firth Green's ideas, as well as the

⁸⁰ John A. Alford, 'Literature and Law in Medieval England', *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 92 (1977), 941-51.

⁸¹ John A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988).

⁸² *Ibid.* For a useful explanation of Alford's study and its purpose see the introduction, pp.ix-xx.

⁸³ Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

concept behind ‘law words’ (used specifically within a legal context) as well as understanding ‘keywords’ (words seen as socially significant), support this thesis.⁸⁴

The Armburgh and Shillingford documents provide a rare opportunity to see the vocabulary as it was directly used to frame these arguments, and in this the identification and appreciation of the use of law words or keywords is crucial. Essentially these two sources provide the opportunity to examine the idiomatic language of dissent and to see how that language was used to reflect the personal concerns of those directly involved in these types of dispute. In this respect the letters give us the opportunity to evaluate the individual voices of the protagonists. In both the Armburgh and Shillingford letters the individuality and personal character of the writing are key features which provide documentary evidence of legal conflict that is not restricted to or restrained by the formality found within the majority of the period’s other legal records. For example, petitions made to the courts and to chancery are the most frequently assessed form of evidence in similar legal cases.⁸⁵ The language of petitions and court records has provided a sound base for understanding vernacular development throughout the fifteenth century and the importance of that is not underestimated by this study.⁸⁶ This thesis aims to

⁸⁴ Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth*, 10-13. For a consideration of keywords which can be seen as socially significant vocabulary and how this vocabulary framed and shaped the various genre of writing, see also Andrew Galloway, ‘The Making of a Social Ethic in Late-Medieval England: From Gratitude to “Kyndenesse”’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 55, (1994), 365-83.

⁸⁵ Williams, ‘English Vernacular Letters’, 114-53; Williams considers civic petitions in terms of identifying identity and power and how petitions could be seen as similar to letters with similar epistolary conventions and language.

⁸⁶ John H. Fisher, ‘Chancery and the Emergence of Standard Written English in the Fifteenth Century’, *Speculum*, 52 (1977), 870-99; Gwilym Dodd, ‘The Rise of English, the Decline of French: Supplications to the English Crown, c.1420-1450’, *Speculum*, 86 (2011), 117-50; *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Collette and Garrett-Goodyear: the section ‘The English Languages’ - 16-44, (p.18, p.30) -

complement the understanding of those language studies, but nonetheless stresses that it is the plain customary writing that is potentially more revealing in determining the everyday language of law and conflict. It is within these direct and personal compositions that there is a greater chance of recovering the unmediated voice of the person behind the text.⁸⁷ We are engaging in some of the earliest personal texts that were being composed in the vernacular and this certainly raises the question as to whether they were also being composed in the language of everyday speech and whether they represent some of the earliest chances we have to engage with idiomatic language use.

Both Shillingford and the Armburghs were writing of their personal experiences and as this thesis will show it is evident, from the close textual reading, that the carefully crafted language allows us to perceive how experience was related or explained. It also allows us to appreciate how the writers employed experience to suit their purposes. This is particularly true of Robert's letters; he was adept at employing and manipulating the recollection of incidents to direct his requests or instructions.

provides an overview of the use of English and its development which indicates how the writing style in the vernacular was reflecting both 'lively and engaging writing' and which was showing the development of many different registers as, for example, within the prose format which related to the use of English in a variety of civic discourses and formal documentation.

⁸⁷ Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In this study Beattie considers the question of the unmediated voice and how the petitions to chancery do not offer the unmediated voice of the petitioner. She assesses how the structure and rewording of a petition through the services of a lawyer would be achieved to fit the formulaic structure of chancery petitions.

The letters of both Shillingford and Armburgh are prime examples of experience. A main focus of my methodology has been to move the consideration of these fifteenth-century letters away from a narrative approach to the reading of the text, a style that scholars of the late-medieval period, who have considered the letters, have tended to adopt.⁸⁸ One of my major objectives in this thesis is to consider not just what the letter-writers say but rather to examine how they say it. A clear aim is to develop a critical close-reading that looks at the skilled employment and manipulation of the language of the everyday writer and to show that it is a method which can be utilised to explore all late-medieval vernacular personal writing.⁸⁹

Audience

It is crucial to our understanding of the letters that we address the question of audience or the reader and/or the recipient(s) of these communications. The perception and understanding of audience, and issues of authorial intent which sit behind the writing, are all essential considerations. There is no doubt, in all forms of writing not just in correspondences, that the language used and the audience are inextricably linked. Indeed, what and how we write reflects what we consider or know to be our ultimate audience.⁹⁰ J. Allan Mitchell, in his examination of John

⁸⁸ Noble, *World of the Stonors*: Noble talks of the letter collections being ‘mined’ for illustrative material: 3-4.

⁸⁹ As a background to the consideration as to how language was being adapted and used in the political arena and as a base for a methodological study of vernacular language see Jean-Philippe Genet, ‘New Politics or New Language? The Words of Politics in Yorkist and Early Tudor England’, in *The End of the Middle Ages? England in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* ed. John Watts (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 23-64.

⁹⁰ Paul Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 1-19. Strohm’s ideas on audience are especially pertinent,

Gower and John Lydgate, comments that it has always been a ‘requirement of rhetoric’ to ‘suit the message to the audiences.’ He quotes from Lydgate: ‘And lyke the audience so vttre they language’, (And according to your audience so utter your language).⁹¹ This is equally true of the epistolary genre as of the literary and therefore in terms of the analysis of the personal and individual letters we need to have an awareness of who they were written for as it underpins our reading of the text and our ultimate interpretation.

Here, I think it is important to recognise that our understanding of audience is far less nuanced than the late-medieval understanding would have been. We are now removed from the root of the word with its close associations to the Latin ‘audire’ (meaning – to hear) and perceive or simply visualise audience as a group of people who view or listen to an event; and although this is one of the late-medieval meanings, there are more subtleties to its meaning and use in medieval texts.⁹² In the section which follows I will be looking at the verse that is included in the Armburgh Roll and set out my reasons for why I think its inclusion is of such significance. A substantive argument as to its inclusion rests with the idea of the audience of the

9-11. A brief appreciation of audience and authorial intent can also be found in Andrew Butcher, ‘The functions of script in the speech community of a late medieval town, c.1300-1500’, in *The Use of Script and Print 1300-1700*, ed. Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 157-170 (p.160). Audience or readers for literary texts have been an essential consideration for literature studies and for understanding of the language see ‘Addressing and Positioning the Audience’ in *The Idea of the Vernacular – An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280-1520* ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor & Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 109-208, in particular the introductory section, 109-16.

⁹¹ J. Allen Mitchell, ‘John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture’ in *A Companion to Medieval English* ed. Brown, 569-84, (p.579).

⁹² See OED; the MED gives four meanings: 1(a) ‘capacity for hearing or listening’; 2(a) ‘a group of listeners’; 3(a) ‘an opportunity to be heard, to receive a hearing’; 4 ‘a spoken discourse or message, by word of mouth, hearsay, or by report’.

Roll. However, I include here a line that I suggest assists us in understanding something of a contemporary thought towards audience, as being predominantly the hearing of a message and its careful and respectful consideration: ‘Besechyng yow that ye audience therof not disdeigne’ (*AP* 159). Therefore, when developing the ideas as to who was the intended or actual audience of the letters, it is important to reconsider what we understand by audience and to associate it much more to the idea of hearing or listening to a message.

This approach gives not only a substance to whom the recipient(s) or readers might have been but, at the same time, helps keep at the forefront of the analysis the fact that these letters were composed for an oral transmission and reception (the practice of private or silent reading was not customary at this time). Letters were themselves far from private missives and the incorporation of an additional message to be given orally by the carrier of the letter or the appointed messenger was often as much a part of the communication as the written material.

The Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters present us with different circumstances from which to evaluate the intended audience or addressees. We know the intended recipients of the Shillingford letters, his fellow civic peers back in Exeter, whom he addressed as ‘Worthy sirs’ and also ‘ryght feyne ffrendis and ffelows’.⁹³ We can, therefore, appreciate the equality in the relative status and identity of those for whom Shillingford was composing and crafting his letters. We also know many of the named recipients of the Armburgh letters and can in many instances determine their relationships to the Armburghs and their relative social

⁹³ See for example letter 24 May 1448, Moore, 67: DRO Folder.

status. As I have identified these details as to the names appear to have been added as an after-thought perhaps when the Roll was in its final stages of completion.

The difference between the two collections is that Shillingford was writing for an associated group, his letters were not written for an individual, nor were they anything other than public missives to be shared amongst his fellow magistrates. The Armburgh letters were written to one or at most two/three individuals; we could therefore consider these to be private correspondences. As stated it is important to keep the thought about audience to the fore when looking at the individual texts as well as when considering the collections in their totality.

Opening Epistolary Conventions

A significant element of my methodological approach to the Armburgh Roll was to consider who the recipients of the letters were; this aspect had an influence on my interpretation of the individual letters. I undertook a detailed analysis of all the epistolary conventions. The background to this part of the research was developed from an evaluation of the studies that have analysed medieval letter-writing techniques and the epistolary conventions and those which were based upon an appreciation of *ars dictaminis*.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Alexander Bergs, *Social Networks and Historical Sociolinguistics – Studies in Morphosyntactic Variation in the Paston Letters (1421-1503)* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005); Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau & Cecile Dauphin, (translated by Christopher Woodall), *Correspondence Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997); Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections* (Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1976); Minna Nevala, *Address in Early English Correspondence – Its Forms and Socio-Pragmatic Functions* (Helsinki: Societe Neophilologique Helsinki, 2004); Richardson, ‘Notes toward an alternative rhetoric’; *idem*. ‘The Fading Influence of the Medieval *Ars Dictaminis* in England After 1400.’ *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19(2) (2001), 225-47; Teresa Sanchez Roura, ‘What’s Left of *Captatio Benevolentiae* in 15th Century English Letters?’, *Neophilologische*

The advantage this detailed evaluation of the phraseology used in the epistolary conventions was that it established a framework from which I could further determine the relative relationships of the writer and recipient. This laid the foundation for the appreciation of the content and context of the letters and the assessment of the key themes of worship, identity, status and friendship which are integral to the thesis.

The conventional openings to the letters in the Armburgh Roll form a part of the original copy text whereas the actual names of the recipients are outside the main body of the text and only associated with the text by being placed alongside the letters in the margins. It is important to note that although the conventional openings are included as a part of the text, the text rarely includes the closing conventional phrases or any means of dating the letters. In both instances the opening and closing conventions are the main indicators as to the status and identity of both the writer and the recipient and their relationship, however, with the opening conventions obviously being the most significant of these.

In terms of the retention of the letters as evidence for the dispute there are important questions as to why and for what purpose the opening conventions were seen as so significant whereas the names and the dates of writing were not.⁹⁵ The answer must surely rest in the influence that the acceptance of status and identity and

Mitteilungen (2001), 317-38; J.R. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984): the entries on 'Rhetoric' 10, pp.317-38 and 'Dictamen' 4, pp.173-77; see also Rosenthal, *Telling Tales*: 118-31.

⁹⁵ The letters in *John Vale's Book* are similarly recorded with opening conventions included and not the name of the intended addressee nor dates, seals, or place of writing. See examples: *John Vale's Book*, ed. Kekewich, *et.al.*, 162-69.

the significance of the hierarchical order had throughout the late-medieval period. Even during the early to middle decades of the fifteenth century a period where there was a gradual loosening of the feudal or hierarchical ties, the ideological concept of hierarchy still founded the societal structure. Conventions were still seen as a fundamental part of the epistolary art and the techniques of the *ars dictaminis*.⁹⁶ It could be that this was a standard format for the copying of such letters into a retained copy manuscript. Certainly the evidence from the Armburgh Roll helps us to further understand the way conventional terms and address were still regarded as essential and important in reflecting hierarchical attitudes by the very fact that they were incorporated into the texts.

The analysis of conventions has formed an essential part of my enquiry into the Armburghs, the letters and the purpose behind the Roll. Understanding the conventional placements as a part of the political constructs of the individual letters is important. My contention is that the issue of the Armburghs' status and identity was fundamental to the overall message that was being constructed throughout the Roll and to the protection of their worship and virtue. It therefore follows that in terms of the overall representation of the Armburghs' position within their social sphere and the fact that this representation impacted on their ability to resolve the inheritance dispute, establishing the relative status of those to whom they are writing was fundamental. Standard practice, it might well have been, to include the conventional phrases at the beginning of each entry, but it also established and

⁹⁶ Williams, 'English Vernacular Letters', 34-45, presents a comprehensive analysis of the fifteenth-century learnt art of letter-writing providing evidence for the teaching of letter-writing; she also addresses the current debates over use and format of conventional epistolary techniques.

framed the content and context of the letter for the final reader of the copied document.

In my enquiry into the opening conventions and the relative status of the writer/recipient I realised there were certain questions with regard to Robert's relationships with those he was writing to that needed to be resolved; for example, the relative status of Robert with his brother William. Carpenter suggests that William was the elder brother but, based upon the conventional openings seen in Robert's writing to William and William's writing to Robert, this has to be challenged.⁹⁷ There are two letters which Carpenter determines are from William Armburgh to Robert written in the early years of the 1440s but before 1443.⁹⁸ The opening conventions of these two letters suggest that William could be the younger brother, due to the use of 'reuerent and worschipfull' in the addressing which would suggest an inferior writing to a superior. Worshipful was a part of the common address to a gentleman, or even a noble.⁹⁹ Whereas Robert writing to William addresses him with the simpler, lower (or also equal) status format of, 'My dere and welbeloued brother', 'Dere and Welbeloued', or as in one instance (and most unusually) not including a conventional opening at all instead going directly into the body and business of the letter.¹⁰⁰

Messengers

⁹⁷ AP 7.

⁹⁸ AP 186-87, n.461.

⁹⁹ Williams, 'English Vernacular Letters', summary of conventions in the Appendix Salutations, 108-13.

¹⁰⁰ AP 102-23; AP 110-11; AP 127-28; AP 128-29.

A further consideration is that of the role of the messenger. In Robert's letter to his brother William, in which he included a private letter to their other brother John, with the request that the letter be opened and discussed between them, we begin to see the question of confidentiality developing.¹⁰¹ Up to this stage of epistolary development, and indeed into the later part of the fifteenth-century, confidential additions to the messages could be given orally by the security of a messenger. The means of delivery and transmission of other messages alluded to in the letters is another important aspect in the development of the background to the analysis of both these sources. Again the comparison between the Shillingford letters and the Roll is of significance. Within the Armburgh letters there are frequent references to the carrier or messenger or servant who was delivering the letter, how he would have further information to provide or was to be given due recognition as to his authority to act on Robert's behalf. This use of messengers was common practice and followed the oral tradition of sending messages.¹⁰² The Shillingford letters open the opportunity to see how the messengers, or those acting as deputies, could be directed or instructed. There are five examples of John Shillingford's instructions to his deputies in Moore's edition of the papers.¹⁰³ In terms of the politics of the writing these instructions are valuable, both in terms of their content and in terms of their materiality. Oral messages are frequently alluded to in letters

¹⁰¹ AP 128-29.

¹⁰² H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 120-23. The analysis of the messengers mentioned in the Paston letters indicates that the majority were known and trustworthy servants or retainers.

¹⁰³ Moore, 29-31: DRO Folder; Moore, 31-32: DRO Folder; Moore, 42-49: DRO, Folder; Moore, 51-53: DRO Folder; Moore, 54-59: DRO Folder. There is also a memorandum sent to be delivered to the chancellor Moore, 59-60: DRO Folder and a response from one of the deputies Moore, 61-65: DRO Folder.

and messengers were valued for adding to the written message. It is therefore not an unusual form of communicating and is used as a means of adding weight to the written communication. It is important to recognise the difference between the letters in the Roll and Shillingford's instructions: for example in the Armburgh letters, the additional message is rarely expressed and more frequently just alluded to; here in the instructions the messages are articulated at length.

As material evidence the idea of drafts or retained copies with the originals having been sent, present us with the opportunity to look at the detail of the different patterns of thought through the alterations that were made. Certainly we might expect to see alterations to the text where letters or petitions were being drawn up and where the author wanted to ensure that the written message was not open to misinterpretation. There seems to be less of a justification for changes to the text where the piece was being sent to inform a messenger or deputy and which was effectively been written as an oral directive. My assessment of this is that clarity was an essential consideration in the writing process and that all written missives were therefore regarded with equal respect. Perhaps we should deduce the acknowledged importance given to the exact wording of the instructions in order to accurately inform the deputy, acting as messenger, because it would be he who would then be making the final interpretation to the end recipient. I include two examples where Shillingford wrote to his deputies. Firstly to Richard Druell:

After this recommendacion and thankys ye shall remembre my Lord how ye laste departed fro hym and sh[gap in text] to reherce to hym the articulis

that comyth to yowre mynde, that beth comprehended yn the olde enstrucc[ion].¹⁰⁴

And on another occasion to William Spere:

This mater write yn hast I praye yow to understonde hit well, and by the avyse of Dowryssh to amende the makynge thereof, if nede be, and then to write hit clene, and have hit yn youre hond when ye speke with my Lord Chaunceller as for yowre instruccion.¹⁰⁵

Spere is charged to understand the message well and then instructed as to how the memorandum and letter are to be presented and even copied anew if the original looks unclean: ‘to write hit clene’, and to have it there in his [Spere’s] hand when he speaks to the chancellor. The instructions are specific about how the message is to be handed over. It indicates that the message itself might be received badly if the whole procedure is not properly carried through by the messengers, Spere and Dowryssh.

The manner in which Shillingford formatted the instructions suggests the nature of a dialogue which is reinforced by the linking phraseology of: ‘ye shall seye’ or ‘ye shall enfourme’.¹⁰⁶ Not only can they be read as direct instructions as in, ‘Also ye shall seye to my seid lord’ but can be placed in more complex directions as in, ‘ye shall seye to my lord that the Maier yeveth yow yn commaundement to

¹⁰⁴ Moore, 54: DRO Folder.

¹⁰⁵ Moore, 60: DRO Folder.

¹⁰⁶ Moore 32; 43: DRO Folder.

seye'.¹⁰⁷ Here there is both a direction and a means of providing responsibility and authority to the deputy. Shillingford both directs, 'ye shall seye to my lord' and then, in an official capacity, he gives over the authorisation, 'the Maier yeveth yow yn commaundement', and uses phrases that direct how the message is to be delivered, 'ye shall praye', 'ye shall enfourme'.¹⁰⁸ The responsibility of the deputy and/or messenger as a part of the recall of the negotiations can also be evaluated when Shillingford wrote:

ye Druell beyng present at that tyme and at every doying and comunicacion sithen; wherof y pray yow to remembre yow right well and enfourme my lorde of all thyng truely.¹⁰⁹

Received Letters

All of the main gentry correspondences, the Pastons, Stonors, Plumpton and Celys, provide evidence as to the way in which letter-writing in the vernacular was a central feature of managing the gentry business concerns. The Paston letters, because of the extensive number and character of the extant documents, are especially rich in this consideration of letter-writing. The Stonor letters present a different aspect in that the collection principally consists of received letters. The feature of received letters is important in as much as it further reveals the extent of the customary use of written communications as well as the significance attached to their retention. They show how the habitual use of letters written in English had become, over a relatively

¹⁰⁷ Moore, 32: DRO Folder; Moore, 29: DRO Folder

¹⁰⁸ Moore, 43-44: DRO Folder.

¹⁰⁹ Moore, 46: DRO Folder.

short period of years from the end of the fourteenth century to the middle decades of the fifteenth century, an essential aspect of the literate gentry culture.

With regard to the Armburgh Roll we know that the correspondence, especially with the Mancetter tenants, was reciprocal. Robert alluded to their received letters in his own letters; but they were not copied into the Roll. Harpour and Barbour certainly wrote to Robert and he referenced their letters to him on several occasions: ‘I grete yow wele and as touchyng the maters contyned in your letre that ye desirid I shuld haue done for yow’ (*AP* 111); ‘I gret you wel and there as ye wrot to me in your letter that I shuld make attorne in the chancerie’ (*AP* 116). It can of course only be conjecture as to why Robert included the letters from those involved in the Mancetter advowson whereas he did not include those from his tenants. My conclusion is that Robert must have seen these received letters and the content in their messages positively in terms of the situation over the advowson and Joan’s will as they added further information as to how he had been frustrated and unable to resolve the situations.

Close-reading: An example from the Armburgh Roll

The ideas that I have put forward regarding the politics of the writing of the vernacular letters can be drawn together by the close-reading of an example of one of Robert’s later letters. It is a letter which was written by Robert to John Rugeley, the abbot of Merevale, in late 1449 or early 1450.¹¹⁰ The letter concerned the problems of the lands given in exchange for the Mancetter advowson and that Robert had received no income following the exchange. The conventional opening,

¹¹⁰ *AP* 69-70.

‘Worshipful and reurent sir I commaunde me to you’ is followed by the reminder to Rugeley of Robert’s situation. Appropriately Robert uses a ‘text of holy writte...sic fient nouissimi primie and primie nouissimi’ (*AP* 69).¹¹¹ This emphasised that he was the first to seal the deed of exchange but the last to receive any money from the manor that came in exchange for the church: ‘I rescevyd neuer a peny’ (*AP* 70).

The tone of the letter is one of a strongly worded, but carefully couched, rebuke to one of superior status to Robert. The construction of the message is carefully framed by the use of religious texts as reminders: ‘yf it please you I wolle put you in remembrans of a text of holy writte’, and ‘I put you thys text in remembrans for this entent’. The conventional construct and the use of the religious maxim reaffirmed the abbot’s status giving due deference to his erudite position. Robert’s use of the phrases, ‘in remembrans’ and ‘be remembryd’, are equally well placed in that they recall the events but also turn the message into an active one.¹¹²

The letter is both giving information that needed to be acted upon as well as reminding Rugeley of his moral duty in the fulfilment of the promises over the advowson exchange. Both of these sides of the message are emphasised by the references made to Robert’s servant (and messenger), William Lenton, ‘the bringer of thys letter my seruant and rent gaderer’ (*AP* 70) whom Robert requested was given ‘credans’ by Rugeley to act on Robert’s behalf with the tenants to collect the

¹¹¹ Vulgate Matthew 20 v.16. Translated as: ‘So shall the last be first and the first last’.

¹¹² The nuanced meaning of ‘remembrance’ has to be considered; here the meaning of – ‘a reminder, warning’, with the emphasis on the action of reminding and instruction – seems an appropriate interpretation: see MED meaning 2(c).

due rent.¹¹³ Again Robert placed the responsibility onto Rugeley in the hope and expectation that Rugeley would facilitate Robert's demand that he would receive his due rent. Robert concluded his request with the conventional promise that he would reciprocate: 'I trust to God to do you soche seruise that schall do you greet ese and fortheryng in tyme coming.' However, the letter does not end there; when Robert recalled a request made to him by Rugeley to secure the farm at Mancetter for Rugeley's own man, John Atherstone, Robert commented: 'And as tochyng the letter that ye sent me for your welbelouyd seruant John Attherston I schall do alle that I may to serve your entent' (*AP* 70).¹¹⁴ Even in this simple phrasing there are indications of careful thought within the composition where John Attherston, was not simply recognised as a servant, but significantly, a 'welbelouyd seruant'.

This letter stands as an example that could be used to build the narrative of the dispute but a close-reading reveals the subtlety with which Robert composed his letters. The writing has all the hall-marks of the conventional politeness, but bordering on the obsequious.

Conclusion

In this section of the sources chapter I have set out to establish both the theoretical as well as the methodological framework of what is the central feature of this thesis, namely the politics of the writing of the letters. As this aspect of the thesis has shown none of the considerations of theory, methodology or a comparative

¹¹³ William Lenton – a messenger that Robert used on many occasions in the period 1449-1452: see *AP* 68-70, *AP* 72, *AP* 77, *AP* 168, *AP* 172 & *AP* 182,

¹¹⁴ *AP* 34-35, *AP* 49; Robert was in a difficult position over the farm at Mancetter and he finally had to accept a farmer not of his choosing.

of the sources are in themselves discrete. It is the interdependence of the different forms of approaches that adds to the strength of the development of what I contend is a new way of approaching these important personal texts. From these approaches we can widen our critical enquiry into late-medieval gentry vernacular letters and from there develop their wider use in late-medieval historiography.

The methodology that I have used to consider both the sources is by necessity slightly different, especially in terms of the analysis of how the letters were brought together and preserved. With regard to the methodology of the close-reading this differs in as much as there are no drafts but only copies in the Armburgh Roll. The letters in the Armburgh Roll are evaluated by first looking at the conventions and establishing the relationships. Then, from close-reading, they are examined to consider the phraseology and additions of idiomatic vocabulary, maxims or adages. The Shillingford letters are evaluated similarly but also by looking at the practical elements of writing, to consider the changes made and why and how this affected the overall message. Both the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford's letters indicate the dexterity with which letter-writers were using the language to form skilled and sophisticated written requests, give instructions or record events. It is the means by which we can evaluate this dexterity that secures the methodology of this thesis, by the attempt to read between the lines, to make an interpretation founded on the use of the vocabulary and to try to see the thought processes in the depths of the messages that were being conveyed.

One of the main considerations of this thesis is to illustrate and highlight the confidence with which the letter writers employed language. By 'reading between

the lines', by attempting to understand their meaning through their careful choice of phrases, words and allusions, we may even glimpse their thought processes and the deeper meanings artfully concealed within the letters' language.

(iv) The Armburgh Roll: The Verse and Unrelated Documents

As has been identified there are certain documents within the Armburgh Roll (including a sequence of poems) which are not related to the Brokholes inheritance dispute or do not deal with the affairs of the Armburghs.¹¹⁵ Carpenter's opinion is that these copy documents were either there to fill up spare parchment (as in the case of the verse or Alison Beek's petition) or were to do with the concerns of the scribe.¹¹⁶ However, my contention is that the inclusion of these texts has a far greater significance and that the analysis of them can reveal important insights into the late-medieval gentry writers' approach to their writing and their evidence collation.

There are three questions that this section of the chapter of the sources aims to answer. The first question has two sides to it and asks: to what extent was the content and nature of these unrelated letters and documents used to reflect upon the

¹¹⁵ *AP* 155-68: the Middle English verse. To John Coll bailiff of Huntingdon early 1420s, a letter concerning the execution of the will of John Herries (of Cambridgeshire): *AP* 96; a letter from Robert Trenchemere of West Barry, Glamorgan to Sir Thomas Erpingham, c.1417-1422 : *AP* 98-100; a letter to William Swan, c.1419-20: *AP* 100-02; the petition of Alison Beek, a servant of Robert Armburgh, c.1450-52: *AP* 195-99.

¹¹⁶ With regard to the poetry Carpenter suggests that there is no 'obvious reason for its presence' other than the clerk was 'filling up spare parchment: *AP* 58. The Erpingham and Swan letters had more to do with the concerns of the scribe: *AP* 98, n.172. Alison Beek - petition as the last entry on the later part of the Roll Carpenter concludes 'it was entered to fill up the roll': *AP* 195, n.496.

inheritance dispute by adding supportive ideas and material and, can we determine what influential messages the contemporary late-medieval reader of the Roll would have appreciated and which lie behind these seemingly irrelevant inclusions? The second question relates to a more general appreciation of the Armburgh Roll, in terms of our wider historiographical understanding of late-medieval gentry social practice, by focusing on what these inclusions might mean in terms of our understanding of late-medieval evidence retention. The third question considers what the inclusion of the verse, in particular, might indicate when we are considering late-medieval gentry literate culture especially in terms of their personal writing through a very preliminary enquiry into the vocabulary and language used in its composition.

The Verse: the Context

The verse is written in Hand 2 beginning on m.6v and concluding on m.5v. The text is written in a letter-format and prose format across the full width of the manuscript. Carpenter has transcribed the text in a verse-format, punctuating the lines into separate stanzas. This alteration to the structure of the text does slightly reduce the significance of the writing as associated with the epistolary character and context of certain of the poems.¹¹⁷ However, editing the verse in this way does add to the sense and the interpretation of the individual poems.

¹¹⁷ Carpenter discusses the letter-like characteristics: *AP* 58. See for example stanza beginning ‘En Johan’: *AP* 156. Carpenter considers who this might have been posing some interesting questions of identity in that it might well have been Joan Armburgh or Joan Palmer: *AP* 58-59. The poetry contains conventional openings, for example ‘To yow that be my soueraigne and maistresse, I recommonde me wyth all myn hert and spirit’: *AP* 160.

Joel Rosenthal, in his essay at the beginning of the digital *Medieval Family Life* resource, is dismissive of the poetry but appreciative of Carpenter's inclusion of it in the edition, commenting:

For some unknown reason a string of unimpressive love poems was included in the manuscript and the editor of the volume has been diligent about publishing them alongside the more customary items, giving us some 13 pages of fairly undistinguished verse.¹¹⁸

This thesis challenges that assumption by determining that the inclusion of the verse was not only significant at the time of the writing of the Roll but that it now adds considerably to our historiographical evaluation. Its presence within the manuscript cannot simply be disregarded and as this thesis sets out to prove its appraisal adds another layer to our consideration of the rest of the copy documents and the Roll as a whole.

Poetry was an important aspect of this reading culture. Contemporary verse provided a widely used medium for the spread of political and social ideas and could be found in a variety of manuscript forms, including political miscellanies and chronicles.¹¹⁹ Verse also expanded the political vocabulary introducing new terms

¹¹⁸ Joel T. Rosenthal, 'The Family Letter Collections of the Fifteenth Century', 4: www.medievalfamilylife.amdigital.co.uk.

¹¹⁹ Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England*, (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 143-47. V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford Press, 1971). Scattergood's study of Middle English poetry emphasises the importance of the genre and how many political issues were expressed through the medium. He takes a wide view of the spread of political verse by looking at examples representative of domestic

and ideas into circulation.¹²⁰ It is intriguing to find the lengthy inclusion of verse in the Roll but maybe not extraordinary given the contemporary awareness of the purpose and role of poetry in revealing ideas or messages.

An illustration which exemplifies fifteenth-century gentry verse and where the style is similar to the verse found in the Armburgh Roll is that found in the Findern manuscript. This fifteenth-century anthology of secular and courtly verse is recognised as an important example of the collection of verse by a late-medieval provincial gentry household.¹²¹ The manuscript is a ‘rare survivor’ which illustrates how the provincial gentry were engaging with literary ideas, relating to verse and the writing of lyrics in the courtly style.¹²² In the introduction to the facsimile of the Findern manuscript Beadle and Owen comment that the verse appears to be a deliberate ‘borrowing of the courtly mode by those outside the charmed circle’.¹²³ Within the manuscript is a poem telling the story of *Sir Degrevant* with the theme

and national affairs, religion and the clergy as well as aspects of society, including social change, protest and revolt. As a part of his contextual background he considers the letters of the Pastons using extracts from them to illustrate political concerns. See for example his comments on the Duke of Suffolk: Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, 159.

¹²⁰ A significant contemporary poems was *Piers Plowman*. Helen Barr considers its influence in the introduction to *The Piers Plowman Tradition* ed. Helen Barr, (London: Dent, 1993), 1-8. Alford considers how the language of *Piers Plowman* was a part of the common currency of the language and language of the law: John Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction*, (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988); Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 52-53; Radulescu, ‘The Political Mentality of the English Gentry’.

¹²¹ The Findern Manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS.Ff.I.6: Facsimile – Introduction by Richard Beadle and A.E.B. Owen (London: Scolar Press, 1978). Rossell Hope Robbins, ‘The Findern Anthology’, *PMLA*, 69 (1954), 610-42. Erik Kooper, ‘Sir Degrevant: Introduction’, extract from *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*. Robbins Library Digital Projects Middle English Text Series, accessed 11/11/14 <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/kooper-sentimental-and-humorous-romances-sir-degrevant-introduction>

¹²² Findern Manuscript, Introduction: Beadle and Owen, p.xvi

¹²³ *Ibid.* p.xii

relating to issues of local feuds over land as well as family and romantic interest. Reputation, status, chivalric attitudes as well as the role of women are all embraced within the narrative.¹²⁴ As with the verse found in the Armburgh Roll many of the Findern verses and lyrics represent original compositions and cannot be found in any other manuscript. Beadle and Owen draw the conclusion that the Findern manuscript is indicative of the ‘notable growth and diversification in English vernacular literacy and literate culture’.¹²⁵ Understanding and recognising the value of the verse in the Armburgh Roll must equally support this conclusion.

I propose that a consideration of the themes of the Armburgh verse provides one of the ways by which we might more readily understand its inclusion as well as set it into a wider historiographical context. The Brokholes Inheritance dispute rests on issues of women’s inheritance and their rights and the establishing of a woman’s status as an heiress. The verse expresses and explores the righteousness and gentility of women. It is therefore possible that part of the reason for its inclusion was to reveal the ideal of women of gentle birth as upright, moral and whose innate character meant that they strived to an achievement of perfection; indeed that they could do no wrong or were incapable of doing wrong. By inference the honesty indicated in the verse appears to substantiate the case for the inheritance rights of a moral and worthy woman of gentle status and identity. Does it mirror the integrity of Joan as an heiress? The chivalric overtones within the poetry certainly act as a counterbalance to the lack of courtliness shown by the Armburghs’ opponents and

¹²⁴ Kooper, ‘Sir Degrevant: Introduction’, provides a detailed account of the poem:

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/kooper-sentimental-and-humorous-romances-sir-degrevant-introduction>

¹²⁵ Findern Manuscript: Introduction - Beadle and Owen.

which is implied throughout the other documents. The inclusion of poetry has to be considered by examining how its incorporation sits alongside the arguments as to the antagonism and immoral behaviour of the challengers to the inheritance, such as the Sumpters and their network. If, as I have suggested, the Roll is a measured drawing together of evidence to prove the disputed inheritance and that it sets out to provide a narrative, potentially for the Armburghs' descendants, which is seated in the high ideals of gentry gentility and honour then the inclusion of the poetry would indeed make sense.

The verse: content and language

The first poem in the sequence is known to exist elsewhere.¹²⁶ The presence of this poem suggests a wider literary influence to the Roll's contents and indicates that the compiler of the Roll was aware of the pre-existing poem (even though the reproduction in the Roll differs slightly from the other two extant copies).¹²⁷ The poetry appears to be influenced by French genres and French discourse and it is written in three languages, English, Anglo-Norman and Latin.¹²⁸ This suggests that the writer and possibly also the implied reader were fluent in all three languages; most probably a common situation amongst the literate late-medieval gentry given

¹²⁶ AP 155-68; AP 58, n. 259. Two extant manuscripts exist in Cambridge and the British Library, the Cambridge Manuscript dates from early fifteenth century: *Early English Lyrics: Amorous, Divine, Moral and Trivial*, ed. E.K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1966), 15-17; R.T. Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963) 159-60.

¹²⁷ AP 58.

¹²⁸ *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Collette and Garrett-Goodyear, 42-44. This identifies that the poetry is influenced by French genres and French discourse. It is written in three languages which implies that the writer and the implied reader were tri-lingual. The grammar of both Latin and French are adjusted to accommodate the pattern of the verse.

the development of the vernacular from Anglo-Norman as an increasingly used main language.

In terms of this thesis, and the ideas that support the methodology of the politics of the writing, I think that the verse holds certain clues which are important to recognise. For instance, it indicates how the ordinary gentry lay writer may have engaged directly with words, with literary ideas and with the writing of courtly verse, just as is indicated by the verse of the Findern manuscript. Considering this engagement with the words has two aspects: first that the content and language imply that the writer was endeavouring to place, through some careful language choice, what the description of a person's characteristics actually meant.

The verse is written in a predominantly romantic style, reflecting the ideals of chivalric attitudes, but it offers glimpses as to women's actual behaviour and their social standing as well as their social role. For example, the characteristics of ladyship, which are seen in a letter Robert wrote to Lady Ferrers, (a distant relative of Joan's), whom he addressed as, 'graciously', 'rygth worthy', are seen throughout the verse, with references to gentleness, nobleness, kindness and grace.¹²⁹

O princesses of womanhode enkyinnyd with all beaute

Youre excellent is fully replete with humilite

Youre gentilnesse passyth all other in dignite

Youre nobles encrowynd¹³⁰

Ye surmount all creaturs in worthinesse

¹²⁹ Letter to Ellen, Lady Ferrers of Chartley, c.1429-30: *AP* 114-16

¹³⁰ 'nobles' – noblesse: *AP* 159, n.369.

Ye be welle of grace, the spring of goodnesse (*AP* 159)

The references in the letter to Lady Ferrers included the compliment as to her ‘socour’, with the strong implication of her help in times of distress (*AP* 116). Again, these traits are reflected in the verse:

Ye be graunter of grace and gracious of forgeuenesse

Ye be securable and fauorable in all distresse

Ye be loser and lisser of all duresse (*AP* 159)

The language of the verse opens up the lexicon which surrounds an appreciation of both the status and function of women and ladyship as well as giving an insight into the role that women played in terms of conflict and dispute. The phrase: ‘Ye be loser and lisser of all duresse’ is a powerful expression as to how a woman could ameliorate threats or force. The language indicates women’s role in issues of arbitration or in mediating conflict.¹³¹ The verse gives an insight into the personal characteristics of women which appear to have been regarded as essential:

Ye be fairest of fairer, ye be penacle of fairnesse,

Ye be that ymage in whom is figurid all stedfastnesse

¹³¹ *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Collette and Garrett-Goodyear, 312-6: Advice to Aristocratic Wives on Mediation and Governance, c.1404 from Christine de Pizan’s manual for the conduct of women in the late middle ages. Written c.1404 it established the role of noble women as peacemakers and how a noble woman was used as a means of restoring those who might be out of favour as she ‘gladly would try to restore them to her lord’s good graces’ and how ‘her men must be able to turn to her for refuge’: *Later Middle Ages*, ed. Collette and Garrett-Goodyear, p.313 & p.316.

Ye be reconsiler of all unbuxomnesse. (*AP* 159)¹³²

The second piece of verse begins, ‘En Johan’ (*AP* 156) and suggests that the focus of the poetry is one particular woman. Intriguingly the woman could be either Joan Armburgh or the wife of Robert’s nephew, Joan Palmer.¹³³ The associations with ‘gentilnesse’ (that is dignity, honour, estate, richness, wisdom and grace) run as themes throughout the verse with phraseology that reflects the importance of nobility and worthiness: ‘Ye be princesse gracious of all nobilnesse, Ye surmount all creaturs in worthinesse’ (*AP* 159). The verse should perhaps be seen as a reflection as to Joan’s honourable behaviour, her virtue and her integrity and therefore a clear indication as to her honesty in the pursuit of the contested inheritance claim.

The second consideration when thinking of the politics of the writing is to see what the verse might reveal as to how the lay writers wanted their writing to be received and perceived. I think that the verse does provide some hints as to the attitudes towards the writing which are important to recognise, but that should not necessarily be over-stated.

I think we need to consider that the inclusion of the verse is an indication of gentry literacy, probable literate education as well as a considered understanding of language and word-play.¹³⁴ The examination and close-reading of the texts that

¹³² OED: OE – buxom meaning ‘to bend’: ‘unbuxomnesse’ meaning ‘intractability’, ‘lack of compliancy’: *AP* 159, n. 370.

¹³³ Joan – this could be Joan Armburgh or possibly Joan Palmer (wife to Reynold Armburgh, Robert’s nephew). Carpenter discusses the poetry and the possible author: *AP* 58-59.

¹³⁴ C.E.6.10(4); *AP* 155-68. The verse is written in letter format, with some sections of prose, the similarities between the various inclusions and repetitions appear to suggest that some of the

follow in Part II will further consider and take account of this idea. However, here I stress that I think we should see the verse as making a significant contribution to our appreciation of the late-medieval lay writer's attitudes towards their own writing.

In terms of the politics of the writing the following extracts indicate certain of the difficulties that the writers appeared to have experienced in their writing and its composition. The stanzas are thought-provoking details as to the writer's perception of his abilities to express himself as clearly or as well as he wished:

And thow it so be that I can not wele expresse

The feerefull thoughthis wiche I fele in myn hert (*AP* 157)

For lak of speche I can now say no more

To expresse my mater as I wolde I may not playnly

My wytte is dulle to tell half my sore

And nought I haue yit for all my payne

For want of wordys I may not now atteyng

To telle half my herts hevyness (*AP* 158)

Besechyng yow that ye audience therof not disdeigne

But consider the trew entent of my hert in euery veyne (*AP* 159)

The verse: wider historiographical considerations

workings were drafts with the ideas being worked through, there are some crossings out and amendments made which also suggest a work in progress (it is the only place in the Roll where such alterations are made).

The verse contained in the Roll is further evidence of gentry and elite reading practices. As such it provides yet another indicator of the educated status and identity of those who were instrumental in the Roll's compilation. It adds to the substantiation of the Armburghs' image and the representation of their gentility, indeed to their social identity and status as a part of the ruling landowning class.

In terms of men's direct writing, the poetry can potentially reveal how the men may have regarded themselves in the way that they wrote of the women. Ruth Mazo Karras examines the chivalric attitudes as expressed through literature and how the development of masculinity within the realms of knighthood was expressed. She comments that the writing of and expression of the desire for women was sometimes overtly ostentatious, and that romanticism did not necessarily reflect how men behaved but represented the way they understood and described their behaviour.¹³⁵ However, the poems found here provide an opportunity to see a lay approach to the influences of verse and allows us to consider how the non-professional writer might have been manipulating their ideas through an adroit use of English and rhyme. It hints at how they were deliberating and expressing values that related both to an ideological identity as well as to actual personal identity, or character. Evidently the verse cannot be merely disregarded as inconsequential as it is a valuable, intrinsic and fascinating aspect of the Roll. Furthermore, it is clear that it warrants a separate examination as more could be gleaned from an in-depth study than the restraints here of space have permitted.

¹³⁵ Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 20-66, (p.51, p.53).

The Armburgh Roll, with its combination of copied letters, legal documents, remembrances and the verse, presents an unusual combination of many types of vernacular writing. It allows us to validate that literary influence was an essential aspect of every-day writing, that it was not separate from it, or separated by it, but integral to the modes of composition and the thoughts behind that composition. Marion Turner identifies that a late-medieval literary practitioner, far from being a separate professional practitioner, would also have been working in the realms of administration, government or law. That there: 'is little sense of the aesthetic as a separate realm; writing literature and working in the city or the court were part of a continuum.'¹³⁶ There is no evidence in the case of the Armburghs that they were owner/readers of any of the contemporary didactic or instructive or chivalric literature circulating in the early to mid years of the fifteenth century. However, the fact that the first poem can be identified as existing elsewhere indicates that literary influences were a part of the author, compiler or scribe of the Roll's scholarly sphere. Coss in his paper on the dissemination of romantic literature identifies how London was central in the spread of vernacular writing including didactic, homiletic, romantic, as well as verse.¹³⁷ The Armburghs were based in Westminster at the

¹³⁶ Marion Turner, 'Conflict', in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 258-73, (p.260).

¹³⁷ For a discussion on the dissemination of vernacular literature see P.R. Coss, 'Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: the Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), 35-79. Coss identifies the spread of literature and how it was being copied commercially in London by the end of the fourteenth century, stating that London was becoming 'the cultural capital of England': Coss, 'Cultural Diffusion', 77. Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 39-81: the importance of understanding the reading material of the gentry is considered by Radulescu who looks at the books in circulation during the fifteenth century, the political miscellanies, chronicles, and verse and provides a comprehensive overview of the sources available. She points to the networks where books were circulated and lent: Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 40-1. See Radulescu's essay on literature in *Gentry Culture*, ed. Radulescu and Truelove, 100-15. See also, Thorpe, 'Writing and Reading in

centre of what was an apparently thriving literary and cultural society; it is, therefore, hard to conceive that these influences did not have a substantial impact on their writing. Indeed, in the construction, context and content of the Remembrance these influences can be readily recognised, especially the influence of the homiletic discourses. The censorial language of the Remembrance and Joan's invective in her letter to Horell exemplify how the writing was framed by religious and moral beliefs rooted in the concepts of sin. These texts are valuable as they clearly illustrate how ideological perceptions were being incorporated into everyday or common discourses and conflicts.¹³⁸

The study of vernacular phraseology and language has been by literary scholars in the field of late medieval literature.¹³⁹ Any consideration of gentry vernacular letter writing thus needs to take into account the possible influences of contemporary literature in circulation.¹⁴⁰

the Circle of John Fastolf (d.1459)'. The Armburghs are unlike the Pastons or Fastolf whose library of books can be determined. However, it is the fact that the ideas were in circulation that is the important consideration and that these thoughts or ideals were an integral aspect of the growing literate culture of the gentry strata. For references to the Paston letters where details of the books lent are mentioned see, Davis, I, pp.477-78, pp.516-18, pp.573-75.

¹³⁸ Turner, 'Conflict', in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, 258-73: Turner's assessment of literary textual engagement in conflict is of importance here.

¹³⁹ See V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford Press, 1971) for an early appreciation of this form of study and one that still is relevant.

¹⁴⁰ *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). The *Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture* provides a comprehensive study of English literature; the essays open up new ways of looking at the study of literature alongside the cultural and historical considerations. See also *The Idea of the Vernacular; An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans (Exeter, 1999); Deborah Thorpe, 'Writing and Reading in the Circle of John Fastolf (d.1459)' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of York (2011)).

The Paston letters have previously, albeit briefly, been examined in relation to their reading or literate influences but as this thesis is identifying with regard to the Armburgh letters this approach to the day to day writing of the gentry needs to be developed to include a comprehensive appreciation of all the gentry letter writers and the influences that must have affected their compositions.¹⁴¹

The unrelated documents

The first letter to consider is that to John Coll, identified as a bailiff of Huntingdon. Carpenter suggests that Robert may have been the author but that the association between Coll as well as Herries is tenuous and what Robert's interest in the execution of the will of John Herries would have been is unclear. Certainly the letter does not appear to have any significance in terms of the Brokholes inheritance dispute.¹⁴² The letter concerns the execution of the will of John Herries, who was probably of Cambridgeshire, and was to do with land relating to Ely cathedral. The link could possibly be geographic in that the Armburghs' were associated with Huntingdon and in this respect may have had connections with the Herries.¹⁴³ The importance of the letter is in its content in that it is considering the complications that have beset John Coll, an executor of Herries' will, and the conflict that had occurred between him and the other executors. It is a detailed letter of advice which it appeared was endeavouring to offer assistance in order to resolve the unfulfilled execution of the Herries' estate. I believe that the importance of the letter lies in the

¹⁴¹ Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 40-44; Radulescu looks at how miscellanies were much in demand and became the equivalent of medieval best sellers: p.43, n.24.

¹⁴² *AP* 96.

¹⁴³ *AP* 96, n.163

subject matter, the problems faced when attempting to resolve an inheritance and the antagonism that had occurred between the executors. It might not be directly related to the Brokholes dispute but, in terms of the overall consideration of the Roll, it does add a further layer of information, which perhaps Robert considered important, to the debate that the Armburghs themselves faced. It is certainly a letter which speaks strongly of conflict, of conscience and of the defence of worship.

Another letter that does not appear to have any bearing on the Armburghs' dispute, indeed is not written by any of the Armburghs or their immediate family, nor is it addressed to them is a letter from Robert Trenchemere to Sir Thomas Erpingham c.1417-20. Again, the significance of this letter is that it deals with a similar inheritance dispute to the Brokholes dispute.¹⁴⁴ It mirrors the same problems that beset the Armburghs, of obtaining inherited properties, and deals with Robert Trenchemere's wife's inheritance claim. This inheritance, just as with Joan Armburgh, comes down the female line when the male line had died out. The appeal is made by Trenchemere to Sir Thomas Erpingham in order to obtain Erpingham's help in the matter. It is a complex letter of appeal outlining a network of relationships, and lordships, which draw on many connections and courtesies. The language is reflective of honourable actions, and those of trust, right and grace feature clearly and show how these attributes could be expressed within such written appeals. Equally, it underlines the importance to all the parties of the fact that the

¹⁴⁴ *AP* 98-100. Erpingham was identified as a famous soldier and servant of Henry IV and Henry V, *AP* 98, n. 172. Carpenter considers that as the letter is unrelated and out of key with the collection it might have been 'interpolated by the copyist and had more to do with his interests than with those of the Armburghs'.

position of lordship embraced influence and power, but crucially rested on a degree of moral duty and the use of that power to do the right thing.

This letter is another curious inclusion into the Roll. As a communication, it is evidently very personal, but clearly not private or confidential and of course raises the question as to how it came to be in the Armburghs' possession; a question that as yet cannot be answered. However, I would argue that both the subject of the letter and its context are too tightly aligned to the premise of the Brokholes dispute for this letter to be anything other than a deliberate inclusion. Because of the close correlation of the subject it unquestionably adds weight to the Roll's message and discourse. For the purposes of determining evidence preservation and the manipulation of proofs within the Roll, the letter is crucially important. It is yet another example of the skilled approach to the Roll's compilation and the fact that the Roll and its message were focused on reputation, status and Robert Armburgh's need to safeguard his virtue and righteousness in the dispute, and thereby his worthy identity.

Taking this premise further we can consider yet a further letter which again has no immediate or obvious correlation to the Roll, the dispute or indeed the Armburghs. Carpenter suggests that the recipient would have been one William Swan and the letter dates from 1419 or 1420.¹⁴⁵ Carpenter provides a detailed consideration of the background to the letter setting it against the complications which rose from the last phases of the papal schism and the financial implications that this had for the bishop of Llandaff. The letter deals with the problems and

¹⁴⁵ *AP* 100-01, n.181.

consequences of borrowing money, of debt and of having to make payments to secure a position or property. It deals with the question of simony and furthermore addresses the issues of lordship, the problems that undue influence may have brought and the need for friendship and support.¹⁴⁶ My contention is that it is the context of the letter that is of consequence, not the content. The focus of the letter is an appeal which is aimed to establish a good character against a background of financial difficulties. In many respects this letter in which the language and the message reflected the principles of establishing and maintaining a good name under difficult circumstances embodies much that is at the centre of the Armburghs' challenging situation. A chance inclusion or a deliberate one? My belief is that it was a considered copying in as yet another example of a similar situation which reflected pertinently the Armburghs' discourse.

The final document in the later part of the Roll, that of the petition of Alison Beek, is another entry that Carpenter considers was probably entered to 'fill up the roll'.¹⁴⁷ Detailing a complex case in the ecclesiastical courts the petition deals with a servant of Robert Armburgh's, Alison Beek, who becomes embroiled as a petitioner on behalf of her brother, Thomas Beek, a cleric, who is accused of the rape of a woman to whom he had lent monies. On request of repayment a fabricated rape accusation was made to prevent the reclaim of the monies and Thomas Beek was temporarily put into the custody of Robert. Carpenter suggests that 'it is more than likely that Robert wrote the petition for Alison'.¹⁴⁸ The account that this petition gives of the wrong-doing meted out to Beek is so closely aligned to the other strands

¹⁴⁶ Simony: the buying or selling of ecclesiastical preferment.

¹⁴⁷ *AP* 195-99, *AP* 195, n.496.

¹⁴⁸ *AP* 196, *AP* 195 & n.496.

of the arguments over abuse of power that are contained within the rest of the Roll, that again I contend that this petition's incorporation could be nothing other than deliberate. This supposition is supported by the petition's language which is so fundamental in identifying, the 'grevys and wrongys' and the 'feere of dyuers thyngys which were coniectyd a ynes hym [Beek] in Wesmynster' and how, in the ultimate punishment, this apparently innocent Beek was 'a cursed' in a mass 'by candel lyght' organised by the church authorities.¹⁴⁹ Not only, therefore, is the petition further weight to the ideas of abuse of power, the condemnation of the power-less, but it also once more puts Robert himself, in a positive and righteous light. A curious last copy document, unrelated to the lost inheritance, but a further vital clue to the motivation behind the compilation of the Roll.

Conclusion

There were three questions that this section on the unrelated documents aimed to answer. The first question considered whether these unrelated texts were included in the Roll for a specific purpose to add depth to the message on the problems which surrounded the inheritance dispute. I contend that they were. I believe that the contemporary reader of the Roll would have both understood and seen the influential messages that these letters and documents provided. My argument is that they add depth to both the moral and righteous tenor of the Roll; they act as signposts within the overall message. Equally, and in answer to my second question, in this respect they add to our appreciation of the Armburgh Roll, for as this thesis argues they indicate the subtlety with which the late-medieval gentry approached their evidence retention and preservation, and this can only add to

¹⁴⁹ AP 199.

our wider historiographical understanding of late-medieval gentry social practice. Finally, my conclusion as to the verse is that it is indicative of the prominence of personal literary composition and writing and that this is of value within the overall study of late-medieval gentry literate culture. The verse therefore needs to be further analysed and considered alongside such manuscripts as the Findern manuscript. In terms of the boundaries of this thesis, and an understanding of the politics of the writing of the Armburgh Roll, the inclusion of the verse makes us more aware of the content and context of the other copied documents; it assists us in the way that we consider and evaluate them especially in the way that we might read the language of the letters.

My overall conclusion is that the purpose behind the inclusion of these unrelated documents and the verse was deliberate and constructive in that they all served a specific purpose which was to reflect on aspects of the inheritance dispute and to add validation to the Armburghs' defensive position.

PART II – GENTRY IDENTITY

CHAPTER THREE – The Armburgh Roll: The Remembrance

Introduction

The first part of this thesis established my ideas for the concepts behind the politics of writing. It also set out how we might adopt a critical assessment of late-medieval personal writing by considering the vernacular letter-writers' emotional engagement with that writing. A principal aim of this chapter is to develop those ideas through a close-reading of the Roll's first document – the Remembrance. As I stated in chapter two on the sources I consider the Remembrance to be a pivotal document the purpose of which I contend was to leave a record of the causes of the dispute and critically to direct the reader of the Roll. In order to develop the hypothesis of the Remembrance being semiotic a significant aspect of my evaluation is to consider how a contemporary reader could have read the moral anecdotes. I therefore evaluate these anecdotal accounts of the Armburghs' adversaries and the nature of the punishments meted out to them by a consideration of the inherent beliefs that appear to lie behind them. The analysis includes the appraisal of other related documents which I think add to the context of the Remembrance.

The Remembrance

The Remembrance establishes the particulars of the disputed inheritance and Joan's claim of 'xl li worth lyfode' (*AP* 61). It also details the Armburghs' main opponents who had been active in collaborating against them. It verifies how,

through the ‘greet steryng of lordschip’ and the great support given to their adversaries in the court of chancery, the Armburghs considered they had been unjustly treated (*AP* 61).

The main adversaries: the fate of John Sumpter

From the outset it is emphasised that no good had come to the Sumpters or indeed those that had sided with them. The emphasis is on those who had helped Christine and Ellen and their subsequent fates: ‘that hath fallen amonges hem that haue holpen Cristin the wyf of Thomas Bernard’ (*AP* 61). The underlying theme, which runs throughout the text, of punishment and just retribution is immediately established by the circumstances surrounding the death of John Sumpter who was determined as the perpetrator of the ‘vntrouthe’ that Christine and Ellen were legitimate Brokhole heirs. The manner in which the fate that befell Sumpter was explored not only served to account for the nature of the injustice that the Armburghs clearly felt, but, I suggest, that it also served as a warning to those that considered opposing the Armburghs. I see this as an important aspect of the Remembrance in that it not only recounts past events but equally sets up for the reader a cautionary message that ultimately God’s justice would prevail over corrupted secular justice.

The passage about Sumpter’s fate revealed how God’s judgement and how God’s punishment would be delivered. The detail is pre-empted by the vilification of both Sumpter and the two daughters: the character of Sumpter undermined by the statement that it was ‘openly knowen’ that Sumpter ‘holde diuers women by side his wyf’ by which he had Christine, Ellen and others (*AP* 61). The allegation of his unfaithful behaviour with other women is effective by developing the idea that he

had been duplicitous and therefore capable of the utmost deceit. The insult was compounded by the direct and damning vocabulary and phraseology surrounding both his fathering of them and their illegitimacy: ‘Atte lest wey he fadryd hem but yit [damaged text] were hys or noon, for a child that is got[en] in suche maner women schuld be called *filius populi*’ and that ‘may clayme no manne to theyre fader’ (AP 61).¹ The narrative suggested Sumpter’s illness (which it is implied was a form of madness as he allegedly went out of his mind) came upon him while he was attending a church service and that it was witnessed by a multitude: ‘church in tyme of seruice whanne ther was most multitude of peeple went oute of mynde’. The cause was ‘al this vntrouthe’ that he had perpetuated (AP 61). I see the composition of the writing as being quite artful in that the apparently factual details of the occurrence are further proved by the statement that God delivered the punishment in His own house and, most significantly, in front of many witnesses. It is as if the writer had asked the rhetorical question: what more proof was needed that right was on the side of the Armburghs?

It is probable that Sumpter died much later than was implied in the narrative and therefore it is possible that the timings, if not the actual circumstances of his

¹ *filius populi* – *filius* represents an element in the surname but not referring to the actual father: see *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*, prepared by R.E. Latham for The British Academy (London: Oxford University Press, 1965; repr. 2004 with supplement), 191. *OLD*: *populus/populi* – ‘people’. The phrase *filius populi* may, therefore, mean that they were given no specific surname and were nameless within society and by inference worthless; the impact of this would be considerable in a society where name and title were of great consequence.

death, were distorted for dramatic effect and to place Sumpter's death much closer to the time that his daughters' claims were being established in around 1426-27.²

Joan's testimonies about the illegitimacy of the Sumpter girls

It is important to evaluate the Remembrance within the context of the dispute and in order to achieve this I examine other documents which are related to the incidents detailed: for example, a letter written by Joan which set out the story of the two illegitimate sisters. On 8 February 1428 Joan wrote from Westminster to Ellen, Lady Ferrers of Chartley, drawing on some tenuous link of kinship.³ Joan asked Lady Ferrers: 'to consideren this gret wrong done to me youre meke and pouer kynneswoman' (*AP* 92). Joan detailed the 'gret wrong' that as both her sister's two daughters were dead the inheritance of the manor of Mancetter should have devolved to her but that she was being deceived out of her inheritance by Sumpter (*AP* 92). Joan was uncompromising in her condemnation. She stated that Sumpter had presented two bastard children of his own as the rightful heirs but furthermore he had acted dishonourably to the memory of the two legitimate daughters, as he had: 'defiled the deth of tho to muliereris' (*AP* 92).⁴ This condemnation added weight to Joan's contention with regard to the deceitful character of Sumpter. She continued stating that: 'vnknownen to me or ony of my conseyle hath proued hem rygth heires and of ful age' and 'to strengthe hym a yens me in hys wrong hath married oon of this seyde bastardes to Thomas Bernard a squyer of the chauncellers, a nother to the sone of Raulyn Bellers, the laste yere eschetour of Warwykschire' (*AP* 92). The emphasis

² John Sumpter senior was a councillor in Colchester 1428-32, his death occurred after Hilary Term 1432: *AP* 61, n.5: see *The History of Parliament*, ed. Roskell, *et.al.* vol. iv, pp.532-33.

³ *AP* 92-93, n.153. Carpenter has been unable to establish any kinship connections: *AP* 41.

⁴ 'muliereris' or 'millierier' meaning 'a child born in wedlock': *AP* 62 n.11.

was on the belief that Sumpter had used these marriages to Thomas Bernard and to James Bellers to strengthen his case.

Joan was emphatic that Sumpter had manipulated one of the girls, Christine, into marriage with Thomas Bernard because of Bernard's influence in the court of chancery and his relationship to Chancellor Kemp (Bernard was said to be a squire of the chancellor's).⁵ The influence of James Bellers also appeared to have come from his connection to the chancellor and Ralph Bellers (his father) was escheator of Warwickshire and Leicestershire in 1426-27.⁶ The influence that the Sumpters had been able to wield in chancery was a central theme of Joan and Robert's discourse. Robert wrote about the influence of the chancellor in a letter to his Mancetter tenants.⁷ He hoped the chancellor would be replaced because without a change Robert would be forced to 'breke vp myn houshold' and if the chancellor remained in office: 'yt shal not ly in my pouer to hold yt, I shall be put to so gret costes' (*AP* 112).

A further document is the statement made by Joan in support of her claim, and which Carpenter dates to between 1428 and 1432; this established a broad chronology of the events.⁸ The timing of the death of the true daughters is

⁵ John Kemp archbishop of York from 1425 and chancellor from March 1426 to 1432. Ralph Bellers was a close servant of John Kemp: *AP* 8.

⁶ *AP* 7.

⁷ Dated to around November 1429.

⁸ Joan Armburgh's statement: *AP* 193-94. The question of dating is discussed by Carpenter who concludes that the petition could be early 1429, or 1430 as it was possible that this petition related to the letter and appeal to Lady Ferrers of Chartley in February 1428 and the petition could date from then. Equally it could have been 'a ploy to secure continued assistance in the period after this': *AP* 193, n.491.

determined as being eight years earlier in August (Lammas) which would correspond to John Sumpter junior's death in July 1420. It is then stated that the 'ij bastarde doughters' were put out 'to his [Sumpter's] frendys' and when he had kept them there for 'v or vj yere he token hem home a yen and made hem be founde by an inquisicion' before the escheators to be found as 'mulirers and copersoners with the said Johane of alle the londys and tenementz' (*AP* 193). This confirmed that the girls were 'founde' to be both born in wedlock and co-heiresses with Joan of the land that Ellen Brokhole had been seised of.⁹ The statement continued that Robert and Joan had been denied their livelihood amounting to £40 a year, through the 'vntrowthe of the seid Sumpter', and that this had been the case for the previous eight-and-a-half years.¹⁰

The nature of retribution and punishment

From the detail of Sumpter's fate his suffering appeared to have been prolonged in that he lived a further eight weeks after the reported loss of his mental abilities. Most significantly: 'he dyed with oute howsill and schryft' (*AP* 61); the implication being that he had been in no fit or rational state to take the sacrament and absolution following the protracted illness.¹¹ To a medieval person there could be no greater punishment or threat of punishment than to die without receiving the sacrament of penance and absolution as it would leave the departed soul in a permanent state of unrest and in purgatory.

⁹ 'copersoners' or 'coparceners' meaning 'coheiresses': *AP* 61, n.4.

¹⁰ This statement appears to confirm the dating of the document to mid-1428.

¹¹ Housel and shrift are defined as the sacrament of penance; 'housel' – 1(a) 'the Holy Communion, the sacramental bread and wine'; 'shrift' 1(a) 'confession to a priest' and 2(a) 'the instance or act of confessions': MED.

Another reference to an individual dying without receiving the sacrament is detailed in the fate that befell Richard Baynard. Baynard, a lawyer, is identified as ‘oon of the grettest mayntenour’ of the Sumpters who worked to hinder the Armburghs both in chancery and to persuade local juries against them (*AP* 62).¹² According to the detail his punishment followed swiftly on the back of his deceit after he had recorded in chancery, through the use of those that had ‘no maner knowlech of ye trouth of this mater’ that Christine and Ellen were ‘millieriers’ and therefore ‘coparceners with the same Johane’ (*AP* 62). The story related that: ‘with inne a while after as he went a huntying with my lady of Bergeveney sodenly he felle downe and dyed’ (*AP* 62).¹³ Two disclosures immediately followed this revelation of his sudden death; first that, like Sumpter, he died ‘with owte howsill and shrifte’ and then, the dramatic denouement, that his restless spirit still walked and caused harm: ‘a non after he walkyd and yit doth and hath don moche harme as it is opynly noysed and knowen in the contre there a boutte’ (*AP* 62). Just as we can see in the account of Sumpter the question of witnesses to the event is significant; it can be seen as the added proof of the reality of the events. The message is certainly nuanced and I feel that the writing is cleverly composed as it proclaims the veracity of this incident by the reference to it being openly spoken about and known in the area.

¹² Richard Baynard of Messing, Essex, c.1371-1434: *AP* 61, n.8.

¹³ For Carpenter’s assessment: *AP* 13-19. The Bergaveney circle of which Richard Baynard was one, with the strong influence of Joan Beauchamp, Lady Bergaveney and widowed aunt to Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, appear to have been allied with the Armburghs’ aggressors – Lady Bergaveney was politically active in Warwickshire, Essex and Hertfordshire drawing on the loyalty of nobles, gentry and locals in these areas especially in competition with her nephew Warwick in Warwickshire for the power base there.

Two sermons in *John Mirk's Festial* include the belief that those who were not absolved of their sins, but buried in holy ground, subsequently walked or appeared in the desire to seek absolution and thereby rest. In Sermon 68 the exemplar of three men who steal from the abbot is used. Two of the men are shriven, the third is not and his spirit was seen out at night, after sun down, whereby the men in the area would not go out at night for fear of the restless spirit; the sermon preaches that the spirit prayed for help that 'he were asoylud and or he myght haue no reste'.¹⁴ In the additions to the Burial Sermon (Additional 2) the details are set out as to the manner of receiving absolution and the sacrament and how the failure of this absolution gives the power to the devil to trouble the corpse. Again an exemplar is used whereby the unabsolved corpse is entered by the devil in the form of an ape.¹⁵ The nature of this punishment to die unabsolved with its dire eternal consequences was used to great effect to reinforce the rights of the Armburghs' case; the message was unequivocal, God was on the side of the Armburghs and therefore, by inference, so was law and right and justice.

The moral anecdotes

The individual anecdotes within the Remembrance which focus on the Armburghs' enemies are deftly told. The rhetorical techniques used produce a narrative from which the unmistakable message of retribution resounded. Many of the elements central to the message of the Remembrance, of deception allied with punishment, are included in the anecdote about Baynard and reinforced by the

¹⁴ *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Susan Powell, Vol. I (Oxford: EETS, 2009); *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Susan Powell Vol. II (Oxford: EETS, 2011). *Festial* ed. Powell, Vol. II, Sermon 68, pp.249-52, (p.252)

¹⁵ *Festial*, ed. Powell, Vol. II, Additional 2, pp.256-59, (pp.257-58); *Ibid.* see also Explanatory Notes, p.441 and p.449.

ostensible factual manner in which it was related. It draws out the deceit, how evidence was fabricated against the Armburghs and undue influence used to determine the case against them. The recurrent and compelling theme of retribution and in particular God's punishment was succinctly captured in the repetition of the belief that those who had wronged the Armburghs died: 'with oute howsill and shrifte' (*AP* 62). Simply, but effectively, the moral message reverberated throughout the narrative as to how the consequences of immoral behaviour would go even beyond the grave. On each occasion that a further story is related against the Sumpters and their supporters, it is reinforced and built up to great effect.

The important consideration for us is to recognise how the Armburghs' defence, which was not simply determined by the direct application of the law but was just as equally framed within the all pervading religious culture, was written about, considered and articulated. These allusions to accepted moralistic concepts add to the appreciation of the Remembrance as an absorbing example of secular writing. Not only does it reaffirm how inseparable and integral the period's religious belief was to its secular culture but crucially it illustrates how medieval Christianity and Christian values underpinned these literate ideas and how they were incorporated into all spheres of written communication. I think we should consider that the Remembrance highlights that educated and intellectual writing skills were not just the prerogative of the clerical literate community but were far more inclusive of the lay writer. The fact that a lay man (or woman) was prepared, and able, to convey and explore an individual, but very specific, message in such a crafted format is a further step to our understanding of the importance that must have been given to personal vernacular writing and the use of that medium in the recording of common

ideological beliefs.¹⁶ This hypothesis is borne out by Joan's letter to Horell, which I examine in the final chapter of the thesis, and in which the language of retribution and morality is a further example of the literate skills that I suggest were required to develop this illustrative method of discursive writing and which we should not underestimate.¹⁷

Chancery, court and civic officials: The abuse of power and authority

The stories within the narrative move along effortlessly and even the use of what might at first appear just straightforward link words or phrases add to the complexity and the depth of the writing. An example is the manner in which the individuals are brought into the narrative by the use of the adverb, 'Also'. As in:

- Also Mylde of Clare....was a grete supportour and mayntenour to hem in theyre vntrouthe (*AP* 61-62).¹⁸
- Also Master John Bernard.... was a grete labourer in this matere (*AP* 62).¹⁹

¹⁶ A comprehensive guide to late medieval sermons is to be found in: *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, ed. Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, 4 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007). There is extensive evidence of the writing of sermons but as the editors of the *Repertorium* determine the definition needs to be widened beyond compositions which were based on biblical texts. They use the definition of moral discourse to incorporate a wide genre of texts, *Repertorium*, Part I, pp.xxvi-xxvii. See also: *Middle English Sermons Edited from British Museum MS. Royal 18 B. xxiii*, ed. Woodburn O. Ross, (Oxford: Oxford University Press published for EETS 1940). The sermons were written between the years 1378-1417, but the manuscript itself was not copied until about 1450, p.xl.

¹⁷ Joan Armburgh to John Horell, 1429/30: *AP* 120-23. See Chapter Seven of the thesis for an analysis of Joan's writing.

¹⁸ Thomas Mylde of Clare Suffolk, who was married to Thomas Bernard's sister and kept Christine in his keeping for two years after she had married Thomas Bernard; Robert wrote to Mylde and Bernard agreeing to meet to confirm identification of Christine: *AP* 130-31.

¹⁹ John Bernard, parson of Isleham: *AP* 7, n.35.

- Also Baynard of Essex was oon of the grettest mayntenour of heire partie (*AP* 62).
- Also John Godeston, William Notyngham and Simund Mate...for the love that they hadden to Sumpter (*AP* 62).²⁰
- Also Ffox of Essex laboured a yenst the seid Johane (*AP* 63).²¹
- Also Dirrayn... laboured besyly a yenst the seid Robert and Johane (*AP* 64).²²

The effect of this is two-fold; not only does it give rise to a tension within the writing itself, but equally it gives credence to the substantial opposition that the Armburghs encountered. I regard this as a writing technique that made the reader focus on the number of the individuals who had stood against the Armburghs. Equally, it provided the way by which the extent of the duplicitous behaviour of these men could be accentuated.

The abuse of authority within the legal processes that the Armburghs contended was a significant element of the conflict can be seen in the account of the fate of Dirrayn who was identified as being: ‘somtyme of the newe inne and a clerk of the chauncerye’ and one who ‘laboured besyly a yenst’ Robert and Joan (*AP* 64).

²⁰ Identified as burgesses of Colchester: John Godeston a Colchester citizen collector of the customs at Ipswich, although it could have been Thomas Godeston, Carpenter identifies naming may have been an error: *AP* 9: *AP* 62, n.14; William Notyngham, feoffee to Ellen Brokhole as well as her executor: *AP* 9; Simon Mate, also feoffee to Ellen Brokhole: *AP* 9. Letter to Simon Mate: *AP* 93.

²¹ Richard Fox of Arkesden in Essex and of Shropshire and Northampton (d.1435) an associate of Lady Bergaveney and of others who were active on the Sumpters’ side: *AP* 16: *AP* 63, n.17.

²² Dirrayn was possibly a member of the Warwickshire Durant family. He was identified as being ‘somtyme of the newe inne and a clerk of the chauncerye’, although none of the possible candidates were legally trained or held office in the chancery: *AP* 64, n.24.

Seemingly Dirrayn was responsible for taking a commission of twenty ‘persones thereynne’ to arrest Robert at the request of Robert’s adversaries, but Robert secured a surety to keep his day to appear in chancery. However, it was related that as Robert attended the offices of the chancery to inform the clerk as to his guarantors Dirrayn raised a group of people to attack Robert and, most significantly, this event was common knowledge: ‘Dirrayn reryd al the Newe Inne vpon hym forto have slayn hym, which is opynly knowen a bout the Stronde’ (*AP* 64).²³

The public nature of the incident seen in the phrase ‘opynly knowen a bout’ gives rise to the question of audience, both the immediate audience who had apparently witnessed the event, as well as the wider audience of the text. The statement that the event was common and public knowledge validated the particulars, which we can confidently assume was with the intention of proving the details to be genuine. It is a technique used in other anecdotes: Sumpter whose collapse was witnessed by a church congregation (*AP* 61); Baynard of whom it was ‘opynly noysed and knowen in the contre’ that his spirit still walked after his public fall and death whilst out riding, (*AP* 62); and those that were killed among their neighbours (*AP* 62, 66). In all instances the inference is one of knowledge definitely not one of rumour or speculation. The incident also indicated that physical violence played a part in the obstruction of the processes through the court.

A further record of the abuse of authority within the legal system comes with the account of Cokayn, identified as a justice and commissioner who was involved in

²³ ‘maynpersours’, ‘mainpignor’ was surety for the appearance of someone in court or for his future good behaviour: see Alford, *Glossary of Legal Diction*, 93-94. New Inn - one of the Inns of Chancery, The Strand, in the heart of the legal quarter of London: *AP* 64, n.24.

the division of the Brokholes properties in Hertfordshire.²⁴ Cokayn was recorded as preventing Robert's witnesses from speaking on his behalf and furthermore prevented Robert's legal counsel from speaking to the jury:

Cokayn [would not] suffre them to speke no word, ne wold suffer the said Robert hys counseill to enfourme the contre nor to take non excepcion to the writte nor to make no chalanges (*AP* 65).

The account also recorded that men in the jury were: 'in the bisshop of Yorkes clothing'. They were the liveried men of the chancellor, John Kemp, archbishop of York, who was patron of the Bellers, central figures who were identified as the Armburghs' adversaries (*AP* 65). The point was that within a day or two of the case Cokayn was punished for his abuse of trust by God who struck him down and that he was dead within two weeks of the event:

[so] for his vntrouthe God smote hym with sykenesses with inne a day or two atte most and was dede and beryed with inne fourtenyght after (*AP* 65).

Another story which exposed official corruption is that of the account of John Godeston, William Notyngnam and Simon Mate who are identified as burgesses of Colchester. It stated that these men fraudulently used the town seal on documentation to claim that Christine and Ellen were entitled to the inheritance. Godeston and 'hys ffelauschip' were accused that they subverted justice and hindered Joan by silencing those that knew the truth of the matter through the

²⁴ Carpenter identifies John Cokayn of Bury Hatley, Bedfordshire, JCP who died 1429: *AP* 65, n.30.

making of an ‘ordinaunce in the towne’ and that any ‘manne or woman diskured ony maner counseill of the towne shuld be committed to preson and make a ffyne’.

According to the Armburghs this:

ordinaunce is cause that poore men and other, that haven verrey knowleche of thys matere and have knowleched to diuers persones a forn tyme, dare now no more speke ther of (*AP* 63).

Godeston, Notyngham and Mate, duly received their punishment for ‘theyre vntrewe labour’ from God who shortened their lives. Pithily the detail of the punishment was magnified because their deaths came about: ‘not withstanding that they were lykly men and lusty to have liven mony a yere’. It is stated that their deaths followed swiftly on from their misdeeds: ‘dyde al thre with inne a while after’ (*AP* 63).

One of the techniques used to good effect is to associate the wrongdoing with swift and timely retribution. The force of phrases such as ‘dyed sodenly’ (*AP* 64) or ‘sodenly he felle downe’ (*AP* 62), are sometimes enhanced by the addition of ‘with inne a while after’ (*AP* 63). In the account of Cokayn’s demise the last line of this passage reveals the subtle way in which the truth was validated. I suggest that phrases such as ‘with inne a day or two atte most’ and ‘beryed with inne fourtenyght after’ imply that the writer, as a witness, may have had a personal or immediate knowledge of the event. I feel that these carefully placed descriptive phrases would have left the reader with the impression that this explanation of the occurrence could not be argued with. The accounts then determine as to how they have behaved before concluding with the punishment that they suffered as a result of their wrongdoing.

The succinct writing of each of these descriptions, whereby all the relevant information needed to expound the abuse of trust, with the emphasis on the official position, the immoral behaviour and ultimately the deserved reckoning, is again a further indication of the skilled composition of the Remembrance. Indeed, I think we should recognise that it is the very concise format of the reported information that adds to the strength of the message.

The fate of the Sumpters' associates

The Armburghs' principal opponents are identified as the 'grete supportour[s] and mayntenour[s] to hem in theyre vntrouthe' (*AP* 62-63). These include Thomas Mylde of Clare, who was married to Thomas Bernard's sister.²⁵ Mylde is one of two named supporters of the Sumpters who is recorded in the Roll as having received a letter from Armburgh (the other being Simon Mates).²⁶ The letter to Mylde is a grudging response from Robert following a request that the Armburghs meet with Thomas Bernard and his wife Christine to ascertain, by making a visual comparison with Joan, that Christine was indeed the legitimate heir as claimed by the Sumpters.

A further one to be named was John Bernard quite probably a relative of Thomas Bernard.²⁷ John Bernard was the parson of 'Yeslam in Cambryggeschyre'

²⁵ Thomas Mylde was party to the undertaking given to the king on Joan's behalf, before her remarriage to Armburgh, in which it was determined that she would not remarry without permission. Carpenter suggests that the implication here is that there was, as yet, no 'serious dissension among the heirs': *AP* 5.

²⁶ Letter to Mylde and Thomas Bernard, c.1430-32: *AP* 130; letter to Simon Mate: *AP* 93.

²⁷ Carpenter suggests that 'Yeslam' was quite likely to be Isleham which had links to Thomas Bernard, with a Robert Bernard of Isleham possibly Thomas's father: *AP* 7, n. 35.

and he too was identified as being ‘a grete labourer in this matere’ (*AP* 62). John Bernard is revealed as having borne many of the costs because of Thomas Bernard.²⁸ Once again the punishments and retributions meted out to these two antagonists appear to correspond to the wrongs that they had been accused of. Mylde, who had insisted on there being a face-to-face visual identification, was made blind in both eyes and John Bernard, who had apparently provided financial support to the Sumpters’ side, was robbed and ‘mordrid with his owne neighbours’ (*AP* 62). This pattern of the punishment allied with the recognition of the wrong continues with each of the individuals named.

Members of the Bergavenny circle who were active on the Sumpter side again come in for censure with the implication that they were deceitful and laboured against the Armburghs.²⁹ In the case of Richard Fox he actively ‘hyndred’ Joan ‘in the bygynnyng of this matere’ (*AP* 63). His associates were identified as Sir John Tyrell, Robert Darcy and Richard Baynard; it is stressed that these powerful individuals could have had the matter amended but chose not to. All three had connections with the Bergavenny circle and Sir John’s younger brother, Edward Tyrell, was the escheator of Essex before whom the proofs of age of the Sumpter daughters were considered; it was he who was responsible for the subsequent acceptance of their inheritance claims.³⁰ Fox it would seem partially redeemed himself by speaking to the others involved in the obstruction of the inheritance. It recorded that he:

²⁸ *AP* 7, n.35.

²⁹ Lady Bergavenny was actively involved in Hertfordshire and Essex where part of the Brokhole inheritance was situated. Carpenter’s evaluation of the Bergavenny circle details those named by the Armburghs as particular ‘enemies’ Richard Baynard, Robert Darcy, John Tyrell and Richard Fox.

³⁰ *AP* 6; *AP* 63, n.18.

seyde these wordes, “In the peyne of my lyf, this gentile woman schall ouer lyve us alle and have her lyflode maugre oure hedys, and we lyke fooles have put oure soules in jopardye for other mennes auantage” (*AP* 63).

The use of this reported speech comes part way into the account where Fox, ‘hawyng better knowleche’ of the situation spoke to others, who were associated with the opposing side, to persuade them to amend the situation (*AP* 63). The use of the conversation is rhetorical, in addition it intimates the veracity of the message by the very fact that it is included as quoted speech and therefore, this use of dialogue here provided an impression of realism to the reader. It was a technique that medieval audiences would have been familiar with as it formed an integral part of late medieval discursive practice with ‘speech and its instrument the tongue’ regarded as potent agents of communication.³¹ The passage concluded by stating that only one of Fox’s fellow conspirators had been left alive with the warning that he too would suffer his fate because: ‘Godde is of power to punyssh as he punysshed hem whanne he seethe his tyme’ (*AP* 63).

An effective example of this anecdotal writing is to be found in the description of Bakepuz (Bagbyes), one of the Sumpters’ circle who came in for particular condemnation. This was possibly William Bakepuz who was linked to the clerks of chancery in 1416 and who the Roll identified as ‘dwelling with the clerk of

³¹ Edwin D. Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature; Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 1; 3-9. Shillingford also used this technique of including dialogue and conversation in his letters, see for example his lengthy letter of 2 November 1447 to his fellow magistrates: Moore, 8-17: DRO 1859 (a paper roll which comprises of 4 stitched together sheets).

the rolles'.³² The clerk of the rolls was identified as Nicholas Wymbysh, an associate of Ralph Bellers.³³

The role that Bakepuz played was illustrative of the complex manoeuvrings that were allegedly manifest throughout the conflict. It would appear that he tried to subvert the case by attempting to manipulate Joan into relinquishing important evidence. He 'laboured alle that he koude to haue deceyved her of her evydence and bare her an hande' that if she gave up this evidence to him he would show it to men of counsel and ensure that his master, the said clerk of the rolls, would be a 'good maister to her in her ryght' (*AP* 63). Failing in this endeavour he then 'laboured [...] opynly a yenst the seid Robert Armebourgh and her'. (*AP* 63). The story continued that he certified in chancery that he had served a writ upon Robert, instigated by Joan's 'aduersaryes', in the abbey church of Westminster and that Robert having received the writ threw it to the ground and trod it under his feet. Yet, the story has a clever twist: it claimed that Bakepuz had never actually delivered the writ and therefore for his 'vnthrouthe' he was doubly punished.

And, with inne a while after, for his vnthrouthe and specially for the offence that he dyde in that holy place, Godde chastised him and sent hym soche a disease in hys bak, that he went stoupyng, that his shuldres were as lowe as his myddell and neuer recovered that disease (*AP* 64).³⁴

³² Carpenter suggests that this is the same man as William Bakepuys who was an esquire of Derbyshire, but she has not been able to establish the identification: *AP* 63, n.20.

³³ *AP* 63, n.21.

³⁴ 'disease' - aside from the meaning of serious illness 3 & 4 and 1(a) 'material discomfort'; or 2, 'distress of the mind' the word was also used to indicate acts of destruction or vandalism and misfortune 1(b) and 1(c): MED.

The author embraced the cruel irony in this tale in that Bakepuz ended up stooped to look permanently at the ground. This followed on from the accusation that Robert having received the writ threw it into the dirt and then proceeded to tread it under his feet. The punishment that Bakepuz received cunningly mimics the wrong that he accused Robert of in that he, Bakepuz, forever had to look down at the ground and the dirt beneath his feet. However, cunningly the writer took the details of the incident when it was stressed that the whole deceit was compounded by the fact that Bakepuz was in the Church of Westminster (identified earlier as the abbey church) and had therefore offended against that holy place.

In my reading of these texts I have endeavoured to see the homiletic associations that a contemporary reader to the text may have absorbed naturally. The craft of the homily was an aspect of the literate culture and alongside this I think these texts indicate that irony was moreover a part of the crafting. Edmond Reiss argues that medieval irony was an integral part of the way the medieval writer viewed and wrote of the world, it was a part of the context of the writing as:

Medieval irony stemmed from man's recognition of his place in creation; it was not at all a challenge to God but rather an acceptance of man's own inadequacy.³⁵

However, the reading of the irony is one that we need to assess from the medieval perspective and not our own perspective. Modern concepts of irony stem from our

³⁵ Edmond Reiss, 'Medieval Irony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (1981), 209-226, (p.213).

sense of doubt or uncertainty, whereas medieval irony came about, paradoxically, from its sense of certainty.³⁶ It is this perception of the inner meaning of the language and the depth of the inherent belief ideology that a contemporary reader would have seen without explanation. But for us, the use of irony, and its interpretation, is a feature that adds a sophisticated dimension to the sense of these damning messages.

A further example of this ironic and penitential turn of writing is that of the story of Starkey, an undersheriff, accused of making false returns at an assize and of giving false information to the jury.³⁷ This related to the disputed manor of Mancetter and the Armburghs' adversaries attempted to have the assize rule by default against the Armburghs on the grounds that they had: 'nought with inne the schyre wherethorewe they myght be distreyned nor they hadde no baillefes' (*AP* 64). The response was that it was untrue as: 'they were soole seised and in pesible possession of that other halveyndell of the thrydde parte of the manere of Mancestr' (*AP* 64). The detailing of the processes of the courts and legal proceedings and how these processes could be used against the defendants was highlighted by the description of how: 'a sise [was] stolen at Warwyk a yenst the seid Robert and Johane vpon the ton halyvndell of the thyrddde parte of the manere of Mancestr' (*AP* 64).³⁸ Just as in the case of Dirrayn, Starkey was punished within days of his deceit:

³⁶ *Ibid.* 212.

³⁷ This was most probably Thomas Starkey from a minor gentry east Warwickshire family, named in a petition to Kempe's successor as chancellor; he and his brother Edmund were receivers to William Mountford prior to 1444: *AP* 64, n.27 and *AP* 27. See also Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, 667: here Carpenter lists the various members of the Starkey family. The assize is most likely to be one of 'novel disseisin' but it is not specified.

³⁸ halyvndell – 'moiety': *Dictionary of Medieval Terms* ed. Coredon.

withinne a day or two after, the same Sterky in reward of his vntrewe labour was smetyn with a palsey and his mouthe sette a syde and hys yen drawn and so i taken in euery joynte of hys body (*AP* 64-65).

Again the essential link was between the sin and the nature of the punishment. As a result of the lies Starkey suffered his punishment and, while the palsy affected his eyes and other parts of his body, there is no mistaking the fact that first it was his mouth that was afflicted and ‘sette a syde’. The associations made between the character of the disease and the nature of the sin as well as between the sin and the appropriate penance, as we see very clearly set out in these morel anecdotes, were long-established ideas, which were reinforced by teaching and the knowledge of biblical texts.³⁹

The Bellers

The fate of James Bellers, Ellen’s husband and the son of Ralph Bellers, adds yet a further damning illustration to the consequences of opposing the Armburghs. Because of the significance of the close relationships it is clearly an important thread in the whole catalogue of fatal disasters that had befallen the Armburghs’ enemies. The passage follows on from the detailed revelation of Cokayn’s obstruction through the courts and the jury processes, beginning with the opening phrase: ‘And a non after alle this’ (*AP* 65). The account then ends with: ‘and be syde all thys’ (*AP* 66). It

³⁹ John T. McNeill, ‘Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Penitentials’, *Church History*, 1 (1932), 14-26 (p.21 & p.26): Deut. 25:2. Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (Toronto & London: Associated University Presses, 1983).

is then followed by recording the fateful stories of the many jurors who stood against the Armburghs. This terse framing adds to the impression that the information contained in the story surrounding James Bellers, which although it was supplementary to the main narrative of the Remembrance, was significant, and that its value lay in exposing just how much and how many times the Armburghs had suffered from the abuse of trust and deceit on the instigation of their enemies.

The tale acts as yet a further means of highlighting the dishonest characters of the Bellers, both father and son. The background appeared to be that James Bellers was in debt and that money was borrowed against the land that Ellen had inherited with part of inheritance land conveyed to feoffees to secure the loan. The two documents evidencing these financial manoeuvrings (feoffments made in 1436 and 1437) are in themselves fascinating as they are the only two documents in the whole Roll that originate from the opposing side.⁴⁰ How and why they come to be included in the evidence is curious. Carpenter suggests that with access to government departments in Westminster Robert was able to get copies of these enrolments.⁴¹ But this does not explain why he would then include them in the Roll. I suggest that the answer lies in the inclusion and interpretation of the story included in the Remembrance. In this it was suggested that James Bellers went to Normandy to attempt to rectify his financial problems, problems which he had in spite of his endeavours to gain part of the inheritance: ‘there thorew infortune evyn after his forwrought malyce and vntrouthe’. Once there, and:

⁴⁰ Final concord settling the estate of Ellen and James Bellers on Thomas Pekke, Westminster, 9 February 1436 (one of the only documents written in Latin in the Roll): *AP* 188-89 and an indentured agreement following on from the final concord, 8 March 1437: *AP* 190-91. See *AP* 28-29 for Carpenter’s interpretation of the situation.

⁴¹ *AP* 57-58.

threw temptacion of the devill, he assosid hym vnto soche as he was hym selfe and of his owne condicions and robbed an Englyssh pyle and slewe and hurt many of ys Englyssh sowdyours that were therinne (AP 66).

He was then pursued by the ‘Capteyn of the place’ who ‘toke hym and smote of hys heede and slewe many of hys felawes’ (AP 66). The description here is crucial and enhanced by the meticulous detailing of the incident. Not only had Bellers not benefited by his earlier malice and untruth but his weakness had left him vulnerable to temptation whereby he acted disloyally against an English site and English soldiers. This adds yet another signal to the reader of James Bellers’ depraved character in that he would go against his own countrymen. For this his punishment was beheading. It is a cleverly constructed anecdote with the skilled use of directive language and adds weight to the Armburghs’ insistent message of abuse of trust associated with dishonesty. A contemporary reader would have been aware of Bellers’ behaviour as an antithesis to the soldier’s chivalric code. The rules of conduct of the professional soldier were still in evidence, within the performance of chivalric action, and these included the pursuit of honour and valour in battle. Within this pursuit of honour there were acceptable actions such as those of the slaughter of enemies. However, Bellers’ actions went beyond this acceptable action and the story adroitly directs the reader to show that Bellers had broken the rules of chivalric conduct and for this he was duly damned.⁴²

⁴² Marjorie Reeve and Stephen Medcalf, ‘The ideal, the real and the quest for perfection’ in *The Later Middle Ages* ed. S. Medcalf, (London: Methuen & Co., 1981), 84-95. Reeve and Medcalf comment that although some historians have ‘written off’ the ideal of the chivalric code because of the

I would suggest that the two documents and this story in the Remembrance serve the same purpose to emphasize the corrupt characters of both the Bellers. The documents and story proved the recklessness of the son, substantiated the duplicity and cunning of the father, and added to the inference of the gullibility of Ellen, who had been persuaded by her father-in-law into an unwise disposal of her property to his friends (whom Carpenter identifies were not her's or James's).⁴³ Both these different forms of proof stress an immensely shrewd approach to the gathering of the evidence within the Roll and how it was being compiled to establish the Armburghs' message of their righteousness alongside the history of the conflict.

After the account of James Bellers' treachery the text moved back into the immediacy of the Armburghs' cause and moves beyond the named individuals to include an anonymous group who had served on the juries and had acted against the Armburghs: 'vpon the Inquisicions and vpon the accion of particions' (AP 66).⁴⁴ The narrative determined that these unnamed persons also 'felle to myschef' and detailed the various misfortunes that befell them. It is determined that these jurors were duly punished some: 'fillen in dyuers sykenesses and somme her goodes wastyd a wey and felle to nowght' (AP 66). In some cases the jurors' lips were

brutalities of the Hundred Years War, it was still prevalent, and may have rested more by this period in the sense of history that lay behind the chivalric attitudes: pp.85 and 89.

⁴³ AP 29. See also Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c.1422-c.1485* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Acheson identifies that Ellen had entrusted her manors to her father-in-law and that James Bellers had instructed the feoffees of her estates to pass control to his father who proceeded to take the profit from these without compensating Ellen: Acheson, *Gentry Community*, 82, 171-72.

⁴⁴ 'action of particion', a common law action compelling the division of an inheritance between coparceners: AP 66; AP 62, n.10.

destroyed, ‘the kanker brent a way her lyppes’ (*AP* 66). This powerful imagery again associates the physical destruction of the relevant bodily feature most closely allied to the nature of the deceit, in these instances the mouth and lips through which the apparent lies were produced.

Singled out for specific condemnation with regard to the corruption of the juries is one of the King’s bailiffs called Christopher. It was recorded that he ‘was a greet labourer amonges the jurroures a yenst the seid Robert and Johane’, but more than this without any proper authority or ‘manere of warrant’ save an attorney’s brief which was under the Armburghs’ adversaries’ seal, he manipulated money out of the Armburghs’ tenants and farmers (*AP* 66).⁴⁵ Again there is a strong association between the deed and the penalty; just as his dishonest actions were very public so was his death as he was slain among his neighbours. Here the writer included a reference to wider political issues and the difficulties associated with poor governance by an observation as to the issue of maintenance and corruption within the king’s areas of authority:

Cristoffer, on of the kyngys bailleifes as the kyngys officers schuld take no mayn tenaunce in no maner mater that stant by twyxt partie and partie and ys with inne a while after he was slayn a monges his neyghbours (*AP* 66).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ There is a gap in the text before the name ‘Cristoffer’ and no record of his forename. For my consideration of the gaps in the text see Chapter Two on the sources. Carpenter suggests that this may have been Thomas Christopher a king’s sergeant and yeoman of the chamber 1422 or possibly John Christopher, groom of the chamber and armourer: *AP* 66, n.38. Certainly the individual is identified as a king’s officer.

⁴⁶ Kathleen E. Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2009). Kennedy’s study on maintenance broadens our understanding of the concept

The narrative concluded with an account of how the Armburghs were tricked out of the advowson of Mancetter by a legal technicality through which they could not claim to have authority over the filling of the church's vacancy without sacrificing Joan's inheritance. Three adversaries were identified as having worked against the Armburghs in this instance. These included the parson, John Swalwell, who was appointed to fill the vacancy, and the recorder of Coventry, who was regarded as the opposition's chief counsel at this time.⁴⁷ The legal proceedings over the advowson of Mancetter had begun in Hilary term 1433; it appeared to have been a collusive suit which was intended to compel the Armburghs into acknowledging the Sumpters' title to the Mancetter property.⁴⁸ The final statement was that the three men who had acted in this matter were dead within twelve months.

Conclusion

The Remembrance provides the opportunity to examine late- medieval conflict from an unusual perspective; it highlights the intensely personal nature of a dispute and emphasises how deceit and retribution could be envisaged and portrayed through the medium of writing. Throughout the Remembrance we can see how the language was employed to manipulate and persuade the reader of the Armburghs' case and to stress their righteousness and moral behaviour. The prominent subjects are ones of judgement and retribution, but the emphasis is on these being manifestly

and provides a valuable resource for considering the subject from both its negative connotations as well as its more positive angles. Kennedy uses a variety of sources, including examples from the Paston, Stonor and Plumpton letters: see especially her introduction, 1-13 and chapter 2 where she focusses on the letters, 15-30.

⁴⁷ AP 26, AP 66-67.

⁴⁸ AP 21.

God's judgement and retribution and His power. Certain phrases such as, 'Godde is of power to punysshē' (AP 63); 'Godde chastised him'(AP 64); 'God smote hym' (AP 65) weave through the text as unequivocal signs to the reader as to the righteous power that was unleashed on those who went against God's divine law. We can also determine that there is a significant didactic element contained within the phrases as well as the vocabulary, for example 'chastised' and 'smote'.

Each of these characteristics of the writing, the factual and the didactic, support the other and add substance to the Armburghs' assertions. We should conclude that the detailed evidence appeared to have been cleverly manipulated for both literary and dramatic effect. However, facts were not necessarily the criteria in late medieval writing. Legal evidence was occasionally forged, frequently inaccurate or even opportunely disregarded and documentation: 'depended simultaneously on the recognition that writing both created and reflected truth.'⁴⁹ Clanchy determines: 'the distinction between fact and fiction in writing...would not have been as sharp to medieval people' and Krug states that texts: 'depended on an audience devoid of cynicism concerning the relationship between truth and textuality'.⁵⁰

My conclusion is that as a text, for further advancing our understanding of gentry literate culture, the Remembrance is effective. There are two aspects to this: first in that it provides the means by which we can appreciate how a gentry family

⁴⁹ Krug, *Reading Families*, 25. For an examination of medieval forgery see Alfred Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries – False Documents in Fifteenth Century England* (London & Toronto: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2004). Hiatt's study argues that medieval forgeries were not simply acts of deception but that they were used as a means of investing a historical account or narrative with the authority of a written record.

⁵⁰ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 321; Krug, *Reading Families*, 25.

engaged in a bitter conflict might have revealed to their circle of associates their own thoughts and attitudes to justice, to morality and retribution. Second, that it substantiates how private gentry lay writing was being influenced by the late-medieval ideological belief culture. Indeed, my conclusion is that one of the most significant attributes of the Remembrance is that it provides us with an example as to how a lay-gentry writer and compiler had a clear concept of how a message could be assembled and how it could be skilfully crafted to gain the greatest effect.

In this respect the didactic character of the Remembrance bears comparison with other forms of homiletic writing, for example *Peter Idley's Instructions to his Son*, throughout which exemplars are used to illustrate various moral dilemmas.⁵¹ Although the completed text of *Idley's Instructions* post-dated the compilation of the Armburgh Roll Idley had drawn on his experiences to write the text which were contemporary with the period of the Brokholes conflict.⁵² His writing was based on earlier tracts and the literary tradition of ethical and religious stories as an accepted medium for revealing God's moral judgment. We can see that much of the vocabulary as well as the attitudes that run through the Remembrance were similarly mirrored in Idley's writings. For example, one such exemplar that resonates in terms of approach, message and vocabulary is that of the perjurer and his demise of which the following stanzas are extracts:

God to whom periurie is grevous and lothe

Anon gave hem his mortall sentence –

⁵¹ Peter Idley, *Peter Idley's Instructions to his Son* ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn, (Boston and Oxford: D.C. Heath and Oxford University Press, 1935).

⁵² *Ibid.* 36-37.

This man fille deede in all hir presence

And neuer sterid after, hande nee foote

He died without shrifte or dispensacioun.

Allas! man for ony lucree of worldly goode

Shold leese that Iuell that God bought with his bloode!

fforsweryng is as moche for to sey

As forsakyng God and all his werkis

But to somme men this mater full derke is

That list not to amende of his fals othes,

Whiche vnto God no thyng more lothe is.⁵³

In the phrase, ‘This man fille deede in all hir presence’ we see the idea of audience and witness to the fact that the man fell dead in the presence of others, a situation represented in certain of the Remembrance’s moral anecdotes. The nature of eternal punishment, again a constant theme in the Remembrance, is mirrored in: ‘He died without shrifte or dispensacioun’. The depiction of sin, in this instance of ‘fals othes’ or ‘fforsweryng’ which gave rise to God’s retribution are identified in these exemplars, just as the sins of the Armburghs’ enemies were identified throughout the Remembrance.

⁵³ Ibid. 152.

Central to the arguments put forward by the Armburghs was that they were subjected to the scheming of their adversaries, the Sumpters, who used their connections and the associated influence in chancery as a means of defeating Joan and Robert. The Remembrance emphasised this by exposure of the individual issues of trust and the abuse of that trust and the details of underhand manoeuvrings within the law courts. In so doing it further validates our understanding of late-medieval attitudes to corruption and the workings of the law courts by providing us with rare evidence as to the intensely personal complexities that lay behind land and inheritance disputes. Many of the copy documents in the Roll detail the associated tricks and manoeuvres that the Armburghs ascertained had been used by their opponents in order to defeat them alongside the prejudice that the Armburghs perceived. Ultimately the Armburghs' inheritance claims failed and yet, from the Remembrance, the conclusion that they gained, or retained, what they considered to be the moral high ground resonates throughout, even now.

CHAPTER FOUR – The Ideal of Worship

This thesis asserts that although the gentry letters do indeed reflect how their writers wished to be regarded they are also more revealing of individual attitudes than has been previously allowed for. In this chapter I set out to explore that premise from a consideration of the language that surrounds one of the most significant of late-medieval concepts: that of worship. I believe that in the letters from the Armburgh Roll where the focus is the fear of the loss of worship we can evaluate the paradox that this thesis presents. This chapter will consider how the writers represented themselves through the language that they used and whether we can actually determine what image they were endeavouring to portray. The chapter will also consider the attitudes towards worship that prevail in the writing but which we do not readily or easily appreciate.

Recent studies which have focused on the gentry have considered the concept of worship; it has been recognised as a fundamental, and integral, part of the late-medieval gentry's social condition.¹ Carpenter succinctly summarises many of the issues surrounding worship, including our problem in satisfactorily being able to define it:

¹ See Carpenter, *Locality and polity*; Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, 136-186; Peter Coss, 'An age of deference', in *A Social History of England 1200-1500* ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31-73; *Gentry Culture* ed. Radulescu and Truelove: see in particular Philippa Maddern's essay on 'Gentility' (pp. 18-34) and Maurice Keen's essay on 'Chivalry' (pp.35-49); Radulescu, *Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur*, 17-24 and 83-96; Noble, *World of the Stonors*.

If it was land that gave landowners their power, it was then their ability to handle, friends, neighbours and superiors and the income from the estate, enabling them to live at the level dictated by their power and influence that gave them the all-important quality of ‘worship’. Worship, a word in constant use in this period, was the quality a landowner expected to have if he used his resources properly. It defies modern definition, but can best be described as the worth or credit that was earned by living up to one’s status as a landowner in all publically-visible aspects of life, [sic] from housing and food through litigation to dealing with the king or his officers. A man or family that lost its worship lost a large part of its existence.²

It is therefore important to recognise that the possession of land and property moved beyond simply the economic considerations in that its ownership ‘defined a gentry family as a political and social entity’.³ In terms of Robert’s position this defining element, the ownership of land, and not just any land but land that had associated status in terms of manorial rights, is crucial in beginning to unravel the aims and ambitions that dominated his writing. It is probable that Robert’s lack of his own lands was the prompt for his marriage to Joan. Land acquisition through marriage was a common means by which men in Robert’s position (possibly a younger son with no land-holding to his name) acquired the much desired status of lordship.⁴ The inheritance of manorial land bestowed certain rights and privileges

² Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, 245.

³ Ibid. 244.

⁴ There is no conclusive evidence that Robert was the younger son but Carpenter suggests it. However as I have already argued in chapter two on the sources I believe that Robert was the elder brother.

that could not be achieved simply by purchasing land. Lordship and the concept of honour came through birthright as opposed to being acquired through the ability to purchase land. However, purchase of land was the means by which many throughout the fifteenth century progressed from the profits of trade or through entering the legal profession.⁵ There is not just a little irony in the fact that much of Robert's concern expressed throughout the early stages of the dispute was over his potential loss of worship, through the debts he was unable to service, and yet it would seem that it was his desire for this worshipful status that put him in the position in the first instance. In aspiring to landownership by the acquisition of the manorial rights of Joan's inheritance, Robert also took on the debts incurred by Thomas Aspoll, Joan's second husband.⁶ The marriage also brought with it the familial and financial responsibilities of Joan's two children by her first husband Philip Kedington: Robert and Margaret. Paradoxically, it would seem marriage had to be considered as a

There is also no direct evidence that Robert Armburgh was a trained lawyer, but it is clear from his writings and the legal advice he gave in many of his letters that he had substantial knowledge of the law and many of his letters are addressed as his writing them from Westminster which was central to the law courts.

⁵ For a broader discussion on the fact that land was better acquired through marriage than by purchase, see Christine Carpenter, 'The Fifteenth-Century English Gentry and their Estates', in *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in late Medieval Europe*, ed. Michael Jones (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1986), 36-58: Carpenter comments that: 'fame and fortune had to be achieved by the expedient of marriage', 38. S.J. Payling, 'Social mobility, demographic change, and the landed society in late medieval England', *EHR*, 45 (1992), 51-73. Payling determines that the 'later medieval period was the last great age of the heiress' in part due to the serious demographic changes brought about by plague, leaving many estates only entailed on the female line and from which upward mobility through marriage into the landed class could take place: Payling, 'Social mobility', 62, 51-2. In the Roos/Brokholes inheritance the male line ended 1375 - Ellen (Joan's mother) inherited as the aunt of the last John de Roos - the property subsequently coming down the female line to include the Brokhole property after Ellen's marriage to Geoffrey Brokhole.

⁶ Thomas Aspoll, an Essex man, was dead by July 1420. In 1417 he served as a man-at arms under John Mowbray, earl of Norfolk, in Normandy: AP 5: www.medievalsoldiers.org (accessed 30/5/14).

matter of business, from a social as well as an economic perspective, undertaken even if it brought with it certain financial burdens.⁷

The lack of income arising from the non-payment of rent from the Brokhole manorial lands, alongside the debts incurred in the pursuit of the ongoing litigation, were two of the major problems that Robert faced throughout the protracted inheritance dispute. The impact of these financial considerations was the focus of many of his letters and the monetary challenges that beset the Armburghs created several different problems, not the least of which was the lack of return from the manors. This was compounded by the loss of income over the non-contractual removal of valuable wood from their lands. Other financial factors, such as the debts that Robert inherited on his marriage to Joan, and the various family expenses that he incurred were irritants to an unstable and insecure economic situation, but they were not core features of the difficulties. When taken together, however, all these financial concerns gave rise to one of Robert's main anxieties, the potential loss of his worship.

The damage that could be inflicted on an individual's worship by being in debt is evident in Robert's letters to his brother William. There are only four such letters, written between 1428 and March 1430 but these demonstrate the

⁷ Further examination of the background to late medieval marriage taken from letters is found in Keith Dockray 'Why Did Fifteenth-Century English Gentry Marry?: The Pastons, Plumpton and Stonors Reconsidered' in *Gentry and Lesser Nobility* ed. Jones, 61-80. Dockray stresses that the complexities and motives behind gentry marriage should not be underestimated and that the considerations of love and friendship matches were also to be found.

vulnerability of being in debt, how it was regarded as a weakness and how indebtedness could be a very dangerous and socially threatening burden.⁸

In an appeal to his brother William in c.1428-29 Robert requested that William lend him: ‘x or xij marc or summe notable summe wherthorough I might be releued and my worship sauyd at this tyme’ (*AP* 103). The letter stressed Robert’s ongoing problems, how he had been: ‘grevously vexed at the comune lawe be myn aduersaries’ (*AP* 102). These vexations were compounded by the expenses over his step-daughter’s marriage.⁹ Robert said that he had been put to ‘greet cost’ and, therefore, had ‘borowyd moche good’ which if it were not repaid ‘withinne short tyme’ would mean that he was ‘lyke to be foule shamed’.¹⁰ He determined that without William’s help he would not be able to make the repayments. By way of reciprocation he promised his brother, in lieu of the loan, whatever surety William required which Robert suggested could be an interest in one of his properties: ‘be yt assignement in a manere of myn or an obligacion, ye shul haue yt al redy’ (*AP* 103).

⁸ *AP* 102-23; *AP* 110-11; *AP* 127-28; *AP* 128-29. There are two letters which Carpenter determines are from William Armburgh to Robert written much later in the early years of the 1440s but before 1443: *AP* 186-87, n.461. Although Carpenter has suggested that William was the elder as I have proposed the opening conventions of these two letters suggest that William could potentially be the younger brother, due to the use of ‘reuerent and worschipfull’ in the addressing which would suggest an inferior writing to a superior. See Carpenter: *AP* 7.

⁹ Margaret Walkerne, Joan’s daughter by her first husband Robert Kedington. See *AP* 10, n.52 and *AP* 6, n.33 regarding the £40 that had to be settled in July 1421 and which was recorded in chancery. These place the date that the settlement of the money had to be made early in Robert’s marriage to Joan which had taken place at Michaelmas 1420.

¹⁰ C.E.6.10(4). Carpenter’s transcription is ‘soule shamed’ but the lettering is ‘f’ not ‘s’ making the word ‘foule’ which provides a significant change in meaning: *AP* 103.

A later letter to William, dated 1 March 1430, again rehearsed Robert's many financial problems and that he had been: 'right greuously chargid and put to inportable costes this ix yeer and more thorough dettes paying and entangelyng of myn aduersariis' (*AP* 127).¹¹ Once again the letter stressed how Robert had had to find money to continue the litigation and for Joan's daughter's marriage, both of which led him into further debt. It was the threat of those that lent him the money that dominated his concerns. He had borrowed 'of diuerse personys in London whiche be to me but strange men' and had not been in a position to repay the loans (*AP* 127). The language reflected the extent of the threat to Armburgh. Those that Robert were in debt to were 'right angry with me and hasty vpon me', warning him that if he did not 'content hem' they would 'sue me and do the werst that thei can do to me' (*AP* 127). Ultimately he was 'lyke to be shamed and foule hyndred' without his brother's assistance.¹² He continued by detailing the consequences of his failure to repay the loans and how if his and Joan's adversaries in the inheritance dispute heard of the debts and his difficult situation they would take advantage of it. We can read the menace in the subtext of the phrase where he expressed this concern: 'yt wold be gret hyndryng to al myn other maters and also thei wold be moche the bolder vpon me' (*AP* 128). He concluded his appeal by beseeching his brother's aid and, as in the earlier letter, promised reciprocation. In these letters Robert only once directly used the word 'worship' in the desire that his 'worship', should be 'sauyd at this tyme' (*AP* 103). But around this the expressions of appeal and consequences, if

¹¹ 'Entangel' or 'entangelyng' are words found frequently in Robert's letters, the meaning of involving someone in difficulty or embarrassing them is very evident from the placement of the words and the context in which they are usually found. There is a single meaning for 'entanglen' – 'To involve (someone in difficulty); to embarrass': MED.

¹² C.E.6.10(4).

the requests were not met, all reflected back into his primary concern - the loss of his worship.

Shame was one of the inevitable consequences, as seen in the phrase, ‘I am lyke to be foule shamed’.¹³ In contrast to much of Robert’s writings the letter to William which set out how he had been compromised in his pursuit of the litigation by his adversaries, who had been ‘maintened thorough greet lordship’ was brief and direct, and the problems and the request for help were simply established (*AP* 103).¹⁴ The second letter to William (dated at Westminster, 1 March 1430) was more expansive (*AP* 128). It established how two actions of partition in the estates had been taken out against Robert alongside other litigation and that although he had been ‘endettyd more’ earlier on (which might tie into the first letter of appeal dated around 1428-9), the extent of his debts were still the cause of considerable concern: ‘neuertheles I am right hevy that yt is so moche’ (*AP* 127). Here he repeated the fear of the shame that would befall him in that he was: ‘lyke to be shamed and foule hyndred’.¹⁵ The concept and the word – hindered or hindering – are frequently used in association with his inability to pay debts. It ties in closely with Robert’s position, how his ability to defend himself at law was undermined by his debts and also by the nature of his relationship with those from whom he had borrowed.¹⁶ Hindered is a

¹³ C.E.6.10(4). See alteration between ‘soule’ and ‘foule’: *AP* 103.

¹⁴ *AP* 102-03.

¹⁵ C.E.6.10(4).

¹⁶ ‘hindringe’ – 1(a) ‘harm, damage or injury’; 1(b) ‘to the detriment of; to someone’s detriment’; 2(a) ‘harm to reputation, defamation’; 2(b) ‘damage to one’s reputation’: MED. OED – obstructing. Shillingford used the word ‘hyndering’ in relation to a present of buckhorn to the chancellor which was delivered late and referred to the problems that this caused commenting that the gift might have sped the matter but how its late arrival caused the matter to be hindered: Moore, p.23.

powerfully evocative word in the context of Robert's concerns for not only does hindering mean obstructing, but it also included the idea of damage or harm to an individual or actions to the detriment of that individual and the concept of harm to one's reputation and defamation of character. The fears and frustrations of being hampered, obstructed or having his reputation damaged are brought to the fore when Robert wrote:

Wherfore I beseech you al this considerid, as I may do for you here afterward whan I am at more ese and better myn owne man than I am at this tyme, to lene me some resonable somme of money (*AP* 128).

The phrase 'whan I am at more ese and better myn owne man', appears to contain complexities of meaning that would have needed no further explanation and which William would readily have appreciated. Here Robert's worship was stripped away not just by the debts themselves but by the impact that lack of independence and the ability to function without obligations caused. Through this wording, 'better myn owne man', it is possible to determine just how strong the feelings that sat behind the concept of worship were and the reality of the fear that even just the notion of loss of worship could engender.

Equally it is possible to interpret the considerable frustration and foreboding that Robert experienced. This is particularly so through the analysis of how he spoke about his business associates. The letter of 1 March 1430 provides insight into these relationships.¹⁷ Robert stressed the 'entangelyng of myn aduersariis', of the money

¹⁷ *AP* 127-28.

that he had borrowed of ‘diuerse personys in London’ which were to him ‘but strange men’. He explained how he had put down securities - ‘weddys’ - and how these securities ‘shul be forfet’ unless the money was repaid and he stressed the facts that the parties to whom he owed the money were angry and threatening.¹⁸ In contrast to these securities, the obligations and promises Robert made to William do not appear to be so socially, or even economically, oppressive or ultimately so damaging. The phrases Robert used highlight the nature of obligation and how the weakness in Robert’s armour, that is to say his indebtedness, gave an opportunity for his adversaries to take advantage of him. It revealed how much wiser it was to borrow within the tight circle of close family and friends as opposed to borrowing from ‘strange men’, whom it was unequivocally stated would not have hesitated in bringing about Robert’s downfall. The expressive ‘entangling’ is indicative of the methods that have been used against Robert and Joan; the Armburghs were effectively trapped by their need to pursue the litigation and the inheritance claim, and this entrapment and the financial consequences, impinged on them at all levels of their existence. Whichever way Robert appeared to turn he was thwarted and his worship under threat.

The idea of Robert not being his own man was further emphasised by a letter that Robert wrote (probably in March 1430) to William appealing to him to intercede with their other brother John on Robert’s behalf.¹⁹ Robert stated that he had enclosed a letter for John praying that their brother, John, ‘lene me som resonable somme of

¹⁸ ‘weddys’ - securities deposited temporarily with the creditors to ensure that payment of a debt is eventually made; a pledge, the ‘wed’ sometimes in symbolic form such as a rod or stick which was handed over: see Alford, *Glossary of Legal Diction*, 166. The word ‘gold’ is used throughout the text and appears to be interchangeable for ‘money’. MED: 2 (a) & 2(b) ‘gold money; any form of money’.

¹⁹ AP 128, n.284.

money' the reasons for which were 'reherfid' in the letter (*AP* 128). There is no copy of the letter to John nor are there any direct communications with him in the Roll; the only knowledge we have of John and the appeals made to him come indirectly. The manner in which Robert made his request to William for the letter to be delivered personally is unusual, no other messengers or servants were involved, and this was perhaps indicative of the highly personal and possibly contentious nature of the request. Robert wrote:

Wherfore I beseche you that ye wol wouchesaf to deliuer hym his lettre with your owne handys and, whan he hath vndon yt that ye wol ouerse yt with hym, and what ye haue ouerseye yt and vnderstond my nede, that ye wol wouchesaf to stire hym to perfourme my desire at this tyme (*AP* 128-29).

It is significant that Robert gave specific instructions as to how once John had opened the letter addressed to him, John and William were to discuss the matter. Robert appealed to William to use his influence to get John to agree to the loan: 'that ye wol wouchesaf to stire hym to perfourme my desire at this tyme' (*AP* 128). It is not possible to establish whether the manner of the delivery was to do with the confidentiality of the contents of the letter to John or simply that with William's active involvement in the delivery more pressure could be brought to bear on John in order to resolve the situation. However, it gives an indication as to how negotiated settlements of loans, within the family circle, might be made and again the importance of this especially where considerations of repute and worship were concerned. Equally this example adds to our appreciation of the framework of

familial responsibility where money and the provision of inter-family loans, which could equally be the provision of goods, was involved.

In the same letter Robert requested that William: ‘wol wouchesaf to lene me a vij or viij quarters of malt, for I wot wel I shal haue nede therto for certeyn causys that I told you’ (AP 129). He mentioned how the price of malt was rising, promised to repay it within twelve months and prayed: ‘that I may haue good malt and that ye wol sendit by som man of youre owne cuntre etc.’ (AP 129). In a letter from William to Robert the flexibility with which these loans could be resolved was detailed when William stated: ‘thankyng you of the greet chere that ye made me, and as for the money that ye lent me, I haue sent x quarters of malt [...] to be delyuered to you or your assynges at Westm in all haste’ (AP 186). The reciprocity, as well as the responsibility, between the brothers was evident and reinforces the idea that worship was something that affected the family as a whole and not just its individual members.

The question over the provisioning of the malt from William to Robert was indicative of the financial crisis that the latter faced. This was stressed by Robert’s request that the servant William had left with Robert went back to William; Robert had no need of him and indeed it would seem that Robert only kept the servant within his own household as a favour to his brother:

for I haue no nede to hym, for he shuld not haue bydyn so long with me as he hath doo but for be cause that he was youre seruant and that ye sent hym to me (AP 128).

The suggestion was made that it were cheaper to give the servant: ‘v marc than yeve hym his boorde [...] for whete and malt and other vitailles be passyng dere ouer that thei were wont to be’ and that the servant would do better elsewhere (AP 128). Robert made the point that: ‘yt is gret hyndryng to me and ne fertheryng to hym’ (AP 129). He commented that the servant could: ‘take gretter wagis with you than he shuld take with a gentilman to abyde with hym in housholde’ and that ultimately the servant’s position would be more favourable (AP 128-29). From this exchange we can see that Robert’s financial difficulties impinged on his ability to maintain a certain lifestyle; it is evident that he had difficulty in meeting his obligations as the master of the household.

As Carpenter has identified the ‘publically-visible aspects’ of life, the provisioning of the household and living up to the level required by one’s status as a landowner, were all intricately interwoven within the ideal of worship.²⁰ The way in which Robert’s concerns over the servant are exposed reveal the very personal nature of the impact that financial difficulties could bring.

I think we can appreciate in the composition of his second letter to William, Robert’s skill in prose writing. For example, the simple composition of the phrase ‘yt is gret hyndryng to me and ne fertheryng to hym’ (AP 129), with the juxtaposition of ‘hyndryng’ and then ‘fertheryng’ mirroring each other, succinctly summarised all that was necessary to say in that neither party benefited from the arrangement. I also think that here it is hard to argue that Robert’s letters were primarily driven by the

²⁰ Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, 245.

desire to project a positive image of himself: far more the content and context are to do with self-preservation of repute. The language and construction and tone of these letters undoubtedly demonstrated Robert's societal vulnerability quite the opposite to a socially confident position. However, we do also need to recognise that Robert was always careful to ascertain that none of the problems he faced were the result of his own recklessness nor were they caused by any failing on his part. In terms of our understanding of social attitudes the letters undoubtedly represent the opportunity to see in some detail how critical were the feelings surrounding the all-important status concept of worship and in particular the real fear that surrounded the loss of worship when allied with debt.

Just as William was requested to act as an intermediary with their brother John, so too a similar request was made to Robert's Mancetter tenants, William Harpou and Richard Barbour.²¹ Robert wrote in an attempt to put more pressure on one of his brothers:

And also withoute my brother help me with sum resonable somme of money, as he behith me that he wold the last tyme that I sente to hym, I am lyke for to be suyd of certeyn persones and foule shamyd and hyndrid for gold that I borwyd of hem the last yere, and therefore I pray yow with all myn herte to speke with hym and pray hym to releue me so in my greet need that I haue at

²¹ *AP* 112-13. The brother concerned is not named and therefore cannot be identified, but the assumption that the reference is to William seems secure, as this request would tie in with the letters that Robert wrote to William around this same time of late 1429, before November 1429.

this tyme, that I may haue cause to do asmoche for hym a nother tyme (AP 112).²²

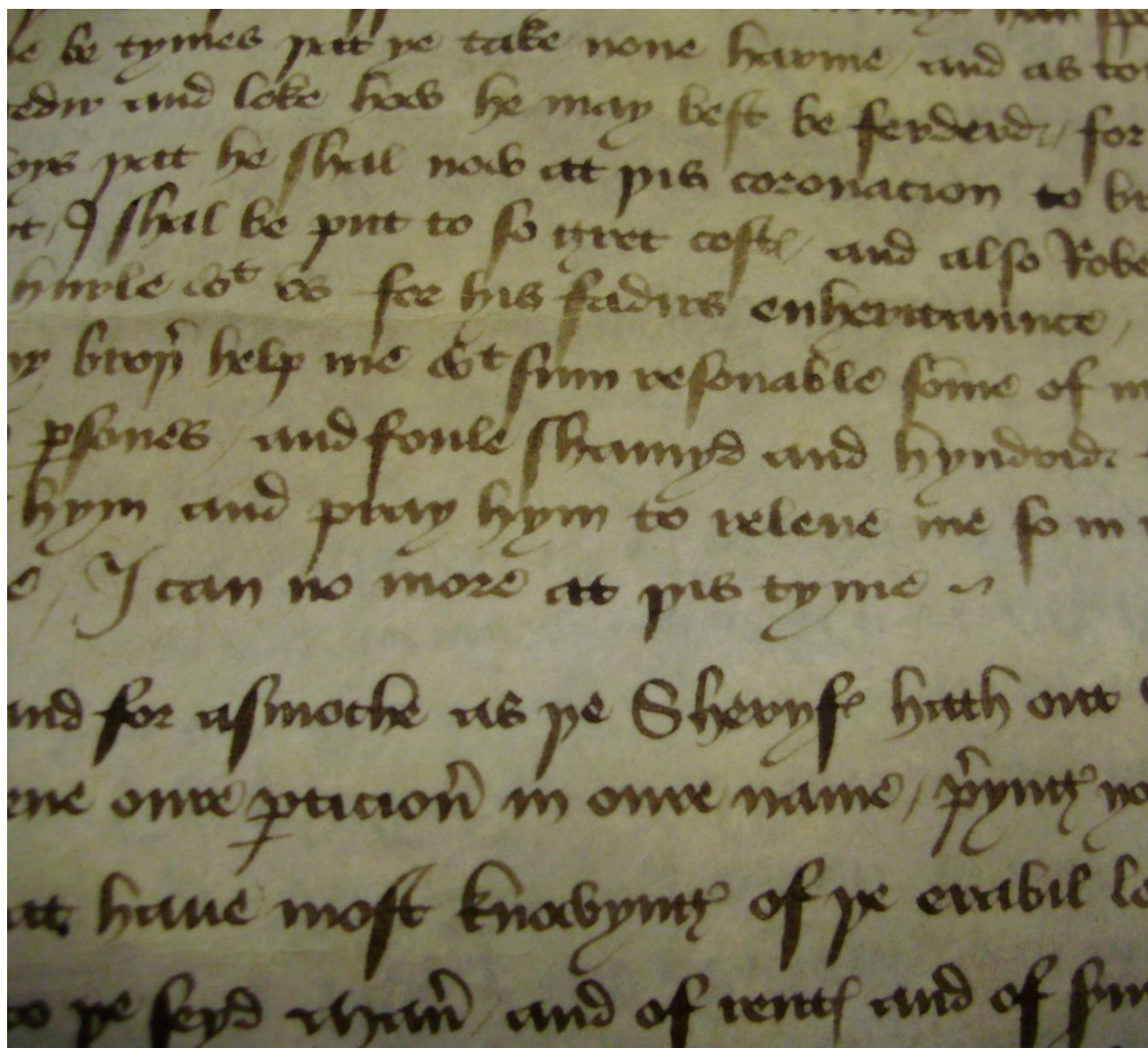


Figure 4: ‘foule shamyd and hyndrid’: Robert to Harpour and Barbour before November 1429: (AP 112) – Edition transcribed ‘soule’ not ‘foule’

The language repeats the same ideas of shame made in other appeals. The concern of shame is, once more, strongly expressed by ‘foule shamyd’, as is the prospect of being ‘hyndrid’, and the fear of being sued. The desire to be relieved is

²² C.E.6.10(4). To Harpour and Barbour shortly before November 1429: AP 112.

robustly voiced: 'I pray yow with all myn herte to speke with hym and pray hym to releue me so in my greet need that I haue at this tyme'. The desire to be released, to have one's worship saved, is reinforced by the phrase: 'pray hym to releue me'. It reiterates the lack of independence that being encumbered by debt brings and the difficulties faced by not being one's own man.

This is an intriguing letter when we consider the apparent difference in status between Robert and his tenants, as well as the nature of the implicit authority that he had in his role as the manorial lord. It could be that the tenants' position was jeopardised by Robert's insecure financial position in which case requesting their support would not seem as strange as they may also have reason to secure Robert's brother's assistance to keep them protected. It reveals the complex nature of the relationships where money and indebtedness were concerned and establishes that the interdependence, within both familial and the wider community circles, was a vital consideration. It moves the requirements beyond the familial responsibility for the protection of worship to the responsibility in the wider social sense, although of course Robert did not request financial assistance from his tenants; he simply asked them to bring pressure to bear on the brother.

A letter that I consider to be central to our understanding of the significance of the relative status and the relationship of those involved in the financial arrangements of loans and/or borrowing is a letter that Margaret Walkerne wrote to her step-father in c.1430.²³ This letter emulates both the structure of appeal as well as the same phraseology that is characteristic of Robert's letters to William. Indeed, the

²³ AP 126-27.

specific words that Robert used in his letters are mirrored in his daughter-in-law's letter to him. She spoke of 'entangelyng of here aduersariis', the 'grevous costes' and the need for the 'savyng of myn husbondes worship and myn' (*AP* 127). The entangling that Margaret referred to and the costs were, however, not her own nor her husband's, but those of her friends who, because of these 'grevous costes and inportable charges', were unable to assist her financially: 'that thei mow not aquityn hem to me as thei wolden' (*AP* 127). Thus she turned to Robert for assistance.

Margaret's letter to her step-father is enlightening on several levels. I believe that it reinforces my idea that the letters in the Roll were specially selected. There are no other letters written from, or addressed to, Margaret. I see the letter's value in the way that it functions to support the other evidence which surrounded Robert's financial situation, including the responsibilities he had towards Joan's children, and his indebtedness. The content and context of Margaret's letter suggest that its inclusion was primarily to add weight to the arguments that Robert had put forward in his own letters of appeal. Margaret's letter focused on her need to maintain her own and her husband's worship at the time of her confinement for the birth of her child and that without her step-father's help she would not be provided with 'onest beddyng' (*AP* 126). The subject of the honest bedding links into the wider impression of honesty, seen when Margaret stated that without the honest bedding: 'myn hosbondys oneste and myn may not be savid'.²⁴ 'Honest' and 'honesty' are

²⁴ 'honeste' or 'oneste' – the word can be either a noun or an adjective: as an adjective: 1(a) 'of persons, their reputation, desires'; 1(b) 'of actions, conditions, events; worthy of respect'; 1(c) 'of seasons or times to be honoured'; 2(a) 'appropriate for a purpose or effect'; 2(b) 'seemly', proper befitting social status; 3(a) 'of things or places being beautiful or excellent'; 4(a) 'of persons or their hearts, virtuous and of women chaste'. As a noun: 1(a) 'honourable position'; 1(b) 'good name'; 1(c)

words that had complex and multiple meanings in medieval England. The primary meaning related to a person's reputation, honour, virtue and respectability which are bound up with concepts of social status and how someone was seemly and correct. More broadly the meaning of 'honest' encompassed the idea of being virtuous or of women being chaste or pure, as well as being truthful; a thing could also be spoken of as being honest, by being beautiful, comely and excellent or fine. Therefore the complexity of Margaret's appeal must be read at many different levels. For example we need to see how with the provision of linen appropriate to their status was absolutely fundamental to the concept of their honesty, and how the lack of the correct items could give rise to the fear of embarrassment and loss of worship.

Margaret, by emphasising both the idea of honest bedding alongside her and her husband's honesty, evidently wanted to avoid any possibility that the visitors (specifically identified as the 'ladyes and gentilwemen and other frendys of my modres and myn' who 'ar lyk to vysite me while I ly ynne childe bende [*sic*]' (*AP* 127)) could find any cause to criticise her and her husband. The implication is that this criticism could lead to a loss of the household's reputation. We can also read a subtext which was by inference the possible reflected criticism of Robert himself. The implication is that Robert's own worship was jeopardised if he did not comply with Margaret's wishes and that it could be seen that he did not make provision for his step-daughter and her husband and their unborn child in a way appropriate to their rank and status. It reaffirms the fact that the responsibility for familial worship ultimately rested with the head of the family and of the extended household. This requirement was no doubt heightened at times of significant family events prime

'dignity'; 1(d) 'reverence'; 2 'propriety of behaviour, good manners'; 3(a) 'splendour or honour'; 4(a) 'moral purity, uprightness'; 4(b) 'purity, virginity, chastity': MED.

among which must have been the birth of a child.²⁵ From the substance of this letter we can begin to understand why Robert borrowed in the way that he did to protect his role, his status, the identity of the family and that all pervasive social ideal of worship. Paradoxically, it would seem to be apparent that his worship was then threatened by the very debts he had incurred in order to protect the worshipful status he had sought in the first instance through his marriage.

An important aspect that I think can be gleaned from Margaret's letter is that it extends the idea of worship beyond a purely masculine discourse. It widens our appreciation of the fact that worship could be focused and centred on women, and that the ideal of worship was not only defined by men's roles or that it was only linked to their status. Ultimately it must be accepted that the final responsibility for maintaining worship was with the male head of the family, but gradations and subtleties within the concept of worship can be deduced through this appeal. Margaret's husband was identified as having newly come into his lands, property in which he had invested but from which he had, at that time, no returns: 'and my husbonde ys newe comyn to his londes and is but bare and as yit hath lytill profit takyn therof and hath leyd gret cost on his husbandry'. So he too, like Margaret's friends, had been unable to: 'aquityn hem to me as thei wolden'. Margaret made the

²⁵ The value of lineage and the antecedents of a family and of the guaranteed lines of inheritance and genealogy which could be proved or at least reliably fabricated as in the case of the Paston family and late-medieval veneration of the past is a well accepted part of fifteenth-century gentry culture. The birth of a child was a very significant occasion and how the lying-in was perceived would have been of great importance; the damage to reputation by not 'doing the correct thing' was not to be underestimated. For details on the Paston family where he examines the origins of the Pastons: see Richmond, *The Paston Family*, 1-22. Carpenter, *Locality and polity*: In part one of her Warwickshire study Carpenter explores family and lineage, 244-61. She suggests that land produced 'complex and deep emotional responses' and that the same 'applies, with perhaps even more force to the words 'family' and 'lineage', 245.

promise to Robert, that when: ‘myn hosbond ferme comyth yn’ Robert would be ‘wele and trevly payd ayene’ (*AP* 127).

I also think that the way in which the prospect of the confinement, with all the associated concerns of loss of face and honesty, is explored provides a rare opportunity to glimpse the bonds that may well have existed between a wife and her husband. From the phrases ‘in savyng of myn husbondes worship and myn’, and ‘myn hosbondys oneste and myn’, it would seem that it was their joint worship as well as their individual worship which was at risk (*AP* 127). My interpretation of the language, tone and construct of the letter is that it suggests that arising from their mutually supportive relationship there was a degree of equality, even respect, within the responsibilities that they both shared in safeguarding their reputation and the honour and worship of their household.

Another letter that concerns the possible loss of female worship is one written by John Palmer to his mother Sybil Palmer.²⁶ The letter appears to have been written shortly after Joan’s death in 1443 as reference is made to her death and the fact that her husband, Robert, ‘hath me [John] in gouernance’ (*AP* 185); Carpenter suggests a date of summer 1444.²⁷ As with the letter written by Margaret Walkerne to Robert I contend that this letter’s significance not only stems from its content or

²⁶ *AP* 184-85

²⁷ *AP* 31-33: Carpenter provides a detailed explanation of the likely relationships. John Palmer was most probably a nephew to Joan Armburgh and the Palmers heirs to the Kedington family, relatives to Joan’s first husband. John Palmer was underage at the time of writing the letter: *AP* 184-85, *AP* 184, n.456; John Palmer writes of Joan as his ‘grandame’ but as ‘nephew’ or ‘niece’ could be synonyms for ‘grandson’ or ‘granddaughter’ Carpenter determines it is much more likely that John Palmer was Joan’s nephew. Carpenter also provides details for the apparent dating.

context but that it is further evidence of a comprehensive and determined approach to the compilation of different, but mutually supporting, proofs within the Roll. The subject of the letter does however offer the opportunity for us to interpret a further piece of correspondence where the central message concerns the possible loss of familial worship.

The letter was written in response to a request by Sybil to come and visit her son. John responded: ‘And for asmoch as ye sent me worde that ye wolde come in to thys contre a pilgrimage after thys Whitsontide that is the cause that I sende you thys letter’ (*AP* 184-85). The letter continued by setting out all the reasons why this visit was not in either Sybil’s or John’s best interest nor seemingly in Robert’s interests either. Although the letter does not deal directly with the inheritance dispute, it is very much the subtext as the letter sets out how Robert had incurred considerable costs, all stemming from the inheritance and subsequently Joan’s death. In a detailed listing it established the difficulties over money that were contributing to Robert’s financial embarrassment. My interpretation of this detailed inclusion is that Robert was actively involved in the letter’s composition, perhaps even dictating to the young John what to say. The detail suggests that John was aware of all the many complex economic problems that Robert had, especially when he made the comment that Robert had: ‘lost, spendyd and payed a gret summe of goode sithen my grandame dyed’ (*AP* 185). The list included the complications over non-receipt of the tenants’ rent and an incident where money was allegedly taken from Robert’s tenants illegally by the earl of Oxford. It details that money had been expended on John’s sister’s marriage, the prayers for Joan’s soul and that paid in fines and in tax

and to the escheator over Joan's estate.²⁸ It constituted an intriguing list which concluded with further validation of Robert's troubles:

the which thynges her rehersed I knowe well drawyn to the somme of xiiij^{xx} marc withoute alle the costes of hys household and alle oure fyndyng, with oute alle thys he schall bere a stronge coste thys same yere in byldyng of new hovses and reparacion of olde hovses, the which felle doen and were destroyed for lakke of reparacion [...] and this cost most nedys be doen or we schull have no fermours (*AP* 185).

The delivery of the information provided a candid record of the causes of Robert's financial distress – the household expenses; the keeping of John and certain unnamed others; the building costs associated with the dilapidated houses on the tenanted land that had to be rebuilt to ensure that Robert kept his tenant farmers.

It is in the conclusion to the letter that the reason for listing Robert's financially strained circumstances and their causes in such a detailed fashion becomes evident when John stated that it would be a great 'hynderyng' if his mother were to come at that time as:

for alle these causys yf ye comyn in to this contre at thys tyme, it schall not lye in oure power to resceyve you and refresh you, neyther to your worschip nor to our worschip (*AP* 185).

²⁸ *AP* 185, n.459.

He suggested that she postponed her visit for about a year and quarter after which time: 'I trust to Godde we schull be in power to resceyve you and your frendys to your worship and our also' (AP 185). The emphasis is on the detrimental effect on her worship, and by association the impact that this would have had on her standing with her friends. The considerations are closely allied with reputation and behind the suggestion that Sybil and her friends would not be properly entertained, was the implied social stigma (much as Margaret Walkerne felt about the lack of linen) in not being able to entertain appropriately to the household's situation. Again, the letter provides a revealing, albeit brief, insight into the dialogue of family relations and the tact required to ensure they were maintained with equanimity. The letter adds further depth to the underlying message of the different documents that make up the Roll and justify Robert's actions and his endeavours to maintain his reputation and worship. However, most significantly, it reinforces the ideas apparent in Margaret Walkerne's letter that women had gender-specific concepts of worship and that their worship could be lost or enhanced independently of their husbands or other male relatives. Nevertheless, a woman's worship could impact directly on that of the wider family.

Overspending or being unable to meet the familial commitments and financial obligations were critical and undoubtedly Robert had been compromised by his unstable economic situation.²⁹ As has been identified on his marriage to Joan, Robert took over not only the responsibilities for Joan's two children but also the

²⁹ G.L. Harriss, 'The Dimensions of Politics' in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. R.H. Britnell, and A.J. Pollard (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 1-20. Harriss in his discussion looks at the idea of the 'moral economy' and the exhortations to young men not to live beyond their means: 'In mesure to spende, thus Y meane, Eche man after his astate, Spende after they levelode woll strecche, Worshipfully and not as a wrecche': Harriss, 'Dimensions', 13 n.35.

responsibilities for the debts of her second husband, Thomas Aspoll. The money that Aspoll borrowed from Richard Ketford appeared to have been required for his participation in Henry V's French expeditions.³⁰ There are four documents that relate to the ensuing financial complications: Robert Armburgh's account, which related to Joan's dealings with Ketford during 1417-20, as well as his own involvement, probably written around 1420 or 1421;³¹ various evidences, some in Latin;³² a further replication of Joan and Robert's defence against Ketford;³³ an extract from the proceedings before the sheriffs in London, February 1423;³⁴ and a further letter which appeared to have been written by Joan regarding the potential loss of ransom money for a French prisoner taken by Aspoll.³⁵ The details surrounding the nature of the debts are extensive and set out a highly complex narrative as to how Joan, 'bounde in her weduohode' for certain obligations of debt, was seemingly tricked into agreeing to further 'obligacions' which were falsely conceived. The main thrust of the argument was how Richard Ketford had been duplicitous and persuaded Joan into agreeing to debts that were not originally taken out by Aspoll. The detailed inclusion of these various documents once more points to how the evidence was being assembled within the Roll for validation of the Armburghs' case.

³⁰ AP 48; AP 77-87; AP 82-83. The money borrowed in order to equip Aspoll with harness and saddles, a copy of the indenture made by Aspoll detailing the money borrowed included in the various evidences, in which he binds himself, his heirs and executors and sets his seal.

³¹ AP 77-81: see Figure 1 which shows the details of the margin entries to this document.

³² AP 81-83.

³³ AP 83-86.

³⁴ AP 86.

³⁵ AP 75-76. It is of course conceivable that Aspoll bought the prisoner although due to the fact that he did go on expedition in 1417 it is more likely the prisoner was a trophy.

Trickery, deceit and dissembling are all key features in the record that these lengthy accounts provide of the Armburghs' problems. I think that the way in which they are written about and the choice of phrases and vocabulary enables us to have a view of the fine and nuanced issues that sat behind the conflict. Here we have a unique opportunity to consider the detailed circumstances and just as vitally how those circumstances were related to close societal relationships. Both the use of the language used in Joan and Robert's defences against Ketford as well as the way in which the personal characteristics and relationships were explored are especially revealing.

Ketford is reported as having been unable to find the first obligation that Aspall had taken out: 'he serchyd alle coffyns with his evydences in her presens thereafter and made hym as thow he not fynde hit' promising that should he find it he would 'breke it or sende it to her' (*AP* 85). Joan through 'grete besynesse and entanglyng that she hadde at the comyn lawe' (*AP* 85) forgot much of the details and Ketford re-presented the old obligation to her again, insisting on its settlement.³⁶ The Armburghs determined that he went further by manipulating those that, 'schulde have ben her frendys' to be 'his frendys' and then threatened to have her arrested. Furthermore Ketford had counselled her to borrow more money from him in order to pursue her mother's inheritance arguing that Joan 'hadde moche nede of hys frendship' (*AP* 86). In Robert's first account, he had stated that Ketford, 'by sotil ymaginacion and thretyng of presonement and thorowe the vntrouthe of certeyn

³⁶ The word entangling is important and the impression that it conveys comes to the fore when analysing these various incidents and the documentary evidence that deal with the background to the debts left by Aspall. It is a word that features throughout the letters. (See earlier explanation of meanings in chapter four, note 11).

persones that were a bouthe her' (*AP* 79) had manipulated Joan into the breaking of an old obligation and the sealing of a new one. The deceit and threats continued when Robert was arrested, 'with inne a sevenyght' after his marriage to Joan, and then 'vnknowyng of that deceit don to he wyfe' which had broken the old obligations he had bound himself 'in a nother obligacion of alle the hole' (*AP* 79).³⁷ The vocabulary and the construct leaves an impression as to how the deceit was compounded with phrases such as 'sotil ymaginacion and thretyng of presonement'. The word 'sotil' with its multiple meanings of not just skilful or subtle but also crafty or wickedly cunning adds depth to the manipulative behaviour that is being exposed.³⁸

One such example of the alleged deception is contained within the story of how Ketford apparently took and used a deed that he had sealed with Aspall to aid with his falsification of an indenture to procure money from the Armburghs. The argument was that the indenture was 'feynynd bothe by the makyng, by the sealyng' (*AP* 83). The record stated that the seal had been removed from the earlier document and then it had been heated so much that the 'baksyde of the seale [was] so hote to make it cleve vpun the endenture that hit meltid through the perchemyn' (*AP* 83). When the truth of the falsification was about to be revealed Ketford tore the seal off the document, broke it into five or six pieces and threw it down onto the floor so that:

³⁷ *AP* 79, *AP* 86-7; the dating of Robert's imprisonment is not secured by this statement as a further copy document of the proceedings before the London sheriffs of Ketford versus Armburgh dated February 1423 ordering Armburgh's release from custody is also included and the Armburgh's marriage took place in 1420. As a means of providing dramatic effect for the narrative placing Robert in prison seven nights after his marriage is a clever and effective writing ploy.

³⁸ The meaning of 'sotil' is taken from the glossary in *Middle English Sermons*, ed. Ross, p.394. Ross identifies the use of the word in certain of the sermons but also gives other derivations of the word: 'sotelly' meaning ingeniously and 'sotelte' meaning subtlety and ingenuity.

no man schuld have hadde knowlech of his disceyt nor how it was a contreyd endenture. But Robert Arneburgh havynge very knowlech of his vntrouthe, gadryd vp alle the peecys (*AP* 83).

Robert's actions were in order to prove that the indenture was contrived and that 'euery man may well knowe that it was a contryved endenture' (*AP* 84) and 'made for that entent to disseyve the said Johane in her wedowhode' (*AP* 84). As an antithesis to honesty, with all its associations of integrity, reliability, trustworthiness, all the characteristics of upright behaviour, which were associated with the idea of worship, these expansive records of the various obligations, the broken promises and untruths, were, I believe, useful tools in establishing Robert's good character.

A further detail which added more to the tale of the deceit that had been meted out to Joan, as well as Aspall, is found in a letter detailing a request for help for Joan with regard to a French prisoner.³⁹ The letter may well have been written by Joan; the personal pronoun and description 'myn husbond' is used twice in the body of the letter. It details that the French prisoner had been kept in London for some years, but had been 'by imagynacion remevyd [...] a gaynst lawe of armys' and Joan was denied the financial benefits (presumably the proposed ransom). Deception, through a proclamation that Joan determined was not lawful, and the misappropriation of funds were spelt out by Joan. According to her the prisoner had been unlawfully held, had been kept away from her husband, Aspall, and others who had a legitimate interest, by those who were 'purposyng [...] to have the presoner ys

³⁹ *AP* 75-76.

ffynance hem selfe' and to that intent there had been negotiations 'be yende the see' (AP 76). Joan appealed to the addressee with the request that through the help of 'your gode maysterschip' and good lordship she would 'sette hand on the presoner' and keep him until the finance came through.⁴⁰

In terms of the other complex financial problems this letter stands as a one-off and no further references are made to the situation. However, the letter does provide another layer to the dishonesty by recording that the abuse over the debts, after Aspoll's death, was only one aspect and that even during his life-time Aspoll's rights, as well as his honour, had been transgressed and he himself had been manipulated by 'vnlavfull menys' (AP 76). The detail is notable but not without reason; here it can be seen that Robert was in effect protecting Aspoll's reputation and name, in other words, his worship. It is established that Thomas Aspoll during his lifetime had acted in good faith and Joan had done likewise in respect of her late husband's memory and therefore, in taking on and shouldering the responsibilities, and arguing for the rights of Joan and her deceased husband, Robert was consequently protecting his own worship. Furthermore he was justifying the reasons

⁴⁰ AP 75-76: The letter appears chronologically out of sequence and the difficulties over the dating and its location in the Roll, together with identification of those named in the letter add to the problems of interpretation. Carpenter suggests that it is written to a John Rigges, but it comes between two entries to John Rugeley, and consideration must be given to the fact that this letter was sent to Rugeley and not intended for or sent to Rigges as it appears with two letters written to Rugeley. The conventional addressing of 'Worshipful sir' would tie in with the other manner of addressing in the letters to the Abbot Rugeley - 'Worshipful and reuerent sir I commaunde me to you'. The content and context of the letter also suggest that the margin note identifying Rigges and not Rugeley is an error. In terms of the good lordship that Joan sought it would make more sense if the lord referred to was the abbot. Carpenter identifies John Rigges as possibly a grocer of London. It is highly unlikely that Joan would be appealing to Rigges a merchant in terms of lordship.

for his indebtedness in that it had, in no small part, come about through the dishonesty of others and not through his own recklessness. It was a canny defence to protect his name and reputation.

I suggest that we need to consider to what extent Robert inherited the chivalric character and status of Joan's late husband (identifiable only through the fact that Aspall had been in service to Henry V), through his defence of Aspall and that we need to contemplate whether Robert's position, status and identity could have subsequently been regarded as more chivalric by reflection. Radulescu closely associates worship with knightly values in her study of Malory's *Morte Darthur*; she observes that 'no fewer than 195 entries of the term worship and its variants worshipful or worshypfullest are associated with the definition of knighthood, its reward for prowess, seen as knightly ability and courage'.⁴¹ Carpenter argues that: 'Landowners [...] continued to see themselves as the repository of the knightly virtues'.⁴² The question is did Robert Armburgh see himself in this light? I conclude that he did.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to consider how the letters from the Armburgh Roll present us with the opportunity to evaluate how a fifteenth-century gentry letter writer might have wished to have been regarded, especially in respect of the all important concept of worship. The chapter has also considered what more can be revealed by these letters with regard to late-medieval inherent social attitudes and beliefs which surround worship.

⁴¹ Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 84, n.4.

⁴² Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, 49.

My interpretation is that a positive projected image was not necessarily the priority in the composition of these letters but that it was essential to set out a considered line of reasoning to mitigate the harm that adverse observations or problems caused. We can see this in some detail over the financial problems that beset the Armburghs and their close family. Robert's emphasis on his economic liabilities and the damage that could be done to his reputation were significant spurs to borrow money from his brothers or to resolve his debts by receiving the due rents. He reasoned and established comprehensive appeals to resolve the issues and what is fascinating is that this line of reasoning was reflected in other family letters, such as those from Margaret Walkerne or Joan's son.

The link between the financial considerations and the all-powerful concept of worship is clearly established in these letters. The letters reveal the vulnerability of a man in Robert's position where he was compromised by debt. There is no doubt that the ideal of worship sat at the heart of the Brokhole dispute. Its attainment, preservation and potential loss were dominant features of the dispute as we read it and paradoxically the letters provide us with examples of writings that represent the antithesis to control. It was not perhaps the most favourable impression that the writer might have intended or have wished to portray.

My conclusion is that here we have further evidence that support the idea that many of the documents preserved in the Roll were carefully chosen. The detailed letters do of course set out to prove Robert's good name and as a defence of the Armburghs' social reputation and, most importantly, their worship. They afford an

unusual opportunity to see how the concepts of worship were imagined and constructed through the direct language used in these personal forms of communication. Although the term, worship, does not figure significantly in the letters, they do at least allow us to construct the lexicon with which contemporaries discussed and expressed the concept. A range of words – ‘entangel’, ‘honeste’, ‘shame’ and ‘hinder’ – express complex and multi-layered meanings, incorporating gendered and social nuances. Taken together they allow a much fuller understanding of one of the most important ordering concepts of fifteenth-century gentry society.

CHAPTER FIVE – Determining Identity and Recognition of Status

Introduction

This chapter considers the questions of personal identity and private or familial status as well as individual identity and status, as associated with a public position, where these characteristics and roles were compromised by conflict. As this thesis identifies the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters provide differing opportunities to evaluate the individual voices of those that were involved in contentious disputes. In terms of evaluating late-medieval identity and status my contention is that it is the comparative of these distinctly different sources and the individual voices and approaches of the authors, within the realms of conflict, that are of the greatest value in helping us add further depth to our appreciation of what still remains a problematic area of enquiry.¹ In this chapter I examine the Armburgh Roll and the

¹ A fully comprehensive definition of identity and status within medieval society remains problematic with regard to how individuals related to their communities and how we should regard communities, in this instance the gentry. Noble sets out a discussion on the term ‘gentry’ and suggests that within the medieval language ‘that there was no concept of ‘a gentry’ but instead a ‘variety of words’ which were used variously to describe various estates: Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, 16-21. Coss considers that the term ‘gentry’ is a construct which is more an external observation rather than a contemporary perception: Peter, ‘The formation of the English Gentry’, *P&P* 147 (1995), 38-64, (pp.45-46). Jon Denton, ‘Image, Identity and Gentility: The Woodford Experience’, in *The Fifteenth Century, V: Of Mice and Men: Image Belief and Regulation in Late Medieval England*, ed. Linda Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 1-15: Denton questions whether identity and gentility were secured as much locally or regionally as culturally. *Culture and History 1350-1600; Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* ed. David Aers, (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992): this collection of essays looks at the questions of identity within vernacular communities. Christine Carpenter, ‘Gentry and Community in Medieval England’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 340-80: in this paper Carpenter discusses concepts of community and its use in historiographical writing and analysis. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of modern identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also *In Search of the Medieval Voice:*

Shillingford Letters separately, drawing together my ideas of their distinct and collective importance in the chapter's conclusion.

I have developed my hypothesis on two ideas which I have considered to be fundamental when we are trying to determine fifteenth-century gentry identity and examine the status of individuals within that complex social strata. The first is the viewpoint put forward by Christine Carpenter in her paper 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England' and her evaluation of gentry social groupings and the idea of communities; in this she concludes that:

It is time to abandon the word [community] and to begin some serious investigation of how the gentry saw both themselves and their role within the polity and how others saw them.²

The second perspective stems from the theoretical models put forward by Charles Taylor in his philosophical work which endeavours to: 'articulate and write a history of the modern identity'.³ Taylor defines identity by looking at where one is 'speaking from and to whom' and that a person is defined by where he or she is speaking from within their social parameters.⁴ He talks of 'webs of interlocution' whereby individuals are only who they are in relationship with others and he writes:

Expressions of Identity in the Middle Ages, ed. Lorna Bleach, Katariina Nara, Sian Prosser and Paolo Scarpini (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

² Carpenter, 'Gentry Community', 380.

³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of modern identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Preface, p.ix.

⁴ Ibid. 35-36.

A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'. It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of 'identity', offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom. The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community.⁵

Carpenter's view is one directly associated with the late-medieval period but I believe that Taylor's views, which build on philosophical and moral ideals and ways of thinking from the early modern period through subsequent historical periods to the twentieth century, are equally germane when we are looking at ways to assess gentry identity. Although I appreciate that these ideas can be appropriate to the consideration of either or both the sources I think it is useful to consider them separately. Therefore, I have held Carpenter's ideas at the forefront of my enquiry into John Shillingford's writing and Taylor's theories at the forefront of my reading of the Armburgh Roll. My reasoning behind this separation is that I see the ideas that Carpenter puts forward as particularly relevant to what was the role and identity of John Shillingford, how he defined himself and how he related to those around him, his fellow civic dignitaries, those within his governing community and within the polity of which he was a central figure. John Shillingford's identity and status were contemporary with his role in resolving the dispute and he was writing within the framework of an established status role, as the mayor. This affects how we read his letters because we are already interpreting them knowing of his official capacity. My analysis takes the form of a close-reading because I believe that this approach opens

⁵ Ibid. 36.

up a means whereby we can consider his perception of his own identity through the careful construction of his writing. In many respects it is the detailed composition that is of most significance and I determine that it is from the meticulous crafting of Shillingford's letters that we are able to appraise the relationships that he had with his peers and the wider Exeter commonalty and by extension his perception of his identity and status within that group.

Within the Armburgh Roll I believe we can address the question of identity more closely if we consider the idea of where Robert was speaking from and to whom. As I have already established this thesis is predicated on my contention that in the Armburgh Roll we are looking at a purposefully assembled piece of evidence. The extension of this hypothesis is, therefore, that if these letters and other documents are carefully selected for a specific purpose or end audience then they may permit us some glimpses as to the attitudes of the writer and/or compiler as to their identity and status. Fundamentally, the identity and status of Robert Armburgh is reflected as much through what the Roll contains, or does not contain, as it does through the written composition of the individual texts.

(i) Private and Personal Identity: Robert Armburgh

Our consideration of the identity and status of Robert Armburgh is perforce very different from that of John Shillingford as we do not know Robert's background. We can put forward the ideas that Robert had legal training or that he was the elder brother or that he acquired land, with its associated status, only by marriage to Joan, but this remains conjecture; ultimately we do not know.

The greatest indicator of Robert Arneburgh's social rank and therefore his identity and status, is the copy in the Roll of the proceedings before the London sheriffs dated 10 February 1423.⁶ In this copy document Robert is referred to throughout as 'gentilman':

Robertus Arneburgh infrascriptus per nomen Roberti Arneburwe nuper de Berkyng in comitatu Essex gentilman [...] Et silicet idem Robertus Arneburgh per nomen Roberti Arneburwe gentilman [...] Roberti Arneburgh de villa Westm in comitatu Middlesex gentilman (AP 86).⁷

It would seem by the repetition and different spelling of Robert's name, put as both 'Robertus Arneburwe' and 'Roberti Arneburgh' (Rob[er]ti), there was a need for clarification that 'Robertus Arneburwe' and 'Roberti Arneburgh' were one and the same and that Roberti Arneburgh was entitled to the description gentleman.⁸ This extract from the sheriffs' order complied with the regulations required in all legal proceedings which had been brought about by the Statute of Additions of 1413. This Statute required the inclusion or addition of the 'Estate, Degree or Mystery' of the

⁶ AP 86-87. The documentation concerns the proceedings taken out by Richard Ketford over the debts of Thomas Aspoll that Robert, on his marriage to Joan (Aspoll's widow), became responsible for: AP 86-87, AP 86, n.124.

⁷ AP 86, n.125: possibly this is a variant on 'silicet'. *OLD*: *scilicet* – 'one may be sure (that)', 'it is clear (that)'.

⁸ C.E.6.10(4): *Roberti* abbreviated throughout text and *Robertum* (Arneburwe or Arneburgh) used where the Latin construct dictates it. Spelling and spelling of names was not standardised so it was not uncommon to have different spellings throughout even the same documents but because here it is very clearly specified this adds weight to the idea that it was a required standardisation in this instance. See R.F. Hunnisett, 'Problems of Medieval English Surnames', *Family History*, 11 (1980), 69-89: Hunnisett's paper provides a discussion on spelling and standardisation of surnames.

defendant to sit alongside the defendant's name in all writs and documentation concerning legal actions.⁹ The document not only described Robert as a 'gentilman', it also detailed his places of residence. The entry determines two places of habitation for him, establishing his place of residence (at the time of the proceedings) was Westminster and in the county of Middlesex and that he was from Barking, Essex. These two inclusions suggest that it was important that Robert was seen as a gentleman in both the two locations. It could be that the addition of 'nuper de Berkyng in comitatu Essex', suggests there was a need for elucidation and confirmation of his title but this time through his residency and the antecedents of his residency. Or it might simply be that this means of identification met the needs of the statute. However, it raises the question of his social status, how he achieved that status, and whether he possessed land and estates for which there are no records. It would seem almost certain that he did not have any landholding.¹⁰

What I think we can assume is that there were significant connections with Essex. For example when Robert endeavoured to resolve the problems over the imprisonment of one of his relatives Ralph Beauchamp who had been imprisoned for

⁹ 1 Henry V, c.5: Parliament Roll, May 1413, item 29: *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson (Scholarly Digital Editions 2005): The statute ordained that in every original writ alongside the defendant's name was to be included 'their estate or degree, or their occupation' and where they were or should be living. For further discussion on the Statute and discussion on the title of 'gentleman', see Maurice Keen, *The Origins of the English Gentleman, Heraldry, Chivalry and Gentility in Medieval England, c.1300-c.1500* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2002), 101-20; Radulescu, *The Gentry Context*, 7-8.

¹⁰ AP 6-7. Robert appears to have no property except that brought through marriage to Joan; his brother William is listed as of Godmanchester, Huntingdonshire and Reynold, Robert's nephew (probably son of William) is detailed as 'of Hemingford Grey' and 'of Huntingdon': AP 7, n.34. William is also described as 'husbandman of Godmanchester'. For the term 'husbandman' still being used for minor gentlemen, see Carpenter *Locality and Polity*, 75.

arson in Essex Robert's attempts to resolve the problem indicate that they were made through his connections in Colchester.¹¹ Equally Robert's marriage to Joan, whether they were directly acquainted beforehand or not, suggests that they may have been a part of the same social gentry circle. Joan's associations with Essex are very specific. Part of the Roos inheritance which came to Joan was in Radwinter, Great Sampford and Asheldham, Essex; Thomas Aspell, Joan's second husband, is described as of Essex and Joan's first husband Philip Kedington was of Suffolk and Ashdon, Essex.¹²

With regard to the prosecution for debt, it would certainly seem that the determining of residency in Westminster was significant. It provided a further and substantial argument that could be brought in Robert's defence against the potential seizure of his property as a non-resident of London via the '*forinsecum attachiamentum*'; the process whereby property could be seized in lieu of a debt of a resident citizen against a foreigner or a non-resident.¹³ Robert needed to prove that his residency at the time of Richard Ketford's action and writ was Westminster. However establishing that Essex was his original place of residency seems to have been very important, in terms of his antecedents, and thereby his identity and maybe also his status. To ensure that there was no ambiguity as to Robert's identity, every possible spelling of his name, descriptions and the detailing of his places of

¹¹ Ralph Beauchamp, identified as a kinsman of Robert's and vicar of 'Scharnyffeld', which Carpenter suggests could possibly be Sharnford, Leicestershire which was one of the advowsons of the priory at Monks Kirby, east Warwickshire: *AP* 9 ; *AP* 42; *AP* 93, n.155. See also the letter to Simon Mate, bailiff of Colchester concerning Beauchamp: *AP* 93.

¹² *AP* 5; *AP* 9.

¹³ *AP* 87 n.126: literally 'foreign attachment'.

residence that might be found in legal documents, were included in the sheriffs' copy of the proceedings ensuring that the case would not fail on a technicality.

Lineage, networks, familial background and social connections, and proof of residence and origin were vital in securing both identity and status as someone who could be regarded as 'gentile'.¹⁴ Although a claim of gentility could be made, what was important was that the claim was accepted by others.¹⁵ It would seem that having one's title as gentleman stated within such official documentation was part of that process of acceptance. The claim and assertion of the title was implicit in the idea that 'one was already a member of that group of high-bred equals who alone could recognise true gentility' and with that came the consequent enhancement of status.¹⁶

A notable feature of this copy of the proceedings, as it appears in the Roll, is the fact that the document appears to be incomplete breaking off before the conclusion of the text.¹⁷ The fact that only part of the document was copied implies that what was considered the relevant evidence was contained in the section copied and that it was not necessary to include any more information.¹⁸ The purpose was to identify Robert, to affirm his rank as gentleman, and secure his domicile. A secondary consideration with regard to the evaluation of the language is the fact that

¹⁴ See Denton, 'Image, Identity and Gentility', 1-15.

¹⁵ Noble, *World of the Stonors*, 19-20.

¹⁶ Philippa Maddern, 'Gentility', in *Gentry Culture* ed. Radulescu and Truelove, 18-34, see esp. pp. 26-27.

¹⁷ *AP* 87.

¹⁸ The manner in which this document is incorporated, both its structure and content, furthers the argument as to the Armburghs' intentions in the compilation of the Roll and the nature of selectivity of the proofs and evidence included.

the term ‘gentilman’ is in English while the remainder of the text is recorded in Latin.¹⁹

In examining the language surrounding gentry identity and status it is necessary to consider Maddern’s hypothesis that: ‘status-anxiety drove the development of new usages of old status terms’.²⁰ The changing social trends that were concomitant with the defining of gentlemen and what was understood by the term in association with the concern of gentility have received considerable scholarly attention.²¹ These studies have established the importance of a gentleman as being the ‘highest rank of free persons below the nobility’.²² Arising from the Latin *generosi* the term gentleman had been used in the fourteenth century by heralds to signify those of gentle birth, with rights to a coat of arms and it was used in the

¹⁹ Latin was still the official language of government and still in common usage at this time in a range of local contexts. The Latin term *generosi* was the equivalent of ‘gentleman’ and writs seem to use the two, the English and the Latin, interchangeably by the mid fifteenth century. Maddern and Carpenter provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the term. Maddern shows that a higher percentage of a random selection of mainperners in King’s Bench cases between 1422-42 were identified as gentlemen as opposed to esquires, or other social groupings such as yeomen. She suggests that the law in terms of the gentry needs to be the subject of major research and where and how status within the court sittings was of importance: Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 35-95; Maddern, ‘Gentility’, 31.

²⁰ Ibid. 26.

²¹ T B. Pugh, ‘The Magnates Knights and Gentry’, in *Fifteenth Century England 1399-1509* ed. S.B. Chrimes, C.D. Ross and R.A. Griffiths (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 86-128; D.A.L Morgan ‘The Individual Style of the English Gentleman’, in *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Michael Jones (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1986), 15-35; Raluca Radulescu, ‘The Political Mentality of the English Gentry at the end of the Fifteenth Century’ in *New Europe College Yearbook 2000-2001*, 355-89, on www.cceol.com; Radulescu, *The Gentry Context: Noble, The World of the Stonors*, 15-21; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 35-95.

²² *Glossary of Legal Diction*, ed. Alford, 65: there are examples from texts given which also identify that from a gentleman could be made a knight.

Court of Chivalry to identify witnesses.²³ The term ‘esquire’ was used in order to designate a rank below that of knight but it was still one that needed to include the required obligations of service to crown and nobility.²⁴ By the middle of the fifteenth century the term gentleman was one quite freely used by those outside the traditional military classes, particularly by the men of law; these can be identified as professionals who were given honourable status because of their skills or expertise.²⁵ It would appear that the chivalric connotations remained key features of social identity even when the military activities and armorial characteristics of the gentry were no longer dominant, although as Maddern determines, chivalric honour ‘with its classic accoutrements of war, tournament and pride of blood’ was not so significant to provincial gentry and that the forum for their honour was their relationships and the means of attaining honour: ‘were likely to be legal, peaceful and mundane’. Honour, worship, worth, respect, courtesy were all seen to be integral to society, and each and every one of the individuals within in it, and determined how they should behave.²⁶

As I discussed when considering the verse in chapter two it is important to be aware of the literary influences within the gentry strata alongside the fact that the

²³ OLD: *Generosi* from *generosus* meaning of noble birth or good stock. See also Keen, *Origins*, 44; Noble, *World of the Stonors*, 19. By the middle of the fifteenth century the term ‘esquire’ (a squire who ranked under that of a knight but who was in feudal military service or a young noble who was in the personal service of the sovereign or noble) appears to have absorbed the chivalric context of *generosi* and recognition of this had effectively been transferred to the English term ‘esquire’.

²⁴ Coss, ‘The Formation of the English Gentry’, 63.

²⁵ Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066-1500* (London: Bodley Head, 2011), 167-68.

²⁶ Philippa Maddern, ‘Honour among the Pastons: gender and integrity in fifteenth-century English provincial society.’ *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988), 357-7, (p.357).

language of the letters stemmed from an elite group.²⁷ I think we can recognise that from a consideration of the vocabulary, composition and context of the writing we are able to more fully appreciate the extent to which the chivalric attributes or moral codes remained integral to social practice. Undoubtedly the seminal work in this respect is Radulescu's on Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Radulescu's study of Thomas Malory's writing draws on an appreciation of the reading preoccupations of the gentry, their 'Grete Bokes', and examines how some members of the gentry shared a reading culture composed of chivalric and political works with their noble contemporaries.²⁸

Within the Roll we can recognise certain traits within the writing which reflect both moral and chivalric ethics and these, I believe, should be considered as influential in the representation of Robert's identity, or at least the image that he seemed keen to portray: that of a gentleman of high social status. I certainly see the verse as significant in this respect as well as in its function in the overall meaning and purpose of the Roll. The gallant and reverential overtones of the language of the verse, the main focus of which appears to be the adoration and idolisation of women, is an indication of the importance that was still being associated to the traditional tenets of chivalry; it appears to come within the parameters of the courtly love trope.

²⁷ David Starkey, 'The Age of the Household: politics, society and the arts c.1350-c.1550', in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (London: Methuen, 1981), 225-90. Starkey's work provides a general overview and useful assessment of codes and household conduct alongside aspects of literary engagement. The fifteenth-century saw a wide and varied form of didactic texts, courtesy books and moral writings which set out codes of conduct or directed how a life should be lived and which reflected the vital attributes of gentlemanly behaviour.

²⁸ Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 39-81; Radulescu provides a detailed analysis of gentry reading material and circulation of texts. See *eadem*. 'The Political Mentality of the English Gentry': in this paper Radulescu investigates the reading habits of the gentry and examines how their reading preferences shaped their political mentality and ultimately their identity.

Within the verse we can see how these notions reflect back into two of the main strands of chivalric behaviour, that of service as well as courtesy and gallantry, and attitudes towards women; indeed the writer of the poetry identified himself as the subject's servant whose purpose was to serve: 'Wyth all lowlynesse yow to serue' (*AP* 158).

My reasons for incorporating this look at the chivalric character of the literature that might have been influential and certainly appears to have been so within the verse, is to highlight how identity and status may well have been idealised, even in the common practice of gentry letter-writing. However, and significantly, is the fact that we can see in the Armburghs' condemnation of the Sumpter girls the antithesis to these ideological perceptions. This is an important aspect of the Roll as we are able to see a clear example of the realities of identity and status, especially where this concerned the relationship with or to women, as opposed to the idealised representation. In this respect the Armburgh Roll is a manuscript that provides texts, such as the Remembrance and the letter to Horell, which are a significant addition to our enquiry into the evaluation of gentry identity and status in general.

A further text which I think is of significance is that of a letter written by Robert to Thomas Mylde and Thomas Bernard, in the late summer of 1430 or 1432.²⁹ In this letter Robert railed against the lowly status of the erstwhile heiresses,

²⁹ Thomas Mylde of Clare, Suffolk, the brother-in-law to Thomas Bernard who was married to Christine Sumpter. Mylde was identified in the Remembrance as being made blind in both eyes following his deceitful behaviour: *AP* 62.

Christine and Ellen.³⁰ This letter is important at many levels, not least because it gives us tangible evidence as to the everyday speech relating to gentry identity in contrast to the romanticised elaborate vocabulary which we read within the verse.³¹ It opens up avenues for determining contemporary attitudes towards identity and status that the literary sources alone cannot provide. The text identifies that a woman's worshipful status came through birth right and the associated inherited characteristics.

The letter was evidently written in response to a request that Christine Bernard be brought to meet with Joan (her aunt) to physically identify Brokhole familial characteristics. Of course, as the main premise of the dispute rested on actual identification of the sisters as the two girls were considered illegitimate impostors the need for a physical confirmation of their identity was reasonable. Even Robert accepted this, when he wrote: 'I wol not refusyn your profir'(AP 130). However, the reasons for acceptance were artfully disclosed. The explanation determined that Joan and Robert were not coming for 'that entent to knowyn', to find out whether Christine was related to Joan because they knew she was not: 'we haue verry knowleche that she was neuer none of her [Joan's sister] children' and 'she cam neuer of that blode' (AP 130-31). The reason for the acceptance was far more subtle when Robert explained their reasoning behind their reluctant decision to meet the Sumpter girls: 'we wol do yt to that entent that the cuntre after that she hath be seyn thereynne may be the more out of doute' (AP 130). The Armburghs' adversaries had been spreading rumours, which had been of threat to Robert and Joan, and so to quell these rumours it would appear that the Armburghs' had determined that if Joan

³⁰ AP 130-31.

³¹ AP 155-68.

was to be seen alongside her alleged niece the foundation of these rumours would be eliminated: ‘the whiche contrarie after thei han ben onys sey to gedir I doubte not therof wol be founde soth’ (*AP* 130). Significantly here it is the statement that once Christine had been seen by the community there could be no further doubt as to her antecedents and thus the Armburghs would be vindicated and the truth of their case acknowledged.

Central to proving both Robert and Joan’s worthiness, a vital aspect of their identity, was disproving the claim of the Sumpter girls and at the heart of this was the question of their legitimacy. As has already been considered in the examination of both the Remembrance and Joan’s statements the girls were identified as the illegitimate daughters of Sumpter and their uncertain antecedents and John Sumpter’s immoral character emphasised.³² However, this letter takes the argument further with the condemnation of their parenthood:

‘for gentilmen and other that haue seyn here commendyn here for a foule tame beste vngoodly of condicions and a naturel fool, and wel lyke in all manere semblaunce countenance and chere to the birthe that she is come of that is to sayn cherlys and kemsterys’ (*AP* 130).³³

This leaves no room for equivocation on both the paternal and maternal side identifying that the girls were born of both an unfree bondsman, a decided slight

³² See Chapter Three: The Remembrance.

³³ *AP* 130, n. 293: A ‘kempster’ was a female comber of wool and Essex centre of the wool industry so denotes occupation of low-class women such as the Sumpter girls were determined by Armburghs to be. Cherl – a bondsman or *villanus*, an unfree tenant: Alford, *Glossary of Legal Diction*, 27.

against John Sumpter, as well as the fact that Christine's mother had been an equally low-born woman who had worked in the lowly social position as a comber of wool. Here we should read the implication that damning by illegitimacy was not on its own sufficient, but that identification with such lowly status added impetus to the condemnation and that was far more damaging. The vocabulary that is associated with social position in this letter enables us to further consider how the ideas that the gentry held on status and identity could be incorporated into their personal writing. The sentence neatly brings together the multifaceted belief that appearance, manners, intelligence all stemmed from parentage. Christine was 'commendyn here for a foule tame beste vngoodly of condicions and a naturel fool' and her ancestry was apparently evident in her looks, she was 'wel lyke in all manere semblaunce countenance and chere to the birth that she is come of' (*AP* 130).³⁴ The condemnatory vocabulary is striking: Christine was judged for being like a foul beast of poor and ungodly condition, also she was regarded as a fool, by inheritance and in all ways her features, seen in her face, reflected her poor parentage.

Robert made clear that those 'gentilmen and other that haue seyn here' had denounced her and their opinion was beyond reproach as the witnesses were themselves gentlemen (*AP* 130). Yet he did not leave his carefully constructed reasoning there but further developed it by sowing seeds of doubt as to the integrity of Mylde and Bernard in their choice of location for the meeting. The Armburghs would have preferred the meeting to take place in London where they could apparently bring people who knew the family to bear witness: 'neuerthelesse yf y

³⁴ 'chere' – 1(a) 'the human face'; 2(a) 'the face as expressing emotion, attitude or character'; 4 'the way in which one behaves, one's manner or bearing or behaviour': MED. In this context 'chere' could incorporate a combination of all these meanings.

wol not bryng here to London where as we shul fynde y nowe to sen here that had verry knowleche of al my wyues sister childryn' (*AP* 130-31). The letter concluded with the directive that Mylde and Bernard kept their promise to meet on the appointed day in the chosen location of: 'Munden a thre wekys before Michelmasse' (*AP* 131).

I think we should consider this as a highly skilled piece of personal writing in which Robert's ability to manipulate the language, to set out the situation, to reason and to construct a defensive argument is evident. Although the letter began with the acknowledgement of Mylde's and Bernard's request for a meeting, Robert succeeded in turning the demand around. The conclusion of the letter implied that it was the Armburghs who thought this visual identification was a good means to resolve the problem and that it was they who were putting themselves out and doing the favour by not only arranging the meeting but determining that they would keep their side of the agreement, at all costs: 'and with the grace of God ye shul wel see that I shal kepe comenautes' (*AP* 130).³⁵

³⁵ 'comenantys' or 'comenautes' (a spelling which is found elsewhere in the text); Carpenter has transcribed this word as 'comenautes' on several occasions, the more accepted spelling would be to use 'v' instead of 'm', making the word 'covenautes', however I am inclined to agree with Carpenter's transcription that it is an 'm' not a 'v' or double 'v' or 'u'. However, another spelling – 'couvenautes' – could indicate that the transcription here with the 'm' is incorrect and it could have been 'couvenautes'. For the purposes of the thesis I have kept Carpenter's transcription. The word is obviously meant to mean covenant. See Alford, *Glossary of Legal Diction*, 39: 'covenant' – 'an agreement between parties binding them to certain provisions; a contract or promise'. MED: 2(a) 'promise made by one of the parties to a mutual agreement; also any promise or pledge made by one person to another'. See MED for examples of the spelling 'com(e)nautes'. See also *Paston Letters*, III, ed. Beadle and Richmond, Glossary p. 202 – 'comenautes' meaning contract or agreement.

One of the characteristics of the collation of copied letters in the Armburgh Roll that I consider to be of value is the skilled techniques behind the writing that we can determine from Robert's letters. Of course we cannot ascertain how much scribal influence might have been brought to bear on Robert's writing but I believe that what we see in these letters is very much the individual and personal voice of this male gentry letter-writer. In terms of expanding our knowledge of vernacular letter-writing and the development of the epistolary genre in English at the outset of the fifteenth century I maintain that it is vital that we explore the literate abilities and the written strategies that Robert appeared to be able to adopt within the composition of his letters. My contention is that through the close-reading of the texts these skilled writing capabilities are revealed predominantly by establishing how he wrote in different tones, which effectively depended upon who he was writing to. Of course, we already recognise that opening and closing conventions within the epistolary genre enable us to establish the tenor of a letter but my suggestion is that we need to move beyond that to the context and content if we are to fully recognise the politics of the writing of these correspondences.

The epistolary conventions that were tied closely to identity and status can be seen throughout the letters; the formality of address and politeness, or otherwise, in the language were an integral part of any message that was being delivered. A letter of appeal by Robert to Ellen, Lady Ferrers of Chartley, written in either 1429 or 1430, drew on apparent kinship links between Lady Ferrers and Joan.³⁶ The opening introductory sentence, 'Humbly besechith youre pouer suppliant Robert Armeburgh, the whiche hath weddyd Johane youre pouer kynneswoman' (*AP* 114), set out to

³⁶ *AP* 114-16.

flatter and provide acknowledgement that Robert knew his place in the social order as well as to acknowledge Lady Ferrers' social superiority. It is humbling rather than obsequious; deferential addressing was as much a part of the identity of the recipient of the letter as it was the writer. But equally it comes straight to the crucial point, the relationship and the responsibility that Lady Ferrers had to her distant relation, Joan, and by extension to Robert, himself.

Kinship, however tenuous, was important in terms of identity and here it is seen through the identification of Robert's own position relative to both Joan and consequently to Lady Ferrers. As was determined in the examination of the Mylde/Bernard letter, familial relationships and genealogy, were critical and inextricably linked to identity. Joan's relationship to Lady Ferrers was ambiguous; however, in order to emphasise Joan's social standing and if Lady Ferrers had been in any doubt Robert reminded her that his wife was: 'doughter to Sir Geffrey Brokhole' (*AP* 114). The courteous tone of the letter is highlighted by the constant referencing throughout the script to 'youre right worthi and gracious ladyship' or to 'my gracious lord youre husbond' and how he referenced himself as 'Robert Arneburgh your suppliant aforeseid' (*AP* 114-16), both reinforcing and underlining the need to be constantly aware of social identity.

At different points in the dispute we can determine different aspects of Robert's status from the various roles that he assumed: his role in resolving the issues of Joan's late husband's debt; his taking on the responsibilities to Joan's children; his position as landowner, overseers of the manorial lands and his household servants; and finally as executor of Joan's estate. Inevitably conflict arose

over the execution of Joan's will as Robert refused to relinquish the 'right and title that I haue in the said fee simple londes', fearing that if he did not perform Joan's last will 'hit schall be neuer performed' (*AP* 173-74). However, in spite of the status he had as Joan's executor and the control that he had of the various property Robert's lack of local connections and poor knowledge of local society forced him into a defensive position. He frequently wrote of his lack of power. In a petition to Parliament (1449 or 1450³⁷) to resolve the dispute over the wrongful seizure of lands in Essex, which Robert argued were seized without the due title, he stated: 'your suppliant is not of power to mayntene nor defende none assise a yerst so myghty princes' and he did not wish to 'offende their grete lordschippes' (*AP* 191-92).³⁸ It must be assumed that this lack of lordship reflected back into how Robert was regarded and that quite probably he was demeaned by the lack of support he had been able to muster for his claims. To what extent being in such a powerless position affected his status and identity can only be conjectured; however, in as much as these qualifiers of reputation can be determined socially it is probable he was not held in high regard by his fellow gentry. He certainly fell short of the requirements that gave him the all-important worship.

The document that follows the petition is an agreement between Robert and John Chancy whereby Robert proved his rights to the manor of Overhall in preparation for its sale to Chancy.³⁹ The petition to parliament had clearly failed and

³⁷ *AP* 37-38; *AP* 38, n.176: Carpenter suggests that it was the parliament of 1449-50 or possibly 1450-51.

³⁸ *AP* 191-92.

³⁹ *AP* 192-93.

Robert had not achieved what he had wanted.⁴⁰ Robert was dead by late July 1453 and the inheritance of the whole of the Roos/Brokholes properties descended to Ralph and Ellen Holt, one of the Sumpter daughters who had been married first to James Bellers. It was a final and ironic twist that the identity and status of one of the main opponents in the inheritance dispute, Ellen nee Sumpter, was finally upheld and she was recognised as the heir to the estate.

(ii) Individual and Communal Civic Identity and Status: John Shillingford

A letter written by Shillingford from London to his civic counterparts in Exeter in late November or early December 1447 is a valuable example of his writing style.⁴¹ Not only does this letter reveal his attention to detail in the scripting and constructing of his texts, but it also indicates how careful he was in developing a dialogue with his fellow magistrates. The purpose of the letter was to get the draft answers to the church authority's articles of complaint ratified by the communality.

The text of the letter is much altered and the way that the alterations are made, how the words and phrases are crossed through and moved around, give strength to the idea that this was written by Shillingford while rethinking and restructuring the actual script as if he was preparing a rough copy for final copying. It also offers evidence as to Shillingford's skill as a communicator and a negotiator. The careful structuring indicates that uppermost in the drafting process was the need to avoid ambiguity or to give opportunities for dissent amongst the recipients, especially when the writer would not be present to counter them. Although the

⁴⁰ AP 38.

⁴¹ Moore, 3-4: DRO Folder.

message was directive and instructional, it was couched in terms that provided for a positive and beneficial rapport.

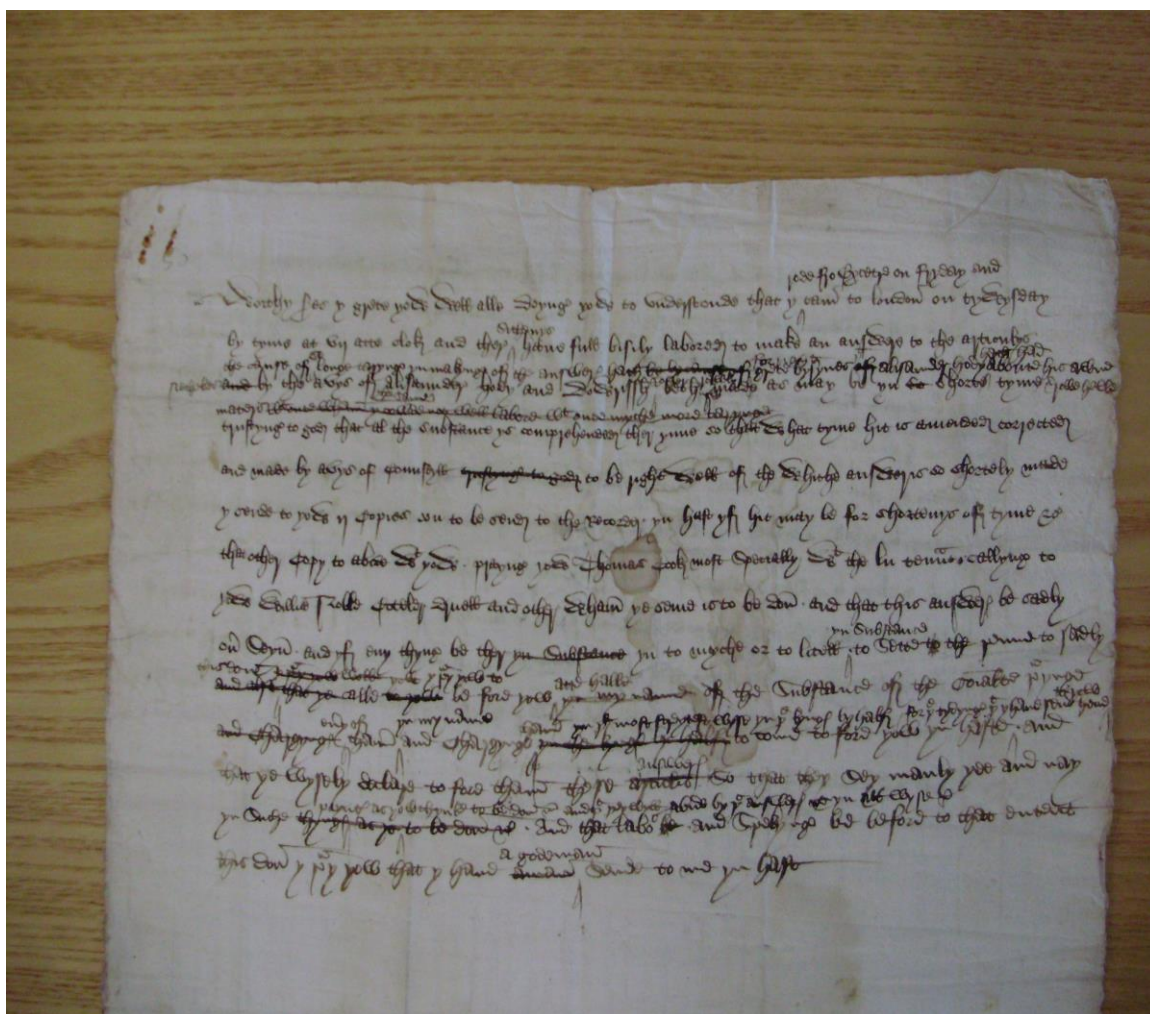


Figure 5: Shillingford's letter in late November or early December 1447: Moore, 3-4: DRO Folder.

Transcript of Shillingford letter ⁴²

Worthy sires y grete yow well alle doying yow to understonde that y <rode fro Excetre on Fryday and> cam to London on tywysday by tyme at vii atte cloke and ther <sithenys> have full bisily labored to make an answeze to the articulyz the cause of <so> longe taryng yn makying of the answers hath [be] ~~by by cause of~~ <for right> grete bysynes [yt] of Alisaunder Hody <hath hadde> aboute his awne maters {netheles} ~~and~~ by the avys of Alisaunder Hody and Dowrisshe <Roger Rawly> [they] beth made as may be yn se shorte tyme <w^t owte wham y cowde not well

⁴² Moore, 3-4: DRO Folder.

~~labore w^t oute much more tarynge~~> trustyng to god that al the substance ys
 comprehended ther ynne so that what tyme hit is amended corected and made by
 avys of counseyll ~~trustyng to god~~ to be right well of the whiche answeris so shortely
 made y sende to yow ij copies oon to be send to the Recorder yn hast yf hit may be
 for shortenys of tyme &c that other copy to abide wt yow prayng yow Thomas Cook
 most specially w^t the lu tenaunt, callyng to yow William Noble Coteler Druell and
 other wham ye seme is to be don and that this answer be sadly over seyn and yf eny
 thyng be ther ~~yn substance~~ yn to myche or to litell <yn substance> to sette t̄ the
 penne to sadly <this don y pray yow calle yow y pray yow to> ~~and after that ye calle~~
~~together~~ be fore yow <atte halle> ~~yn my name of~~ the substance of the comminalte
 praynge ~~and charyng~~ <every of> tham <yn my name> and charyng <tham> ~~yn the~~
~~Kynges byhalf~~ <yn þe most streyttest wyse yn þe Kynges byhalf> to come to fore
 yow yn haste <for þe tydyngs þt y have sent <<home to>> yow> and that ye wysely
 declare to fore tham these ~~articles~~ <answers> so that they sey manly yee and nay yn
 such ~~thynges as you to be don &c~~ <poyntes as yow thynke to be don &c and þt þey
 wyll abide by þe answers yn all wyse> and that labor t̄. and spekyng be before to
 that entent this don y pray yow that y have ~~a man~~ <a gode man> sende to me yn hast

Key:

<inter-line insertions>

<<...>> double inter-line insertions

[Moore additions]

{added in margins}⁴³

The main characteristics of the communication are that it is short, succinct, but direct
 and authoritative. Shillingford had a determined and narrative style. For example, the
 opening of the letter would have made perfect sense without the addition of the
 phrase ‘rode fro Excetre on Fryday and’ inserted above the line and it appears
 inconsequential to the message. However, this is characteristic of the method that

⁴³ Moore, 3-4: DRO Folder.

Shillingford used when he provided an explanation as to how the dispute was being handled, in that he would determine the timing in order to establish that he had travelled with speed and that there had been no delay in his execution of the business of the city. He was specific in that he had arrived in London at ‘vii atte cloke’ and subsequently had ‘full bisily labored’ to prepare the responses, but that he had been reliant on others who had had their own business to attend to. The tone is one of confidence: Shillingford had taken advice but moved to push the matter forward. The removal of the phrase, ‘~~w^t owte whan y cowde not well labore w^t oute much more tarynge~~’, intimates he did not want an opportunity to arise to question his decisions, or through which there might be seen some degree of weakness in his own abilities. The considered insertion then deletion of this phrase is a prime example of his attention to detail and the considered thought processes behind the writing; the sentence was not a part of the original body of the draft text but was added in and then removed again.

My reading of his writing indicates that he was adept at working the text to provide the strongest possible message. For example, here I see that the confidence he wanted to instil into the message was reaffirmed by his positioning of the conventional phrase ‘trustyng to god’. He left in the first occurrence of the phrase but crossed through the second. I think it indicates that Shillingford was adept at removing any questions of doubt and wanted to ensure that there could be no reservations over the advice he had received but equally that it was reliable and he did not need to reaffirm it through the additional repeating of, ‘trustyng to god’.

The many alterations, even in this short missive, provide evidence that Shillingford had a careful approach, considered how the script would read and ultimately how the message would be received. The justification of his actions comes across as leverage to ensure that the matter was dealt with urgently. It is framed to ensure that no blame rested with Shillingford for the pressure that was being put upon his peers to get the documents looked at and agreed by stressing that none of the delays could apparently be blamed on him. The apparent haste that opened the letter, and moves through it, is mirrored in his final request that the answers once corrected are returned equally in haste. We can see by the fact that he altered the final direction from merely the returning of the documents by 'a man' to 'a gode man' that Shillingford left nothing to chance and placed his emphasis on the need for security and reliability.

In this detailed attention to the writing we can see that Shillingford had an appreciative awareness of his audience and studiously considered their reception of his words during his drafting of the letter. The careful structuring and wording gives an insight into the political considerations that Shillingford may have been making and from which we can potentially begin to determine the different layers of accountability. It raises the questions as to the extent Shillingford was using the council as a safeguard as he appeared to be refusing to take responsibility for any decisions without consulting them; whether he was indeed 'sheltering' behind them.⁴⁴ Alternatively it could be that consultation was customary and a part of the common procedure of the governance.

⁴⁴ B. Wilkinson, *The Mediaeval Council of Exeter* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), 45-47.

Shillingford's requests denote that there was extensive consultation over matters of great importance which could have an impact on Exeter's governance and that the responsibility for the decisions made, in these situations, was shared. This would certainly be borne out by the content of this letter and how it addresses the issue of accountability. The primary one, that rested with Shillingford, was the use of his legal position as mayor and significantly he calls the 'the substance of the comminalte' to meet in his name: 'yn my name'. Shillingford also identified specific important representatives, 'Thomas Cook most specially with the lu tenaunt, callyng to yow William Noble Coteler Druell', as well as advice to be gained from the city's recorder. These are names that feature throughout the dispute, and are frequently mentioned as being in London meeting with the chancellor, chief justices and Shillingford, and were clearly representative of a tight and closed circle of knowledgeable men in the governing body with distinct family connections, experience of serving as members of the council and in certain cases as mayor. The importance of these kinship links and the often close and 'cordial' relations between cathedral clergy and city laity must be a further consideration in the appreciation of the urban polity and civic identity.⁴⁵

The letter underlined the importance as to how all in the civic government were involved in the decision making. We can determine that Shillingford was taking responsibility, but that he also ensured the accountability of his peers in a response that would represent the view of the city. I see it as an interesting

⁴⁵ Kleineke also identifies local canons and the 'peculiarities of the constitution of the cathedral church' whereby the Exeter prebends were 'filled by men from local families', of which John Shillingford was one such named: Kleineke, 'Civic Ritual', in *Ritual and Space*, ed. Andrews, p.169, n.11 & n.12.

juxtaposition of his identity and his status in that although it can be determined that he was the representative of the community he was equally aware of the importance of the voice of that community. Ultimately, I think we should consider that Shillingford's reputation, and therefore image, would have been reflected by his correct interpretation of that communal voice. He discussed how the decisions are to be taken 'yn my name' but charged them that this also included the responsibility that they had to the king:

<this don ~~y pray yow calle yow~~ y pray yow to> ~~and after that ye calle together~~ be fore yow <atte halle> ~~yn my name of~~ the substance of the comminalte praynge ~~and chargyng~~ <every of> tham <yn my name> and chargyng <tham> ~~yn the Kynges byhalf~~ <yn þe most streytest wyse yn þe Kynges byhalf>

Both the choice of words and their placement within the text should be considered significant. The directional 'praynge' is in association with Shillingford's name but they are charged in the king's behalf: 'yn þe most streytest wyse'. We can see that the recognition of the hierarchical authority with the associated layers of authority and status that is invested in both directive phrases would readily have been accepted by the recipients. It is important to interpret these phrases to achieve an understanding of the complexities and subtleties of these carefully composed communications. For example, the 'praying' can be seen as a form of petitioning or an entreaty, whereas the being 'charged' can be viewed as an order, but equally with the additional meaning of trust or control associated within the direction. The fact that Shillingford amended the script to alter the emphasis as the 'chargyng' has been

removed before the ‘yn his name’ and placed in proximity to the role of the king is revealing. The basic message remained the same but the fact that the text was slightly amended indicated how subtly the wording of that message needed to be manipulated. Were the changes made to avoid misinterpretation and to ensure that Shillingford’s directions were not being seen as above those required by and for the king? It would seem so. My conclusion is that we need to appreciate and understand these small movements and shifts of words. The changes cannot be understated as they act as written signposts to the methods of management which lay behind civic control and governance.

We can see that Shillingford’s ability to control can be read through his use of language and carefully crafted script and that he had been adept at issuing instructions. He directed how each point in the answers had to be considered, and that the commonality had to reach an agreement, whether that was positive or not. Crucially they had to confirm that they would abide by the answers ‘yn all wyse’. Shillingford pre-empted this by determining the question of the substance of what he had sent home to be considered seriously and altered if necessary:

and that this answer be sadly over seyn and yf eny thyng be ther ~~yn substance~~
yn to myche or to litell <yn substance> to sette to the penne to sadly.⁴⁶

The instructions were specific and included where the meeting was to take place, in ‘the halle’, the Guildhall, which gave further authority to the ultimate decisions taken. This resting of the authority in the specific civic building, the where

⁴⁶ Sadly – 4(a) ‘steadfastly, without changing’; 5(a) ‘seriously, soberly, gravely also maturely’: MED.

in terms of the urban polity and civic identity and the location of the decision taking, was integral, but what I think is intriguing is the fact that Shillingford set it out so specifically. Here, as in other examples of his directive writing he ensured that his directions were clear. In terms of our wider consideration, the letter gives weight to the importance and value of written documentation as it established that there were two copies of the city's answers to the bishop's articles being sent which had been written and amended with the advice of legal counsel. One of these copies was to go to the recorder again in haste and the second was to be retained by the council. These actions also reaffirm the need for a constructive record in the resolution of the conflict.

Civic Relationships

The letter provides an insight into the relationships that mayors may have had with their civic peers by indicating a cooperative level of engagement in the decision-making process and showing how authority was shared. As far as Exeter is concerned, it opens up the question as to the composition of the commonality and the council at this time. In 1435, a period associated with other civic and ecclesiastical conflicts, there was an unusual brief trial in constitutional reform implying that there were problems within the ruling establishment.⁴⁷ The long-established ruling council of twelve was augmented by the election of a further twelve described as being chosen '*pro communitate*'. The experiment lasted three years and then was abandoned but resumed again in 1450. Kleineke links this change to the composition of the council during these two periods with the challenge to the civic authority and

⁴⁷ Hannes Kleineke, 'þE Kynges Cite': Exeter in the War of the Roses', in *Conflict, Consequences and the Crown in the Late Middle Ages: The Fifteenth Century VII*, ed. Linda Clark, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 137-156, (p.150).

the need to strengthen that civic authority and that ‘once the challenge had failed, the governing elite could abandon any pretence of sharing power with a broader group of the citizens.’⁴⁸ In the dispute over the Bishop’s Fee, although a new layer of council was not apparent, the letter to Shillingford’s fellow councillors of November or December 1447 suggests that the number of those who would make the decisions were wider than the council of twelve. We can read into the requests made by Shillingford, with regard to decisions being made, that these have all the hallmarks of decisions being taken with safeguards against dissent later on. This raises the question as to whether the previous experimental form of governing was being used without it being formalised or authorised, but informally, and as a precaution against criticism. The system had been seen to have worked in the 1430s and Shillingford, and his peers, would have had experience of it then.⁴⁹ Shillingford unquestionably relied on his peers at home and their input into the decision making process, whether in the formal and legal sense, or simply in an advisory capacity. Wilkinson determines that it was the mayor and commonalty who were conducting the dispute. He notes how there is frequent association between Shillingford and the fellowship. He concludes that by the middle of the fifteenth century, with evidence not just from Shillingford’s letters but other documentary material such as the Receivers’ Rolls, it was the mayor and the council that were working together in the governing of Exeter.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid. 151.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 151. It is interesting that the process was re-introduced not long after the 1440s dispute (although as Kleineke identifies in the 1450s this was quite probably to pre-empt unrest stemming from Cade’s revolt and associated political unrest).

⁵⁰ Wilkinson, *Mediaeval Council*, 46-47; 46, n.1.

The questions surrounding the wider process of governing do appear to be appreciated by the fact that the writing was so detailed, with comprehensive explanations and the extensive requests for support. The fact that Shillingford wrote so specifically would suggest that he required (even as mayor with all the due authority of that role) to further secure and guarantee his authority and the authority of those on the council and ensure that he has defended himself and them against any future criticism.

The question of shared responsibility between Shillingford and his peers was reiterated on other occasions. As a part of a lengthy conversation that Shillingford had with Fortescue Shillingford stated that although he had the power to make a decision because the matter concerned ‘a grete comminalte as well as me’ he would have to speak to his fellowship at home.⁵¹ Shillingford wrote they had met for a ‘longe tyme and yn gode leisure to comyne of oure mater’, and stated: ‘Y fynde hym a gode man and well willed yn oure right, and like to have the grete rule of the mater’.⁵² However, Shillingford also commented that in the course of this discussion the justice was immovable and wanted Shillingford to make an immediate decision but Shillingford himself remained resolute. Of the request he reported that although it appeared reasonable it was being put in such a way as to ‘tempte me’, but he was not to be manipulated.⁵³

⁵¹ Moore, 11: DRO 1859.

⁵² Moore, 8-17: DRO 1859. Moore conflates this copy text from what he considers to be an original and a second draft copy, indicating where he merges the text: Moore, No.IV, 8, n. b. Moore 9, 11 (2 November 1447).

⁵³ Moore, 11: DRO 1859. ‘Mene’ n(3) – 1(a) ‘the course of action, method, way or means of obtaining an end’: MED. The debates over how and where a ‘mene’ might take place occurs throughout documents, and in conclusion is used in the prelude to the final summary between the

Shillingford emphasised that he would not make a decision until he had been either at home with his ‘felowship, or of tham here with me vj or vij’.⁵⁴ The simple phraseology and the straightforward character of the account belie the subtlety of Shillingford’s ability to both conduct the difficult negotiations and then to ensure it was accurately reported. Shillingford’s skill was in getting the correct message back to his peers and the many layers of his candid explanations giving weight to this. His authority, his position and the respect that as the mayor he commanded, was evident but so too was the respect that he appeared to have for his civic counterparts. He did not denigrate his own power or undermine his own authority, he has ‘power ynogh’, a phrase he repeated twice within two short sentences, but equally he accentuated his responsibility in the phrase to ‘hire and to reporte’. As the account of the meetings continued, and Shillingford further detailed his concerns about the case, it would appear that Shillingford used the obligation to refer to those in Exeter to give himself the opportunity in which to address the case and get the correct responses prepared:

y beseche yow of youre gode lordship to have me excused therof yn to tyme
y have be at home with my felowship, or of tham here with me vj. or vij. for
other wyse woll y never conclude with my gode will.⁵⁵

It was his determination to ensure that all the correct procedures were undertaken that engendered the respect in the justice who saw Shillingford as a ‘wise man’.⁵⁶

Bishop, Dean and Chapter and The Mayor, Baillifs and Commonalty, 12 Dec. 1448 ‘by mene and mediation of Thomas Courtney Erle of Devonshire and Sir William Bonvile’ an agreement that the case would go before the justices at Barnstaple: Moore, 136-37.

⁵⁴ Moore, 8: DRO 1859.

⁵⁵ Moore, 11: DRO 1859.

The inclusion of this compliment in the story would appear to emphasise to his peers the positive character of the work that Shillingford was carrying out on their behalf and his own personal accomplishments. Shillingford never belittled his own authority or his own endeavours, indeed quite the opposite as on occasions he does come across as self-congratulatory and was not ‘much given to modesty’.⁵⁷ However, there is no doubt that he recognised the importance of the commonality and their shared responsibility in making decisions that affected the whole of the city.

Shillingford’s confidence in his peers and the importance that he attributed to shared responsibility are perhaps best summarised in a passage that comes at the end of his letter of 2 November 1447. He indicated the reliance that he was placing on the recipients of the letter to understand and respond to the bishop, partly because he commented that he had found difficulty understanding it all. However, he still reminded them of the efforts he was making on their behalf and that in recognition of this they should not let him down.⁵⁸

Shillingford’s descriptive and lengthy letter of 30 October 1447 established the areas that concerned him, not least his relationship with Chancellor Stafford and how he himself was regarded in London.⁵⁹ The descriptions of his meetings with Chancellor Stafford and Chief Justice Fortescue are significant. It is clear from the way that Shillingford composed his descriptions that he was conscious of his

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *The History of Parliament*, ed. Roskell, *et. al.* vol. iv. pp.361-62.

⁵⁸ Moore, 17: DRO 1859.

⁵⁹ Moore, 4-8: DRO Folder.

audience as well as being aware of his own image. Shillingford gave both a lively and intricate picture as to how he endeavoured to move the matters towards a resolution. I would suggest that from his rhetorical narrative style we can reason that these letters were composed to be read to the assembled company. For example, he set the scenes for his audience and embellished the descriptions of his meetings with inconsequential details, such as where he had met the chancellor and at what time: ‘the mayer came to Westminster sone upon ix atte belle and ther mette with my lorde chaunceller’⁶⁰. On this occasion, Shillingford had continued that he had encountered the chancellor at a broad door a little from the stairs coming from the Star Chamber and there, by the door, Shillingford knelt and saluted the chancellor in the ‘most godely wyse that y cowde’ continuing that he recommended ‘my feloship and all the comminalte’.⁶¹ The where and the how Shillingford as the mayor was received was clearly recorded and described and these seemingly inconsequential details are of significance in terms of the impression that it would seem Shillingford wished to be relayed back to Exeter.

These instances, where Shillingford was granted an audience with the chancellor, provided Shillingford with the opportunity to demonstrate the regard in which he was apparently held. This important message formed a part of the impression by proving that Shillingford was included in the influential circle that surrounded the chancellor. Shillingford was adept at using these anecdotal techniques in his accounts to substantiate his own position and personal influence. In one meeting, Shillingford reported that Chancellor Stafford moved to his barge, surrounded by a ‘grete presse [of] lordis and other &c. and yn especiall the tresorer

⁶⁰ Moore, 5-6: DRO Folder.

⁶¹ Moore, 6: DRO Folder.

of the kynges housholde', Shillingford followed and took leave of the chancellor with the words: 'my lorde, y wolle awayte apon youre gode lordship and youre better leyser at another tyme'. He continued the story by informing his readers that he then met the chancellor at Lambeth: 'we mette and spake with him in the ynner chamber, he at that tyme beyng right bysy goynge yn to his closet'.⁶² In the same letter he recorded a later meeting taking place at Lambeth and again in the chancellor's inner chamber. On this occasion Shillingford elaborated his narrative with the listing of all those that were around the chancellor: 'there was myche peeple, lordes and other, my lord Tresorer, under Tresorer, the pryvy seel, and dyvers abbottes and pryours and meny strangers aleyns of other londys', adding that then the Duke of Buckingham arrived.⁶³ Shillingford awaited his moment, finally speaking to the chancellor and saying that he had come at the chancellor's command but realised that due to the 'grete bysynesse' he could not be seen at that moment; he said he was sorry for the chancellor: 'y was sory and hade pyty or his grete vexacion'.⁶⁴

This skilled story-telling and writing of where and how they met served to validate Shillingford's position, in that he was not just a viewer but a participant in the circle of those around the chancellor. The implication is that despite all of the vexatious business of the chancellor, the chancellor still had time for Shillingford. Shillingford certainly emphasised his own standing and thereby his ability to forward the aims of the civic council. It appeared that he was suggesting that these encounters were not based just on his official capacity, as Exeter's mayor, but also by insinuation, and perhaps more significantly, in his personal capacity as a man of

⁶² Moore, 6: DRO Folder.

⁶³ Moore, 7: DRO Folder.

⁶⁴ Moore, 7: DRO Folder.

status. The subtext that identifies Shillingford as a man of status and worth, which appears to be inherent in these detailed reports, is also closely allied to that of reputation, something that Shillingford was evidently keen to ensure was not besmirched by his actions. He was careful to protect both his reputation and his honest name and was assiduous in setting out all the facts as a precaution against any misunderstanding that could impinge on his good name.

At the outset of this letter of 30 October 1447, Shillingford detailed that certain of the city representatives had ridden out from Exeter to keep a day of appearance in London; they are deemed as having ‘sufficiant power and the comyn seell’ and thereby the authority to pursue matters on the city’s behalf without Shillingford, as mayor, being present.⁶⁵ Shillingford pointed out the fact that he was indeed ready to ride and join them but was delayed due to the business of the city back at home; however he stressed that he was ready to depart at all times. The reasons for his delay were that he needed to speak to the whole fellowship on, ‘grete maters toching the cite’ and that it was ‘yn especiall to have the feloship togeder, a sadde comunicacion to be had or his departing’. However it had not been possible because:

the grete part of the feloship was at Calston is fayre, and tho that war at home, ... were syke on their beddes; and for alle these causes the mayor abode at home so longe, and all that tyme he kepte his iij hors yn stabill every dey redy to ride to hym gret coste.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Moore, 5: DRO Folder.

⁶⁶ Moore, 5: DRO Folder.

It presents an enlightening cameo of the fair and then the illness of the fellowship and the costs that Shillingford was being put to keeping his horses ready in the stables to go as soon as he could. There is a degree of rhetorical licence in the idea that Shillingford was taking the matter seriously and certainly not dallying by going to a fair. The reason behind the scene setting as to the lateness of his departure from Exeter became clear when Shillingford raised his concerns as to how the chancellor regarded him. Obviously Shillingford had wanted to get certain things established and he had been concerned that he had annoyed the chancellor by arriving late for the meetings and that this would damage the city's cause. However, we can also read that Shillingford was concerned for the damage to his own personal reputation and worthiness. He requested a word with the chancellor concerned that the chancellor was angry at Shillingford's late arrival in London and 'yf he so' Shillingford 'bysoghte hym to hire myne excuse grete'.⁶⁷ He wrote of his conversation:

yf he were enfourmed by worde or by wrytyng of eny thyng that y have <do>
or seyde or governed me yn eny wyse at home sithen the last terme my
departyng fro hym other wyse then to his plesure.⁶⁸

The inclusion of the word '<do>', inserted above the line just before the 'seyde', draws together both Shillingford's actions and his words indicating that there was the need to avoid any ambiguity.

This need for clarity is particularly evident when Shillingford referred to himself. He often moved from styling himself as 'the mayor' to the use of the first

⁶⁷ Moore, 6: DRO Folder.

⁶⁸ Moore, 7-8: DRO Folder.

person pronoun. The conjunction of ‘Y’ and ‘mayer’ is significant, especially as in the example above where he stated, ‘Y mayer’. The juxtaposition here of the personal pro-noun ‘I’ with the title of his official position appeared to act to establish his official as well as his personal status. This has the effect of changing and shifting the tone and force of the way the message was being conveyed by using both the authority of his position as mayor to begin the narrative and then to move it to his own individual identity. I think we can see that this technique was used by Shillingford when he sought a personal reassurance for his actions. In this instance he received it as the chancellor responded positively:

He seyde <right> hertly, “Nay” but that y hadde governed me at home yn the most best and godely wyse and therfor he oowde me gret thanke and seide hertely that y sholde have Goddes blessing and his therfor, &c.,⁶⁹

The small alterations within the text are important to note: ‘he sayde <right> hertly nay’, with the ‘right’ inserted above the line for emphasis. The changes made here (with the positioning of the words ‘<do>’ and <right>) might appear to be seemingly minor examples of where additions have been made but it would appear that these were being placed there to add extra weight and impact to the message as well as clarity.

The reliance being placed on the written record of the activities surrounding the conflict, and what influence the wrong report and message could have, is critical. It is evidence as to the politics of the writing and the care and control taken in its

⁶⁹ Moore, 7-8: DRO Folder.

composition. All of these provide sound indications as to how Shillingford and his contemporaries approached the written word, as writers, as readers and the recipient audience and the measures that were being undertaken to ensure that the events were correctly recorded. The many times that the dialogue of conversations is included into the text affirm the need for correct reporting; it also has the effect of adding to the sense of the tension and impact of these meetings. There is a sense in these eloquent passages, where Shillingford described his meetings, that he brought both energy and expertise to the discussions. He was at pains to justify his position, both as an individual and as the figurehead of the civic authority, with the influential political figures in London. The justification of his actions, even down to expanding on the reasons for his late arrival in London, formed an integral part of the means of reaching an agreement which was weighted to the city's advantage. He did not want to be seen in a poor light or have those around him being critical. The movement of the negotiations and the energy put into the discussions and debates show quite clearly that evidently he was 'an able and vigorous personality, a man skilled and shrewd in debate'.⁷⁰

It is apparent that his knowledge of, and familiarity with, the administration, and history, of the city held him in good stead during these negotiations. On many counts it would appear he was a good choice of spokesman and representative for the city council. However, it would seem he did not always undertake the responsibilities willingly. In 1444, he refused the election to the position of mayor until forced by a writ under the privy seal to take the office, the stinging penalty

⁷⁰ *History of Parliament*, ed. Roskell, *et.al*, vol. iv. p.362.

being a £1,000 fine for non-compliance.⁷¹ Refusal to hold public office was not uncommon in the early to middle decades of the fifteenth century; both the economic and personal costs to an individual could be considerable.⁷² This refusal needs to be highlighted because it acts as a background to Shillingford's involvement when he was at the blunt end of the negotiations. It adds to the way in which his writing should be read and interpreted, especially when looking at the relationship that Shillingford had with Chancellor Stafford. Shillingford reiterated the consideration of his refusal when describing the moment of the Ascension Day affray. It is a cleverly structured piece whereby the right of Shillingford's position as mayor, 'by true election after the custome of the cite of Exceter', alongside the fact that he was commanded by the king to fulfil his duty is emphasised. Shillingford reminded Chancellor Stafford that he took up the office on the chancellor's commandment: 'by you my lorde Chaunceller speycally and my lorde Duke of Excetre ys commaundement as y truste yn god ye remembre and knowe ryght well' and that, thereafter, he carried out his duties correctly and appropriately, 'as god knowyth sayng the sayde commaundement and my othe to the Cite ayenst my Wyll'.⁷³ There is evidently a subtext to this description as Shillingford stressed that he had been put into the position of authority as mayor, with all the sovereignty and dignity attached to that position and now, having had that authority and dignity abused, he expects reciprocal support, both from Chancellor Stafford as well as the rest of his peers.

⁷¹ Ibid. p.362.

⁷² R.B. Dobson, 'Urban Decline in Late Medieval England', in *The Medieval Town*, ed. Holt & Rosser, 265-86 (see in especially pp.278-81): Dobson considers the problems of withdrawing from office holding and identifies the problems of office and the burdens that went with it and refusal to take up office was not an uncommon problem. *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, ed. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (London: Routledge, 1972). Clark and Slack identify that the financial implications of holding office were also significant, 9-10.

⁷³ Curtis, *Disputes*, 24.

Shillingford's public role as well as his personal concerns, in the context of his profile as mayor, can be determined through many of the observations he himself made. These observations were indicative of not only the public characteristics of the conflict, but also how certain aspects of the dispute were intensely personal. For example, the hostility engendered, following a response from the bishop to the city's accusation that the bishop kept monies illegally for his own use, is apparent when Shillingford angrily recorded:

yn the whiche articulis as hit appereth they have spatte out the uttmyst and worste venym that they cowde seye or thynke by me⁷⁴

In the bishop's answers to the mayor's articles the bishop had responded, 'without that that the saide Bisshop atte eny tymes hath had or kept eny part of such money so sette to his owne use'⁷⁵ and at the end of the same answer stated that all the:

saide stryves and debates [were] principally by the wilfull laboure of John Shillyngford, nowe being Maier, in whoos tyme ever hath be grete troubill to the grete hurt and losse of the saide Chirch and Citee.⁷⁶

The language is powerful and vitriolic: the suit brought by the mayor and commonality is condemned as it has 'oppressed and enthralled the saide Bisshop

⁷⁴ Moore, 18: DRO Folder.

⁷⁵ Moore, 97-98: DRO 1859.

⁷⁶ Moore, 98: DRO 1859.

Dean and Chapitre and their mynsters and servants'.⁷⁷ Furthermore that the 'wilfull labour' of the mayor has caused 'grete troubill' and hurt and brought loss to those whom he has responsibility for and to, most vitally, the city. Shillingford recorded the chancellor changed the comments:

y enfourmed hym of the grete malice venym that they have spatte to me yn their answeris', the chancellor said, "' Alagge alagge, why wolde they do so?'"⁷⁸

The chancellor instructed Shillingford to bring him the copy and that he would amend it with his own hands. At the following meeting the chancellor saw Shillingford from a distance and called him over whereupon the chancellor erased the comments: 'he rased hit as hit plesed him with his owne handys'.⁷⁹

However, the chancellor was not totally impressed with the city's stance and as Shillingford recorded could be critical of the position the city was taking:

then my lord seide some what strangely and sharpely that oure articulys many were maters of noyse and desclaunders, and forto answer them hit wolde be cause of more grucchyng and yvell wyll.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Moore, 18: DRO Folder.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Moore, 12-13: DRO 1859.

Rebuffed, Shillingford accepted, 'yf eny suche be, lete tham be leide apart'. Here, again, is evidence of Shillingford's manoeuvrings and negotiating skills; he parried and emphasised that the matters, and articles setting them out, were highly significant being 'substancialle grete and grevous to us' and that these were 'somme cause and begynnyng of alle this debate' and as such needed to be answered.⁸¹ However, Shillingford was prepared to set aside certain matters even if that decision would ultimately be 'grevous' to the city. He conceded yet left the chancellor in no doubt that certain of the matters that the chancellor wished to be set aside were at the root of the debate. Shillingford, it would seem, prepared which of the issues it might be necessary to hold back on, in order to make some concessions, and those upon which he would stand firm.

A short letter written in response to a letter he had had from his civic peers provides us with a background to Shillingford's feelings. It details how he considered the discussions were being managed and the fact that he had endeavoured to do the best that he could.⁸² The text is intriguing in that it largely comprises of sequences of words throughout the prose which reiterate and reinforce each other. For example: 'what was comyned, moved, stured, desired' and 'what yvell wyll, waywardnys, and unkyndnesse was assigned'. These repetitions add to the descriptive impact as to how Shillingford accounted for the inability to bring the matter to a conclusion but also adds a forceful message as to how he recalled all the events, without the prompting of his peers. It is an angry letter where it would seem that Shillingford was highly displeased at the implied criticism. It was a strongly worded rebuke which refuted any denigration of his actions and in it he reminded

⁸¹ Moore, 12: DRO 1859.

⁸² Moore, 35-36: DRO Folder.

them that he has consulted them by reminding them that on the last whole day he had been back in Exeter some of them came to his parlour to discuss the situation. He stated that he would do what he could by the grace of God; the most interesting deletion is where he takes out 'so far as God will yeve me wyt and grace'. As on other occasions throughout his writing it would seem he was removing any opportunity to reproach him or to imply his personal limitations; the 'and so y shall by the grace of God' is a far more positive, constructive and strong ending to the letter.

This analysis has considered how the evaluation of an individual style of written communication, the individual perception of image and identity and status as it is recorded and the attitudes of the writer to his recipients can be reflected back into the idea of communal status and identity. Shillingford's character inevitably dominated the writing and the attention that he paid to ensuring that the correct message was recorded and reported is in no small measure due to the fact that it was his reputation that was being reflected in his accounts. His letters reveal how the projection of identity and status was closely allied to the politics of the writing and how word choice was a crucial consideration in the process. Of equal importance in the analysis is realising how the careful construction of the messages established that Shillingford had a critical and acute awareness of his recipient audience. The letters provide evidence to show the importance attached to all forms of written documents and that the communications, between Shillingford and his peers, were integral to the management of not just the dispute, but the overall management and governance of the city. Shillingford's personal reputation is closely aligned with that of the city he represented and it is essential to his own identity and status, as well as the reputation

of the whole polity, as to how he was seen to conduct himself in the very public sphere of London and how he handled the negotiations necessary to the resolution of the dispute.⁸³

In this respect we need to review how Carpenter writes of private landowners and the responsibilities that they had and how the way that they took on those responsibilities impacted on their worship. Shillingford as a public figure mirrored these ideals of responsibility and respect and, perhaps, even worship. Worship is not a word that features often in the Shillingford correspondence, nor do there appear words that are closely associated with it, as there are in the Armburgh letters.⁸⁴ It is certainly not allied directly in the personal sense such as it is when Robert made his appeals to save his own worship. However, worship is clearly aligned with the communal image of the polity for when it is included in the text the context is of ‘the seide Mayer and Communalte’ who in all ‘wise obeye, abide and be bounde’ to the good end of the dispute and to the reverence of God’s pleasure and the king’s and ‘oure worship’.⁸⁵

Conclusion

⁸³ For a discussion on the ideas as to how public life can be regarded as being ‘conducted’ whereas private life is ‘lived’ and how people are more conscious as to how they behave, how they are perceived and seen within the view of others when the activities that they are involved in take place in a public context, for example civic, ceremonial or political, see Mark Merry’s thesis: Mark Liam Merry, ‘The Construction and Representation of Urban Identities: Public and Private Lives in Late Medieval Bury St. Edmunds’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2000), 46-52.

⁸⁴ Examples can be found Moore, pp.33, 35, 40, 47, 56, 57, 76.

⁸⁵ Moore, 40: DRO Folder: A letter from the mayor and commonalty.

I return to my thoughts as to Taylor's defining of identity and the idea that identity comes from where one is speaking from and to whom.⁸⁶ In my evaluation of the Armburgh Roll this is certainly borne out by Robert's writing and even more so if we accept the premise that Robert was actively involved in the compilation of the Roll and the selection of the copy documents. In this respect the documents which directly determined his identity provided at least a part of the answer to the question as to his identity and status. My conclusion is that the inclusions of the copy documentation that dealt with the proceedings before the London sheriffs must have reflected Robert's desire to ensure he was properly identified. It was an important signpost, within the overall composition of the Roll, as to the rank that Robert, in the defence of the inheritance dispute, must have required. I think moreover they indicate that Robert had a clear perception as to how the Roll, its documents and ultimately his message was to be received. In this respect establishing his status and identity would have been of the essence.

A further consideration as to Robert's identity and status, and indeed the status of the Armburghs as a family, can be construed from the way in which Robert wrote of others. For example, the detailed and critical condemnation of the Sumpter girls and their family was a reflection of their impoverished status by comparison to Joan and Robert's. The censure signalled to any reader of the Roll the antecedents that supported the Armburghs' elevated status while at the same time it served to undermine their enemies' rank and position. Robert's identity as Joan's husband, in the contact with Lady Ferrers, and later his identity as Joan's executor determined that the kinship associations and responsibilities were all important concerns with

⁸⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 36.

regard to status, even where, as in the association with Lady Ferrers the association was very tenuous. It would appear that it was of equal importance to either establish the positive boundaries of kinship associations and correct and reputable bloodline or to distance oneself from those not of respectable lineage. The evaluation made here of the contrast in the language used by Robert in his damning letter of the Sumpter girls compared to the way in which he placed himself, and Joan, in relation to Lady Ferrers provides a distinctive opportunity to examine how contemporaries both saw, and wrote, of these contrasting situations. The evidence from the letters, from Robert's writing, and from the way in which the Roll has been compiled, provides a significant opportunity to develop further ideas of how identity and status were assessed, considered and projected.

My evaluation on identity and status I see as complementing the consideration of worship undertaken in the previous chapter in that we can see some of the subtleties that were intrinsic to late-medieval attitudes towards their individual identity and social status. My conclusion is that although historiographically we might already recognise that concepts of status largely rest within the gentry's relationships and how they equated to those within their immediate social or familial circle, we need to further examine the detailed personal writing, to more accurately assess the importance of these relationships in terms of identity. The letters and documents that expose issues of identity and status in the Armburgh conflict indicate the refinements of the vocabulary and the means by which gentry writers were able to incorporate complex thoughts and arguments in the very defence of their own identity.

I set my discussions on the Shillingford letters against Carpenter's proposals that we need to undertake research in to how the gentry perceived themselves, their roles within their political communities and to consider how others may have regarded them.⁸⁷ John Shillingford's identity is relatively easy to determine as his status came from his position as the mayor and representative of his civic authority. We can see that his projection of his own image as well as how the civic polity were regarded and represented were indicated by his approaches to the chancellor and to the London elite, and reflected in how he was seen to behave. These all are evident from his meticulously crafted descriptive letters to his fellow civic dignitaries. However, although we start from the premise of his status-laden position, I believe we can detect that there are glimpses of the personal desire for individual identity and repute. This can be seen from the way in which he wrote his descriptions of his many personal meetings and in his attention to the fine detail of these encounters. It indicates that he did not just see himself in his role as the mayor but that he also wanted his own personal self, his personality, to be considered. We can see this in the attitudes of Shillingford towards his peers and his appraisal of his relationships when in London with the chancellor and chief justices all of which have highlighted the personal nature of what were very public relationships. Through his writing, choice of words, context, content, attitude towards what was being incorporated and set out my belief is that it is possible to see how the formality of these relationships was often in contradiction to the situations and that this can be determined by the character of the language used to reveal them.

⁸⁷ Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community', 380.

In conclusion, the evidence provided by the Shillingford letters is certainly more straightforward when considering the issue of identity and status whereas the evidence from the Armburgh Roll provides us with an intriguing if less direct source from which to make the evaluations. My conclusion is that it is only when we take two such different sources and begin to make enquiries into them in a comparative fashion that we can really begin to add to our understanding of the complexities of late-medieval gentry identity.

CHAPTER SIX – The Voice of Robert Armburgh: Service, Loyalty and Friendship

Introduction

Central to this thesis is the aim to recover the individual voices of the late-medieval gentry letter writers. In my estimation the Armburgh correspondence provides a singular opportunity to achieve this. One of my considerations, when making a choice as to which of the extant letter collections to focus on for my research, was the fact that there are a good number of letters in the Armburgh Roll which were written by one gentry man – Robert Armburgh. I believe that because one author's voice dominates the collection the letters are especially valuable in our endeavours to discover more of the individual and personal attitudes and beliefs of the fifteenth-century gentry. Moreover, I see in Robert Armburgh's writing a chance to evaluate the personal nature of the close relationships that the gentry land-owner had with those in their immediate communal and social circles. As I have already established in the overview of the contextual background to the disputes the relationship that existed between a landowner and tenants was a vital one. In the letters Robert wrote to his tenants we can gain an insight into this important relationship and as a part of this have the opportunity to enquire into the concepts of service, loyalty and friendship.

The focus of this chapter is the voice of Robert Armburgh within the context of his relationship with his tenants. The aim of the chapter is to show that from a close reading of letters, such as those that Robert wrote to his tenants, we may be

able to develop a greater depth and understanding of the personal opinions of the gentry, especially when they faced confrontational situations.

This chapter looks predominantly at the correspondence that Robert had with the tenants of his Mancetter property in Warwickshire, William Harpour and Richard Barbour.¹ There are eleven separate copy letters which were addressed to either or both William Harpour and Richard Barbour, (including two that could possibly have been addressed to one or the other), plus a further letter which was addressed to Harpour and Barbour and also to Ralph Beauchamp.² These letters date from between late 1427 and to early 1434.³ They stem from the years when the Armburghs were experiencing the most acute stage of their dispute over the inheritance and at which point they were in need of as much support as they could garner for the pursuit of their share of the Mancetter properties in Warwickshire. The number of these letters, therefore, gives us the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the context of the conflicts Robert experienced with his tenants as well as to examine what were the likely problems in the relationship. The conflict

¹ William Harpour and Richard Barbour: Richard Barbour attested the parliamentary elections in 1419: TNA C219/12/3. These were men who may well have attested the parliamentary elections in 1419 because that was before the 40s. qualification came in. Later on in the dispute, in the late 1440s early 1450s there is a Sir John Barbour, who is identified as a priest and probably was the son of Richard Barbour although possibly was an illegitimate relative of Mountford; Sir John Barbour was involved in the Mancetter properties, see the letters: from Robert to John Barbour: *AP* 68-69, *AP* 72, *AP* 77, *AP* 182; from John Barbour to Robert: *AP* 181-81, *AP* 183.

² Robert Armburgh from Westminster to either Harpour or Barbour: *AP* 145. Including Ralph Beauchamp, *AP* 134; Ralph Beauchamp was a kinsman of Armburgh and vicar of 'Scharnyffeld', *AP* 9

³ *AP* 89 (c. late 1427); *AP* 104-05 (c.1427-29); *AP* 106-09 (late 1429 or early/late 1430); *AP* 111-12 (before November 1429); *AP* 116-18 (early 1430 or early 1431); *AP* 124-26 (8 July 1430); *AP* 129-30 (mid.1430); *AP* 132-33 (15 September 1432); *AP* 134-37 (late 1432); 145 (8 December 1433); *AP* 148-49 (late 1433 or early 1434).

between Robert and his tenants had three strands to it: one was the non payment of the rents, the second was their failure to establish a network of good friends for the Armburghs within the community, while the third was Robert's belief that his tenants had allowed his adversaries to gain the upper hand in the dispute over the Mancetter manor.

The general consensus among scholars looking at the economic difficulties of this period is that landlords were largely conciliatory with the aim of retaining their tenants.⁴ However, Robert's letters to his tenants reveal that this position of appeasement was not necessarily as straightforward as our historical understanding would suggest. My reading of Robert's letters indicates that the reality of these relationships was complicated by more than just the financial considerations over rent, and that the relationships could be compromised by wider social issues which related to the status and reputation of the landowner and which brought him into conflict with his tenants.

Robert's need of friends in Warwickshire: his requests for support in the area.

The first copy letter (c. late 1427) that is addressed to Harpour and Barbour established the Armburghs' need of support within the Warwickshire community.⁵ It is a significant communication which detailed Robert's instructions to his tenants in order to resolve the problems caused by the unsanctioned removal of wood from the

⁴ I considered this economic aspect in the contextual section of the disputes chapter. See Hatcher, 'The great slump', 259; 260, n.63. Richmond, *The Paston Family: The First Phase*, 29.

⁵ AP 89.

Mancetter land by a Richard Power.⁶ Power appeared to have broken his agreement by taking more wood than was agreed to in ‘hys comenantys as yt schewyth be a payre of endenture made be twyxt me and hym’ (*AP* 89) and Robert wanted recompense.⁷ He instructed them to take half a dozen of their neighbours and ‘as many of hys and goth and ouerseyth the wodys that he hath hewyn’ (*AP* 89). Robert placed his trust in Harpour and Barbour’s decisions: ‘And seyth be youre discrecions what summe hyt drawyth to, the harmys and the wast that he hath done’ (*AP* 89). He also gave them the responsibility of obtaining ‘a resonable summe of money’ while awaiting a surety for the rest of the money owed (*AP* 89).

We can read in this letter the implicit responsibility and trust that Robert had at this stage with the tenants. They appeared to have been acting in the capacity as Robert’s agents, literally his men on the ground. I think also that we can see how this responsibility and trust was further emphasised in the letter’s concluding directions which related to the inheritance dispute. This is a specific request determining that Harpour and Barbour should work on the Armburghs’ behalf to spread the word that Ellen Bellers and Christine were not the rightful heirs or legitimate relatives and his demand that the tenants endeavour to make friends for the Armburghs in advance of legal proceedings that might be taken out against them. The use of the word ‘noysin’ adds an interesting perspective to the means by which Robert suggested that they

⁶ Carpenter suggests the Powers may have served Earl of Warwick and Lord Bergavenny: *AP* 89, n.140; Power was the farmer of the Sumpter part of the Mancetter property: *AP* 170, n.383; a letter to Power from Armburgh date uncertain revisits the question of the destruction of the woodlands: *AP* 170-71.

⁷ I have previously considered the spelling and transcription of ‘comenantys’ in the chapter on identity.

proceed with this request, with the implication being that they were to spread a rumour about the girls, the effect presumably being that the Sumpters' case would be undermined by the gossip:

I pray yow bothe to may vs all the frendys in the cuntrey that ye may in auenture that eny sise be take a yens vs and that ye woll wochesaue to noysin in the contre that Bellers wyfe and here sistre be no rythfull heys to that lyflode ne my wyves sistre childryn as ye haue herd your self while ye were here and more ye schull here yf y come a gen (*AP* 89).⁸

Carpenter found it 'astonishing' that a gentleman of Armburgh's standing was relying on his farmers to establish a place for him within the local networks, concluding that when events turned against the Armburghs, it was no surprise that the farmers could be corrupted.⁹ Robert had a weak position within the community and although the Armburghs fulfilled part of the apparent conditions for acceptance into the social community in that they had a livelihood in the manor and lands of

⁸ C.E.6.10(4): my transcription has some changes to Carpenter's transcription that slightly alter emphasis. For example Carpenter's transcription does not include 'yow' as in 'I pray yow bothe to may vs all the frendys in the cuntrey': *AP* 89. Carpenter dates this letter as c. late 1427 based on the marriage of Ellen to Bellers which was around 5 November 1427: *AP* 89, n.139. The letter would appear to be written at the outset of the conflict.

⁹ *AP* 53. For a discussion on the image of the late-medieval farmer see: F.R.H Du Boulay, 'Who were Farming the English Demesnes at the End of the Middle Ages?', *EHR*, 17 (1965), 443-55: Du Boulay states that the image of the farmers as peasants and 'forelock-pulling yokel[s]' needs to be rejected and drawing on evidence from the Plumpton correspondence it is possible that in certain circumstances the farmer[s] might 'even by the social superior of his lord': *Ibid.* 445. Socially indicative appellations such as 'yeoman' and 'husbandman' are also difficult to determine status – the terms are used 'indistinguishably' in 1450s Kentish King's Bench Indictments: *Ibid.* 450, n.3. Du Boulay's comment that: 'Farmers did not belong to a single social type' is of importance in the consideration of the Armburgh tenants: *Ibid.* 450.

Mancetter there it would seem their qualifications ended as there is no evidence to suggest that suggest that the Armburghs were ever resident in, or even visited, Warwickshire.¹⁰ Nevertheless it would appear that Robert had by the late 1420s found some support in William Mountford, John Cokayn and John Malory.¹¹ Pragmatic business, as well as potentially political, decisions seemed to have been at the root of these associations. Indeed, practicality appeared to be a feature of all the Armburghs' friendships.

Robert, as a stranger in Warwickshire society, was in a exposed social position and it is evident that he had no choice but to depend on his tenants to determine who could be trusted or relied upon to support him. Robert was disadvantaged not only socially, but I think we can also deduce that he was compromised by the lack of any official position or governing capacity which meant that there was a significant element of political society with which the Armburghs' did not engage.¹² As a result Robert would not have had the opportunity to influence

¹⁰ See Hannes Kleineke, *Parliamentarians at Law: Select Legal Proceedings of the Long Fifteenth Century relating to Parliament* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). The difficulties of being a stranger within the county community are revealed by an example from the Paston letters: Davis, II, p.120 a letter from John Jenney to John Paston I, 1455. This letter concerned the conflict over the election of a knight of the shire in which it would seem that there were competing candidates for the appointment, one of whom was without residency, land or occupation within the shire, which would exclude him from standing for election.

¹¹ William Mountford, John Cokayn and John Malory, all three of these influential figures became feoffees for the land: AP 13-14. Carpenter expands on the local political associations inferring that the various problems encountered by the Armburghs and in particular his tenants had more to do with the wider power struggle to make life difficult for the earl of Warwick and his followers, AP 16-17.

¹² Gerald Harriss, 'Political Society and the Growth of Government in Late Medieval England', *P&P*, 138 (1993), 28-57: Harriss identifies the importance of political society emerging from landowning class and the extent that gentry/landowners were becoming involved in all the activities of governing, 33.

the courts, the juries or the higher echelons of the ruling elite. By contrast the Armburghs' adversaries were well established.¹³

The way in which Robert wrote to Harpou and Barbour presents no absolute clues as to their relative status. The conventional addressing of 'Dere and welbeloued frendes' (AP 104) or 'Dere frendys' (AP 124) seen at the beginning of many of the letters is ambiguous in terms of status. It could suggest equal or even lower status (certainly not higher status) and has to be read simply as the conventional courtesy form and not indicative or representative of any nuanced social associations. However, the fact that they were his tenants did not necessarily mean that there was significant social inequality. Indeed, can we deduce from their actions, their obdurate stance on the payment of their rent or their reluctance to provide reciprocity and service to Robert when required, that they were closer to being his social equal than Carpenter's assessment assumes? Certainly the fact that Richard Barbour was of sufficient standing to attest to the parliamentary elections in 1419 would suggest that he possessed a higher social ranking.¹⁴

There are two ways that we need to consider the relationship. First, if we consider the requests made by Robert within the parameters of Robert and the tenants' service relationship then Robert's requests would appear justified.¹⁵

¹³ Ralph Bellers, father-in-law of Ellen, escheator of Warwickshire and Leicestershire 1426-7, also Bellers closely associated (as a servant) with John Kempe archbishop of York from 1425 and chancellor 1426-1432: AP 7-8, AP 7, n.36.

¹⁴ TNA C219/12/3.

¹⁵ See Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 247: who discusses the hierarchical relationships and the importance of service to those of higher status.

However, I think we need to evaluate the association beyond the confines of what might have been the unequal status relationship of landlord and tenant and also beyond the boundaries of the service relationship by considering what actual or assumed elements of friendship were revealed in Robert's letters. I contend that the vocabulary that Robert employed, the way in which he structured the approaches that he made to acquire the tenants' apparent friendship, but certainly their assistance, can be used to examine particular characteristics of the friendship links and close connections that appear to have been critical to social harmony.

It is not clear if the use of the personal pronoun 'vs', ('I pray yow bothe to may vs all the frendys in the cuntrey that ye may in auenture that eny sise be take a yens vs'),¹⁶ included Harpour and Barbour or whether it simply identified the Armburghs. At this stage it would seem that Robert was emphasising the unity between him and his tenants, incorporating them, however spurious, onto his side. A further interpretation of the instruction to 'noysin' in the 'contre' is that both Harpour and Barbour could also be adversely affected if the dispute were settled against the Armburghs and that it was also in their interests to ensure the Armburghs secured the manor. There is a sense of reciprocity within the language emphasised throughout the exchange; for example twice within the short missive Armburgh directed them with the phrase – 'I pray yow', 'I pray yow that ye woll take'.¹⁷ This added strength to his requests, the appeal appeared to be an even-handed instruction and the whole tone of the directive was agreeable. The tenants' relationship with Robert at this stage appeared to be equitable and their role one of respectful

¹⁶ C.E.6.10(4); *AP* 89.

¹⁷ C.E.6.10(4).

responsibility. It is possible to see that mutual advantage was an element of the relationship at this juncture.

How Robert reproached the tenants

Robert appeared to be supportive when his tenants were threatened with legal action; he gave them advice and offered to help them. Yet paradoxically at the same time as he was being supportive he continued to harass them remorselessly for the payment of the due rents. Nevertheless despite his rigorous and often aggressive attempts to collect rent, Robert never moved so far as to evict his tenants. It is important that we recognise that this may well have been due to Robert's wish to ensure their influence within the county community over the question of the disputed inheritance of the manors at Mancetter. It might also have been influenced by the fact that both parties knew that as the sitting tenants Harpour and Barbour were in a strong position.

A letter, probably late 1432 and addressed to both Harpour and Barbour, as well as Ralph Beauchamp, sets out the conflict in direct and very determined language.¹⁸ It is a lengthy letter and its harsh language is bitterly critical of Harpour, Barbour and Beauchamp. The tone is strident and aggressive but I think we can also read into the content the sense that Robert was frustrated because no resolution could be reached on any aspect of the conflict. Robert detailed the fact that numerous letters have gone between them in which the agreements and means of resolution were established, but which had all been broken or forfeited. Effectively he pointed out that if they continued to hold their 'wronge oppnyon' they could 'lese vjd. for

¹⁸ AP 134-37.

the wyunnyng of oon' (*AP* 135). He reiterated the idea further on in the same letter and made the point just as firmly: 'and therfor al thinges considered and al manere vntrouthe y cast aside, schameth nat ne hyndre nat your self for covetise of a litil good' (*AP* 137). Robert expressed his argument with language that has the attributes of proverbial meaning and perhaps we can deduce that it mirrored the vocabulary that was used in daily speech. The questions that surround the language of every day use are problematic. I recognise that we cannot guarantee what of the language of the letters was colloquial or in common usage but I think we need to be sentient to it. I consider this to be especially important when we are endeavouring to establish the attitudes and beliefs of the writers because the use of adages or proverbial sayings adds a further dimension to our evaluation of their individual and distinctive voices.

He stated that this is the 'thrid tyme that ye haven ben aboute to serue me thus' (*AP* 135), over non payments, and that he had their letters to prove it: 'y avouche to record your owne letres' (*AP* 135). There is no mistaking the resentment behind his descriptions of their actions, the 'sotel ymaginacions, canteles and coniectyrs' (*AP* 135).¹⁹ Robert stressed these deceitful actions would not benefit them and that their actions could only result in shame.

Throughout this letter he reminded them that they know the truth of the inheritance claim, not just from him, but from worthy men with whom they had spoken. To emphasise his points he suggested that: 'yif ye leve nat of suche thinges as ben rehersed in this letre' they show it to a lawyer, who should not be an enemy of his 'nor frend to my aduersarez' (*AP* 136). Robert determined that whoever they

¹⁹ 'canteles' - meaning tricks or deceits: *AP* 135, n.305.

consulted would not disagree with any of the points Robert had made; he appeared categoric that the case was indisputable. I think by setting out to read this letter simply as 'a diatribe' it is easy to miss in the message of the letter and the way that Robert appealed for impartiality.²⁰ It places an unusual perspective as to how the interpretation of friendship, or enmity, must be considered. It is indicative of the gradations that must have existed between the extremes of constructive and obstructive action by the opening up of channels towards informal arbitration as a means of resolving conflict. The intricacies of the vocabulary and composition indicate a refinement of the arguments which reflects that the ideals of friendship and animosity, conflict and happy accommodation were more nuanced and that relationships were not as simply or obviously delineated as can sometimes be assumed. Equally to see this writing as simply invective negates the finer details of the letter and I think we should regard it as a striking example of early vernacular lay writing.

My interpretation is that it indicates how correspondents could employ language and engage with their writing to explain their thoughts and develop their discourses in an authoritative controlled way. It also indicates how a letter-writer's personal viewpoints could be developed throughout a written composition and is suggestive of an emotional engagement with the letter-writing process. I read this letter as illustrative of an individual, and political, voice being used constructively to persuade and affect attitudes.

²⁰ Carpenter uses the description of diatribe in her introductory sentence to the letter: *AP* 134.

There are many passages in Robert's letters to his tenants that could be used to illustrate the way in which he uses the language in an expressive manner. A good example as to how Robert used his writing skills and ability to refine the purpose of his message is the following passage from a letter of 1432. In this extract the defining features of the conflict with the tenants are contained in succinctly composed sentences and stated Robert's claims clearly:

Remembre you also how large promesses ye made to me what ye toke the ferme, seiying that ye wold kepe my aduersariez oute of the grounde and that thei shuld nat be so hardy to come there on and ful trewely my ferme shuld be payd and sent to me with oute eny cost of me, and how ye wold labour that ye wold make the gentiles and the contre frendly to me, the whiche promesse made me welwillyng to you, supposing thorew strengthe of you and of your frendes my riht shud be better maynteyned (*AP* 137).

There are several phrases here which are important in terms of the relationship Robert had with the tenants, as well as the wider relationships within the community, Robert's need of friendship and the associated support of the gentry community. Very specifically Robert identified the 'gentiles' and the 'contre' separately whereas on other occasions he speaks only of the country.²¹ This separation of the identities of the gentry and the associated community does appear to broaden the idea that Robert was seeking support at different social levels. My interpretation would be that such specific phrasing indicates the different strata of social control and influence. It would therefore seem logical to interpret this as an

²¹ See Robert's first letter of appeal: *AP* 89.

incorporation of the various political and legal strands of the community especially as often ‘contre’ can be seen as the formation of a jury.²² However, I think the most important aspect of this passage is what it tells us about the tenants. It is reinforced by the impression that Robert had of the tenants’ various friendships and their relative influence, all of which are encompassed simply and directly in the phrase: ‘thorew strengthe of you’. The understanding of the strength that rested within the tenants’ influence was emphasised by Robert’s belief that they would be able to: ‘kepe my aduersariez oute of the grounde’. It certainly indicates how the tenants were regarded within their own social spheres. The fact that Robert reminded the tenants that they themselves had implied that his adversaries ‘shuld nat be so hardy to come there’ reveals the power, reputation and influence that the tenants must have had, and that no one would be so foolhardy as to enter the land if Harpour, Barbour and Beauchamp had control.

What we can also read is a persuasive subtext as Robert endeavoured to put pressure onto them. I see this through the implication that he made as to their lack of worth and their failure to produce both the financial and social outcomes they had promised. It is a restrained but unquestionable criticism of the sense that they had

²² Roger Virgoe, ‘Aspects of the County Community in the Fifteenth Century’, in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1990), 1-13. Virgoe gives examples of where the term country are used and identifies that there are more than one meaning for the term in that it denotes a rural area, small region or neighbourhood, also used to ‘denote a region larger than a county’, but that the vast majority of references to country imply county; ‘cuntre, the employment of the particular word is of some interest, but throws only a little light on the social and emotional connotations of the county in this period’. When the word county is used to ‘represent the inhabitants of the county’, the idea that the unit here is representative of the people who have a unity of interests and attitudes, would seem more in keeping with the implication in Robert’s letters. Virgoe, ‘Aspects of the County Community’: quotes above from p.5. The term ‘contre’ also denoted a jury: Alford, *Glossary of Legal Diction*, 35-36.

had of their own importance and a denigration of their reputation. Was Robert endeavouring to make them feel morally guilty in the hope that they would redeem themselves and work again on his behalf? I think the content and context suggests so.

The provision of friendship

There are many occasions where Robert stated that Harpour and Barbour had promised to help him establish friends within the county social sphere.²³ In a letter of 8 July 1430 he reminded them of their duty to him and he rounded on them for their broken promises with the condemnation that they rewarded their own friends with his money. The strength of their position appeared to be confirmed when Robert stated that he would have been better off with other tenants: ‘the whiche myght moche better haue maynteyned than ye mowe’ (*AP* 126). He continued: ‘wherefor ye purpose you to haue youre comenautes out to your termys ende’ but confirmed that should the money owed be paid and that they abided by their ‘indentures’ (the honour in terms of their lease) he would have reason to thank and reward them later (*AP* 126). By questioning their loyalty to him while at the same time reiterating his own loyalty to them, it would seem that Robert attempted to manoeuvre himself into the stronger bargaining position.

The issue of broken promises with the various accusations of the tenants’ failure to fulfil their side of the agreement shows the breakdown of the trust that was implicit in the relationship. It also highlights the tenants’ strengths and Robert’s weaknesses, again both linked into the geographical element of the social networks.

²³ For example, Robert’s letter to Ralph Beauchamp, Harpour and Barbour of 1432: *AP* 134-37.

Robert was unable, however much he tried to make an impact on the need for friends from his location in Westminster. The various approaches that Robert made and the language he used to manipulate his tenants indicates that the networks which constituted the influence within these social communities were complex and not readily accessible to an outsider. Increasingly in these letters I think we can read the sense of Robert's frustration as the language and the tenor of his letters became more fractious.

Three letters, written by Robert between 1430 and 1433 or 1434 to Harpou and Barbour resound with the accusations of his tenants' duplicity and we can sense Robert's frustration from the writing.²⁴ In the first letter his complaint was that he had not had 'the value of a peny neither of the ferme ne of the wode that I sold you', that the tenants had rewarded their own friends from his property (*AP* 126). He continued that had he realised how the situation would have turned out he would have put in other tenants who would have more readily maintained his rights. In the letter written late 1432 he reminded them that it was on their advice and counsel that he had spent a great deal of money on worthy men of the shire, presumably to gain their influence, but that again all the promises the tenants had made had failed and more than that they had still not paid their due rents. He stated that if others had behaved as they had done then he would have had far more financial problems: 'y hadde ben as evil paid of al other as y have ben of yow, hyt shuld riht evill a leyn in my power to acquite me ayesnt my aduersaries' (*AP* 137). In the letter of 1433 or 1434 Robert once more expressed his anger when he rounded on the tenants again

²⁴ *AP* 124-26; *AP* 134-37 and *AP* 148-49.

for their promises they made but which had not been realised but how that he had been true to them:

with large promysses how goodly ye wold aquyten you to me if ye hadden the ferme and also the good wyll that y have schewed you from that tyme in to this. For wel ye knowen y have doon grete cost at your excitation and have alowyd large rewardes that ye maden in the contre to getyn you supportacion, of the which y had neuer enformacion but of your owne mouthes (*AP* 149).

The language adds yet another dimension to the considerations of influence and friendship – that of pecuniary interest. It would seem that the money needed to secure these associations was a significant factor in Robert's strategy; he had clearly invested to sway the 'worthy persons' and 'other meene persones also of the same schire' (*AP* 137). He had allowed the tenants to put out large rewards in the area to gain the required support. All of these commitments he took on at their 'excitation' were based simply on the information that Harpour and Barbour had provided, 'of your owne mouthes' (*AP* 149). The areas of conflict in these letters were repeated – the occupation of the manor, the lack of payment and their broken promises. Throughout Robert emphasised his good will towards them, his trust in them and his belief that they had had the ability to secure for him a successful outcome. As well as the worthy men and the tenants' friends there was mention of Harpour and Barbour's 'partners of Mancestre'. This would appear to add yet another layer to the complex mix of associates with the noun 'partners' suggestive of a close working, business relationship or an undertaking between the tenants and these partners, with perhaps even a hint of collusion.

Reputation

From our appreciation of Robert and his tenants' relationships we can begin to evaluate the public character of the relationships and the friendships. Significantly I perceive that the public face of a person could be viewed in the light of the repute of the associations they had made or, indeed, could make. Friendship could have a personal or even private side to it but I think here we can see that much of the evidence from these letters suggests that ultimately friendship was a public consideration. Therefore I think we should consider what the subtext was in Robert's letters to his tenants and his confrontations with them. I see this as the issue of reputation and that Robert's own reputation had been put in jeopardy because of the failure of his tenants to act accordingly and to make him the friends that they clearly had influence with but had failed to persuade to bolster Robert's tenuous position.

Barbara Hanawalt's study of good and ill repute stresses the importance of an individual's reputation and shows how that reputation was crucial within their social communities to the support given to them; in extremes it was the difference between being hung or reprieved, imprisoned or bailed, being given credit or not, supported or impoverished.²⁵ A poor reputation could be a stigma which severely damaged a person's opportunities towards the successful outcome of litigation. This was, of

²⁵ Barbara A. Hanawalt, *'Of Good and Ill Repute' Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ix. Reputation, incorporating all the various elements, 'name' 'worship' 'rumour', 'noise' permeated all aspects of social engagement and ideas behind the public face. See John Watts, 'Pressure of the Public', in *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain, The Fifteenth Century IV*, ed. Linda Clark and Christine Carpenter (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 159-80, (p.173).

course, a fundamental consideration for the Armburghs in the pursuit of their inheritance claim. Robert desired to be seen as reputable, partly through the securing of friends within the community and this alongside the rebutting of rumour reverberated as a message throughout his writing. The tactics that he employed to build his reputation and rebut any rumours seem to be neatly devised. His demand to Harpour and Barbour to secure him friends in the ‘cuntrey’ is reinforced by the request, ‘that ye woll wochesaue to noysin in the contre’ of the deceit played out by his adversaries.²⁶ He used the means of rumour to quell rumour and naturally to put his own slant on the implications that may well be noised about.²⁷ Harpour and Barbour were required to forestall any problems, to effectively undermine the Bellers and their reputation in advance of any potential problems.

In the letter dated to July 1430 Robert’s conventional ‘Dere frendys I grete you wel’ was followed by a strongly worded, even bitter, rebuke: ‘Dere frendys I grete you wel merueilyng gretly that ye wol deme me suche a fole’ (*AP* 124).²⁸ The defensive tone suggests the strengthening of the tenants’ position which enabled them to rebut Robert’s demands. He reminded them firmly of his position, rebuked them and insisted that ‘al maner of cancelys and excusacions’ are put aside and the money owed to him be sent: ‘be the next messanger that comyth betwene’ them (*AP* 125). He reiterated his surprise at what he regarded as their disloyalty, received verbally from his servant, using the word ‘merveille’ expressively: ‘Fferthermore I merveille gretly that ye sende me word be my seruant’ (*AP* 124). There is a strong suggestion that the snub was more acute as it was delivered second-hand. The nature

²⁶ C.E.6.10(4); *AP* 89.

²⁷ ‘noysin’ – 2(a) ‘to report or rumour also imply’; 2(b) ‘to slander, defame or accuse’ : MED.

²⁸ *AP* 124, n.270.

and tone of the language has moved a long way from the directional, but not aggressive, ‘I pray yow’ of Robert’s earlier communication. Indeed, there is no little irony in that while Robert endeavoured to use his tenants and their contacts to resolve conflict, his relationship with them deteriorated to a point of conflict itself.

Robert’s advice to his tenants

The evaluation of these frequent requests for the tenants’ help and cooperation cannot be fully determined unless it is set against the limited evidence that there is as to Robert’s support of them and the advice that he provided to them. There are four detailed letters where Robert set out his advice over the unlawful actions that the tenants have been accused of.²⁹ In these he established how they should attempt to deal with the accusations and how to avoid the potentially costly and damaging outcomes.³⁰ Robert’s knowledge of the legal processes is evident in the advice that he provided although he equally recognised that further support from trained men of law is appropriate. The language used by Robert to explain the processes of the court proceedings that the Armburghs and their tenants were embroiled in adds to the framework of their relationships as it indicates how much, or how little, support he was prepared to give. It also provides indications as to the wider supportive relationships that the Armburghs sought.

²⁹ Harpour and Barbour were accused of assault on tenants of the duke of Norfolk and riotous behaviour: *AP* 104; *AP* 106.

³⁰ *AP* 104-112; *AP* 116-118; Carpenter addresses the problem of dating and chronology *AP* 104, n.190; *AP*.105, n.196. The letters date to 1427-9, 1430 and 1431 and they deal with different accusations against the tenants for assault, riotous behaviour and an indictment on an unknown offence. Behind the various accusations sat the duke of Norfolk and Ralph Bellers.

One of the most significant of the phrases that resonates throughout the letters is, ‘I will save you harmless’.³¹ Robert reiterated this promise on many occasions using it both as a means of securing his service to Harpou and Barbour as well as a foil to his enemies. He set himself up to ‘save’ them ‘harmless’ whilst emphasising that his (Robert’s) enemies, are just as equally their enemies and will not, or are not in a position, to ‘save them harmless’. Robert categorically stated that: ‘I shal saue yow harmles what euer yt cost me with the grace of God’ (*AP* 108). It was a powerful commitment set against a portrayal of his supremacy and emphasised by the implied assurance of his authority and an example of Robert’s offers of good lordship. He instructed them to enter the land, confidently stressing that his adversaries do not have sufficient power to cause difficulties: ‘therefore entrith and occupiith and sparith not for hym, for he hath no pouer to lette yow and, what that euer he say, let hym done his beste, for I wol saue yow harmles’ (*AP* 109).

He offered help, deftly setting his own advice alongside that of the tenants’ attorney; he requested they send him details of the conflict, the men’s names who were beaten and the cause of the conflict stressing that with his advice and help it would be possible to prevent the legal process of outlawry from occurring: ‘yt shal be no disese to yow nor to gret cost. I might thorough fauour of the court recorde youre atourne in youre absens’ (*AP* 105). He did however caution them that to attempt this in their absence was not wise when faced with the influences of powerful lords. Robert reassured his tenants that Bellers could not succeed and to

³¹ ‘I will save you harmless’ - this phrase has fundamental legal implications in that it signifies the promise or offer to indemnify the accused person against the potentially damaging outcome of the legal proceedings: ‘harmless’ – 2(a) *Law*: Immune from liability, not liable for a payment; immune from a liability for a loss’: MED..

add further weight to his own cause and twist the knife against his rival he sent a copy of the documents that show how maliciously Harpour and Barbour and their friends had been treated: ‘that ye and youre frendes shuld see how maliciously the retourne is made’ (*AP* 108). Robert built his case against Bellers and outlined his belief that Bellers was underhand in his methods suggesting that the tenants find a friend to ‘enquiryn sekerly’ (*AP* 108)³² as to the role of the sheriff and undersheriff and upon confirmation of this, as well as on the back of the information against Bellers, Robert threatened to do him a ‘veleny’.³³ Robert used this opportunity to boast that he had previously had success in a similar situation: ‘for I ded hym and summe of his counsail a smart velenye’ (*AP* 108) which was to do with the litigation over the partition of the Essex estate.³⁴

The letter continued with the request that Harpour and Barbour enter the part of the farm claimed by the other side and ‘answerith to me of my ferme as ye bounde by the comenantes that were made betwene yow and me’ (*AP* 108) stressing once more his own costs and the disadvantages he had been put to. But he also included the tenants in the concept of the scorn that he sensed:

³² ‘sekerly’ - ‘securely’ – ‘sikerli’ (adv.) 1(a) ‘with certainty, without mistake’; 2(a) Fully, thoroughly, perfectly’; 2(b) ‘boldly, confidently, with assurance’; 3(b) ‘secretly’; stemming from ‘siker’ (adv.) 1(a) ‘in safety, safely; also securely; to play it safe, make certain’; 1(b) ‘firmly, vigorously, well’; 1(c) ‘confidently’; 1(d) ‘for a certainty, for sure’: MED. See ‘siker’ below from letter to Harpour and Barbour : *AP* 109.

³³ ‘veleny’ – meaning to demonstrate a fact or circumstance bringing discredit: *AP* 108, n.219.

³⁴ *AP* 108, n.220.

I am siker Rokeston doth skorne yow and me bothe and playith parassent
with Bellers and takith a reward of hym for to take vp the seid lyflode (*AP*
109).³⁵

The phrase ‘playith parassent’ is highly suggestive of deception alongside flattery. The wording appears in the Latin translation of Ovid as part of a stanza where a snake appears at a sacrifice and hides in a tree near the altar.³⁶ The meaning of parassent appears to stem from the Latin *parasitus*, which could have three definitions: (i) ‘the guests of a priest who has been invited to eat part of a sacrifice with him’: (ii) ‘a flatterer or parasite or spunger [sic]’: (iii) ‘a player or actor that recited poet’s verses’: and from *parasitor*, meaning: ‘to play the parasite, to flatter, soothe or fawn for a meal’s meat’.³⁷ It is therefore strongly condemnatory and the concepts behind it of someone who is parasitic, deceitful and used to using flattery all with the intent of securing something to which he or they were not entitled (the meat of the meal) is a powerful image. If it has further resonances with the image of a snake then, I suggest, it is even more significant within this context. It is yet further proof as to how Robert engaged with literary texts and brought them into his discourse; Ovid it would seem was a well-circulated text and could readily have been available to a gentry reader.³⁸ It is, therefore, important to recognise the literary

³⁵ ‘siker’ – 1(d) ‘for a certainty, for sure, definitely’; also ‘siker’ (adj) 4(c) ‘certain in mind, having certitude, convinced; certain’: MED. Also see meanings above in n.32.

³⁶ Margaret Worsham Musgrove, ‘Change of Perspective in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 12.11-23’, *The American Journal of Philology* 118, (1997), 267-283, (p.268).

³⁷ *Ainsworth’s Latin Dictionary*, revised and corrected by William Ellis (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853).

³⁸ Kathryn L. McKinley, ‘Gower and Chaucer, Readings of Ovid in late medieval England’, in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 197-230. McKinley identifies that texts of Ovid were widespread

context of this phrase and its moral significance as Robert's use of the phrase and the message he was conveying would have been evident to the reader. I see it as an ingenious way of incorporating the disingenuous character of both Rokeston and Bellers. I also read it as an adroit attempt to unite himself with Harpou and Barbour by drawing them into the same sphere of another's seemingly mutual contempt.

When Robert encouraged them to enter and occupy the land he reassured them that they would not be outlawed nor come to harm and would be kept:

out of arest as it shal no maistry be for you thorough help of oure good maistres and frendes that we haue in Warrwykshire, on the which we hau do cost as ye wel knowe (*AP* 117).

This is the only time that Robert made a direct association of the strength of the Armburghs' own circle of friends within Warwickshire. Furthermore he implied that money had been used to influence these good masters and friends. He recommended that they speak to William Mountford, John Malory and John Cokayn again regarding the promises that these men made to help: 'lest thei foryete it' (*AP* 117). He also stated that they contact Lady Ferrers and speak to 'al other good maistres and frendes of ourys and yours'. He reassured them that should they do this they would 'sittyn in pees' and Robert would with the grace of God save them from harm: 'I shal saue you harmles' (*AP* 117). Once more the letter moves to a damning of Bellers and the movement between Robert's showing of his own strength, his

during the late-medieval period and that in both the fourteenth and fifteenth century manuscript copies of Ovid could be Latin school texts, summaries or moral versions of the text. Ovid also appeared in chronologies and political writing, 197.

influence and his goodwill was mirrored in his criticism and in the striking ability that he had to show how the other side was false:

safe reuerence he is fals [...] fals and vntrewe and euer hath be in al his werkyng that he hath wrought a yerst vs from the begynnyng in to this tyme and we han wel preued for al the lordship and fauour tht he hath (*AP* 117).

It would seem that it is only through the support of false attorneys and the favour of the chancellor that the Bellers have had some success.³⁹

The Armburghs' case against the Bellers' family was constantly reinforced. It would appear that even the fear of the Bellers' circle is sufficient to do further damage to the productivity of the land as the farm has been left unoccupied because of the Bellers' threats: 'noman menure yt for fere that Bellers wold steryn hem' (*AP* 117). Robert restated why he had chosen Harpour and Barbour as his tenants because of the promises they had made to him and which centred on the protection of the land. He stressed that they had assured him that they would allow 'no maistries vpon the ground' (*AP* 118).⁴⁰ He had placed his trust in them, giving them the tenancy as 'in trust of that' and because he thought they were 'lykly men to helpe maintene our right' he was 'better willyd that [they] shuld have it' (*AP* 118). The phrase and concept behind the phrase, 'lykly men to helpe maintene our right' provides an

³⁹ John Kempe, archbishop of York from 1425 and chancellor from March 1426 to 1432. Ralph Bellers was detailed as a servant of Chancellor Kempe and Thomas Bernard, a squire of the chancellors: *AP* 8, n.40.

⁴⁰ 'maistries' - has multiple meanings but the ones that are appropriate to this context are: 1(a) 'a high official'; 1(e) 'a conquerer, victor'; 2(a) 'an official or a civil officers of a district'; 2(b) 'one who has control over something or somebody': MED.

insight into the way decisions were taken and how the associations were made. It shows the pragmatic approach that preceded and then continued to sit behind the decisions in the choice of friends and associations.

Money was at the root of the Armburghs' long running problems; it is therefore necessary to examine their constant pressure to ensure financial stability, which was of course inextricably linked with the income deriving from their estates. In one appeal Robert wrote that he had been put to a great deal of costs with regard to the Mancetter manor but had had no return and this needed to be rectified: 'for I haue grete ned therto, for ye wot wele I haue born gret cost for that maner and had neuer but lytil profit therof' (*AP* 118).

The relationships

The Armburghs reliance on agents such as Laurence Sutton is evident.⁴¹ Robert asked Sutton to ride out to Mancetter and speak to the farmers giving Sutton the authority to take whatever steps were necessary to recover the money. It is a lengthy letter the context of which is indicative as to how insecure Robert's relationship with his tenants was. In it Robert detailed that the messengers whom he had sent to collect the over-due rent had been sent away on many occasions. Of his tenants Robert commented that his 'fermours' were 'ben sturdy felawes' and 'strange, slye and myghty with sotil answers' (*AP* 139). The meaning of 'sotil' with

⁴¹ *AP* 17, n. 92: Sutton was one of the Armburghs' feoffees he was also warrener to the earl of Warwick: *AP* 139-40.

its idea of treachery and insidious adds to the concept of it being simply a matter of being deceitful. It is a powerful condemnation.⁴²

The wording of the letter to Ralph Beauchamp, Harpour and Barbour, repeated many of the issues that Robert had written of in his letter to Sutton. The language and the manner in which Robert couched his opinions and requests in this letter reflected this opinion of the tenants' character. The letter suggested that the tenants had been deceitful and that Robert considered their actions had been underhand. He duplicated his account of how his servant was sent home by Harpour and Barbour: 'with outen eny ferme paid to hym of olde or newe' (*AP* 134). The emphasis was on how he had been put to unreasonable costs in the pursuit of his rent: 'and in this wise forgoodly and vnreasonably haven put me to costes to sende to you for my fermes' (*AP* 134)

It is recorded that Richard Barbour was first in London 'to appere to fore the chaunceller' (*AP* 134) during the Lent term and then subsequently in the Trinity term (1432).⁴³ Robert recorded that during the visit Barbour refused to speak to him, did not take his advice nor did he take any counsel from any of Robert's advisors but instead liaised with the Armburgh's adversaries. Robert commented that: 'he went

⁴² 'sotil' (adj.) – 2a. (a) 'Of a person: cunning, crafty; skilful, clever'; 2b. (a) 'Of a person, the intellect, the devil, etc., insidiously, sly, treacherously cunning; deceitful; also as a noun: a sly person': MED.

⁴³ The detail over Barbour's visit comes from a letter which Carpenter dates to 1432 and which is one of a sequence of letters written by Robert at that time: *AP* 132-33; *AP* 134-37. Wendy R. Childs, 'Moving around', in *Social History of England*, ed. Horrox and Ormrod, 260-75, (see especially p. 273). Childs identifies that the growth of government and as the law courts and main governmental offices were centred at Westminster this drew increasing numbers of people to London, many of whom had been summoned to the law courts.

his wey and bad me neither good day ne fare wel nor told me how he wold be gouernyd' (*AP* 134). The description of this direct snub provides an insight into what appeared to have been a hostile encounter. The incident certainly highlights the questions that surround both the status of the tenants alongside what we need to regard as their social influence. The conclusion must surely be that Barbour felt secure in his own position, that Robert was neither a help to him nor a threat and therefore Barbour could afford to act so impolitely. I see it as an important and insightful cameo, which does indicate the strength of both the status and position of the tenants, when we consider it as an impolite action in a society where the correct behaviour was so highly considered and especially courteous behaviour to one's social superiors. Robert concluded the description of the encounter with, if not irony, certainly with what sounded like resignation: 'And there for hit may wel be demed that he was in no grete wyll to paie me my ferme' (*AP* 134).

Friendship

The questions surrounding gentry friendships were examined by Philippa Maddern in 'Best Trusted Friends', where she comments that the question of friendship is an intractable subject.⁴⁴ Her essay stemmed from the need to examine more closely the horizontal connections of the fifteenth-century gentry.⁴⁵ The case

⁴⁴ Philippa Maddern, "'Best Trusted Friends": Concepts and Practices of Friendship among Fifteenth-Century Norfolk Gentry', in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Rogers, 100-17, (p.100).

⁴⁵ Maddern, 'Best Trusted Friends' in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Rogers: Maddern sets her analysis within the context of the then recent work of Colin Richmond, Nigel Saul and Charles Moreton looking at vertical social links, the patron-client relationships, which suggested that these were less significant in terms of gentry society than previously considered, 100, n.1. This line of enquiry has continued to be of importance and a comprehensive literature has grown up around it. Deborah Young, 'Cultural Networks', in *Gentry Culture*, ed. Radulescu and Truelove, 119-133, (p.119): this gives the clearest distinction between vertical and horizontal ties, identifying vertical as

study that she used focused on the immediate and close associates to a Norfolk landowner Simeon Fyncham; she identified that they were not necessarily direct neighbours but lived in the same geographical area.⁴⁶ She sets out that there was a dependence on recognised and trusted relationships with kin-like connections. She established that the networks of the associates bear out the ideal of harmonious working links that might have been of long standing and which would further common interests and ensure prosperity.⁴⁷ The evidence that she put forward from this and from her other sources, including the Paston letters, suggested that friendship rested: ‘not on a cold exchange of services, but on bonds of trust and affection strong enough to outweigh cupidity and outlast death itself’.⁴⁸ Ultimately she concluded that the close ties of neighbourhood and friendship could be so: ‘warmly cherished’ that they satisfied both the instrumental and affective friendship needs of the gentry.⁴⁹

patron-client and horizontal as friendship. For a comprehensive appraisal of the theories behind gentry networks, see Peter Coss, ‘Hilton, Lordship and the Culture of the Gentry’, *P&P* (2007) Supplement 2, 34-52; Deborah Thorpe, ‘Writing and Reading in the Circle of John Fastolf (d.1459)’, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York 2011), p.89, n.24 which gives information on recent work on gentry networks.

⁴⁶ Maddern, ‘Best Trusted Friends’ in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Rogers, 108-13, 116-7 Tables 1 & 2; the case study evaluating the associates of Simeon Fyncham of Norfolk, from 1409-1442, was based on business documentation revealing his close connections and associates most of which are in close geographical proximity to Fyncham, although as Maddern concludes that whilst his most frequent associates ‘were not forced on him by geographical accident’ they were all near neighbours, equally not all his near neighbours were part of his close associates.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 112-13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 108.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 115; 100, n.4: this sets out the definitions of instrumental and affective friendship which were centred round the anthropological hypothesis of friendship as being either affective or instrumental and reciprocal or not. Noble, *World of the Stonors*: the Stonors were seen as closely allied to the county with active participation in county affairs and with land held in various counties, 16.

My interpretation of the Armburgh associations is that it establishes a different angle to the friendship alliances and indicates that the ‘cold exchange of services’ could be fundamental. Unlike the landowner Simeon Fyncham, who was resident in the county where his estates lay, the Armburghs were not resident in the county of Warwickshire. It would seem that geographical distance was one of the Armburghs’ major problems; they had no defined kin or neighbour associations and they were reliant on others to form their connections. They appeared to have been dependent on their tenants to act as intermediaries to establish a viable social position as effectively they had no history within the community, a disadvantage in a society where family background, reputation and honour, were primary factors in determining social standing and influence.

My focus is on the language used in the representation of friendship however I equally recognise that the factual and empirical study of close networks that has been carried out in recent years is important in providing a framework for understanding friendship.⁵⁰ However, these approaches can only go so far before

⁵⁰ Noble, *World of the Stonors*, 5-14: in her introduction to her study of the Stonors Noble provides a valuable summary of Carpenter’s approaches and attitudes towards the idea of county determining that a more regional approach might be needed to assess the networks and puts forward the difficulties of the terms, such as community, which are in frequent use in order to underpin the analysis of the gentry networks. Noble also looks at the way gentry studies have been pursued. Further studies that are based on county boundaries are: Simon Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century c.1422-c.1485* (Cambridge, 1992); C.E. Moreton, *The Townshends and their world: Gentry, Law and Land in Norfolk, c.1450-1551* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); S.M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Derbyshire Record Office, 1983). See also: Elizabeth Noble, ‘Webs of Significance: Some Reflections on Thomas Stonor II’s Social Networks’, *Medieval Prosopography* Vol. 26, (2005), 315-32; Colin Richmond, *John Hopton, A Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); See also Richmond’s three studies of the Pastons: *The first phase; Fastolf’s Will; Endings*.

they become self-limiting. It has been suggested that for historians studying gentry within individual shire boundaries, there is the danger that the shire community assumes a greater significance in the historian's thinking, one which may not have been so evident to the county residents at the time. Or, conversely, that there is the temptation to assume that the gentry saw themselves as part of a wider shire community which they may not have done.⁵¹ The approach taken to the study of gentry networks by Carpenter provides yet another way of moving the study beyond the boundary limitations as the focus of her work, in looking at the connections based on legal transactions, widens the appreciations still further.⁵²

Loyalty

Loyalty, as Horrox determines, was: 'something which the Middle Ages valued very highly [as] one of the primary chivalric virtues'.⁵³ Understanding the language surrounding and expressing loyalty is therefore of crucial importance if we are to further our appreciation of the complexities of the service relationship. Loyalty or *loyaulte* was 'recited as a mantra in the mottoes of aristocratic families' but, according to Horrox, is not to be found in the gentry letters written to request or which offered service.⁵⁴ She also determines that its English equivalents of 'faith and

Carpenter provides a sound analysis of the Armburghs' networks; for an overview of the Armburghs' situation see *AP* Introduction (ii) The Dispute, 4-39 which establishes many of the networks and relationships and (iii) The importance of the document, 40-54

⁵¹ Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, 77.

⁵² Noble, *World of the Stonors*, provides an overview of the historiography of the study of the gentry, 4-9, and an assessment of Carpenter's work on gentry and relationships to the term 'community' as a part of her introduction to the study of the Stonors, 9-11; she recognises the need to examine both the 'familial and regional worlds' including the mental and communicative aspects of these worlds' and building on 'cultural capital', the words, ideas and symbols that were known and used, 11.

⁵³ Horrox, 'Service' in *Fifteenth Century Attitudes*, ed. Horrox, 71.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 71.

fidelity' do not feature even within the writing of the most vociferous of petitioners.⁵⁵ If Horrox is correct, it is therefore very significant that the word 'faith' is found within the Armburgh letters and that it forms a part of the language of the discourse.

In a letter written to Thomas Bedell,⁵⁶ either in the late 1440s or early 1450s, Robert was demanding that money owed be paid and was threatening legal action. The tone and the message are uncompromising, indeed intimidating, although shrewdly Robert endeavoured to maintain the moral stance by qualifying the threats made. In reminding Bedell that he had right on his side, Robert also reminded him of the power that is vested both in himself as the aggrieved party and at law while stating magnanimously: 'I myght have hadde you outlawed' (*AP* 169). Although the initial steps towards outlawry were in place with the issuing of first one *exigent* and then a subsequent one,⁵⁷ Robert's patience had been tested and he stated: 'I counseill you trist not to moche to my curtesye, for ye have yeve me no cause' (*AP* 170). The reciprocal relationship that strengthened the tenancy had broken down to the extent that Robert curtly stressed that Bedell should not be reliant on his courtesy, (in this context 'curtesye' would seem to imply both consideration but also perhaps goodwill); because the debt was outstanding Robert felt he had no cause to continue being loyal or courteous to his former lessee. Yet, the subtext suggests that this is not just about the debt but also about how Robert had been deceived. He had heard from Bedell's neighbours that Bedell had been in receipt of money, and potentially barns

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 71.

⁵⁶ Thomas Bedell, who was a citizen and coppersmith of London, active between 1425 and 1441, would also appear to have been a former lessee/farmer of the Armburghs but the manorial land is unidentified: *AP* 169, n. 375.

⁵⁷ *exigent* – 'the first steps in outlawry': Latham, *Medieval Latin Word-List*, 178.

full of corn, in his capacity as an executor of John Fowler's estate.⁵⁸ Robert's angry retort: 'And gete you all the frendschip that ye can [...] ye schall paye me my money, euery peny, with costys and damagys' (*AP* 169), reinforced the impression that Bedell had not demonstrated the expected honourable behaviour and that the mutual loyalty upon which the relationship was founded had been abused. This consideration of the deceitful behaviour is a subtlety within the writing and context of the discourse which is characteristic of Robert's writing. I see it working at two different levels. One within the letter itself with the immediate impact of how Robert determined his argument but equally the way it is incorporated appears to further support the overall message of dishonesty that is a main focus in the Roll. Robert highlighted the deceit, yet as he went no further the ultimate threatened consequences were never realised.

However, significantly, the letter to Bedell included the phrase: 'as ye promysed me of ffeyth and trowth' (*AP* 169). The phrase is used when Robert rounded on Bedell for breaking his agreement to pay on the 'diuers dayes a forerehersyd' (*AP* 169), which were detailed at the beginning of the letter. The abuse of faith and truth is very much key to the message and is integral to the way in which the duplicitous behaviour over the debt was exposed. The breakdown of the promises made under the moral code, implicit in the ideals of faith and truth, could not be framed by a stronger or more damning condemnation. Questioning Bedell's loyalty and thereby the inherent service he owed to Robert through the accusations of not fulfilling his promises made in 'ffeyth and trowth' (*AP* 169) strikes to the core

⁵⁸ *AP* 169, n.377 & n.380; John Fowler was also party to the debt and Carpenter suggests he may have held the farm jointly with Bedell who was subsequently his executor.

of service and reciprocity which, as established below, were intrinsic characteristics of medieval relationships.

Throughout the protracted arguments he emphasised, in uncompromising language, the abuse of personal trust which he had been subjected to alongside the many financial difficulties he had been faced with. He used condemnatory language when he talked of tricks and deceit and evil will: ‘and y were as evill willed as somme of you wold be to me, wold be in tyme comyng a ful record ayenst yow’ (*AP* 135). His reliance on their advice and counsel, ‘by your avys and conseil’ (*AP* 137), was turned to a demand that ‘therfore I pray you, al maner of cancelys and exusacions put a side’ (*AP*.124). Angrily he railed against their insolence in taking him for a fool: ‘I gret you wel merueilyng gretly that ye wol deme me suche a fole’ (*AP* 124). It would certainly appear that one of the aims of Robert’s writing was his desire to secure the moral high ground. The issue of morality is the mantra of the Roll and, however, disingenuous the writing might be, there is no doubting that Robert’s use of prose aimed to portray the righteousness of the Armburghs and establish their credibility in the letters and discredit the integrity of their opponents:

And seris, demyth not that y send you this lettre nor that y sent you no letre afor this tyme for no wrath that y have to you but for oure bothes auantage, for y kept to have no cause to hurlyn with yow in tyme comyng for my good and so to puttyn vs bothe to cost, and therfor y pray you sendith me my good or som resonable somme ther off and aquytith you to me sum what after the

promys that he made to me in the be gynnyng and yet y wol do so to you that ye schul hold you wel payd (*AP* 149).

This passage characterises Robert's cunning manoeuvres to achieve a moral position and to present himself as both the injured party and the victim of the circumstances. However, it also provided the means by which Robert implied that he was the one who was principled and who had acted in an honourable fashion, and yet whose actions had been misinterpreted. This appears to be the message that Robert established; he did not wish to quarrel, 'for y kept to have no cause to hurlyn with yow', and any disagreement came about as a result of the poor behaviour of others.

The 'seris' is intriguing as it heralds a passage that is placatory. The contrast between these conciliatory words and the other aggressive written attacks that Robert made possibly suggests that he recognised the need to be conciliatory. Could it be perhaps Robert felt he had gone too far, had pressed his so-called friends – his farmers and tenants – to the point where they were no longer interested in, or prepared, to assist or support him. It is, maybe, tempting to read the 'sirs' as a derisive address with Robert's tone more sarcastic than pacifying but that could be reading the message and words as too overtly political and insincere. Instead it is more logical to take the wording at its face value and accept Robert's explanation that he had never sent the other letters, not because of his anger but for their mutual advantage: 'that y sent you no letre afor this tyme for no wrath that y have to you but for oure bothes auantage' (*AP* 149).

However, by evaluating the subtext, that is contained in the phrase ‘puttyn vs bothe to cost’, a clearer appraisal of his thought processes and attitudes may be found. Further investment and expenditure on Robert’s part appeared to be futile. The pressure had not produced any satisfactory results as we can see in his appealing phraseology: ‘or y kept to have no cause to hurlyn with yow in tyme comyng for my good’ (AP 149). The fact that he had not wanted to put himself to further expense seemingly brought about the change of approach, with the more reasoned: ‘therfor y pray you sendith me my good or som resonable somme ther off’ (AP 149).

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to evaluate the personal voice of Robert Armburgh within the context of his relationship with his tenants. The fact that Robert’s letters are written in the first person means that they come across as the direct and forthright communications that Robert had with his tenants. My conclusion is that these letters are more representative of an unmediated voice of a landowner. I believe that a significant value of these letters is the fact that they do not appear to be the product of the communications that were written, sent and or received, through the mediation of a family servant or scribe.⁵⁹ However, this lack of intervention may have had certain disadvantages as the reading of his letters suggests that in his handling of tenants Robert was either not so well advised as the Pastons or, if he had received advice to pacify and accommodate his tenants, he did not

⁵⁹ R.H. Britnell, ‘The Pastons And Their Norfolk’, *Agricultural History Review*, 36, II, (1988), 132-44. Britnell identifies certain of the Paston servants/agents who handled the tenancy affairs.

follow it.⁶⁰ Alternatively it could be that he lacked the experience in the management of his estates, unlike the more experienced Paston or Stonor families, and acted naively.

The reality of the difficult economics of the period and the strength of the position of tenants can be identified by the way in which Robert wrote to his tenants and received little response. The economics however were only one aspect of the cause of the clashes Robert had. What I think we do see is how the lack of respect appeared to be more fundamental. I would argue that the ethics of service and reciprocation, far from being the positive method through which beneficial societal associations were substantiated and achieved, had in fact become a handicap ignored and rebutted by at least one party in a relationship, in Robert's case his tenants. If we begin to consider the service ethic as becoming a negative influence then it is maybe time to re-evaluate whether it was indeed as significant a contemporary principle as we now consider it to be. The chapter here suggests that there was a greater fluidity in the idea or ethics of the service relationship than historiographically we allow for or that the term 'service-relationship' allows for. It implies a boundary to the relationships that I would argue cannot readily be determined by the way that Robert wrote of his landlord and tenant relationship. Robert's letters to his tenants indicate that there are significantly more gradations of service and ideas of reciprocation, as well as understandings of friendship and what that friendship actually involved, than we allow for.

⁶⁰ See the discussion and comments on the conciliatory nature of the Pastons' relationships with their tenants in Chapter One on the disputes in the section on the economic, legal and social context to gentry land disputes.

Just as the ideals of service and reciprocation need to be reassessed, and given more consideration, so does the concept of friendship. The actions taken by the Armburghs to secure friends and a network seem far removed from any ideals of warmly cherished friendship. Money and payment of rewards to those that might carry out a favour were far more central to the successful resolution of a dispute than Maddern's hypothesis would suggest. The question as to whether money was ultimately as essential to the smooth running of the associations as kin-like connections cannot be fully resolved. Evidently Robert was no altruistic landowner, befriending his tenants and their friends selflessly; his letters show that his search for friendship was decidedly self-centred. The letters hold the clues as to how the horizontal lines of societal structure were just as important as the vertical. For Robert it would seem that the horizontal networks were crucial in securing his control of the manor of Mancetter. Virgoe's argument that it is wrong to overstate the importance of the sense of community and that horizontal relationships were less important than vertical ones founded on good lordship I contend has to be re-evaluated in the light of the Armburgh correspondence.⁶¹ The evidence from this correspondence suggests that the horizontal social relationships were just as important. I contend that our interpretation of Robert's letters must be to accept more readily the importance of the middle ground of social influence, which included an individual's immediate contacts, such as his tenants and the men in working possession of the land, to provide for the advantage in the making of important friendships as opposed to the dominance of the higher authority networks.

⁶¹ Roger Virgoe, 'The Crown, Magnates and Local Government in Fifteenth-Century East Anglia' in *The Crown and Local Communities in England and France in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J.R.L. Highfield and R. Jeffs (Gloucester: Sutton, 1981), 83.

Finally, I conclude that this chapter has shown the value of looking at an individual male gentry voice. We cannot begin to fulfil the need of assessing gentry society without first recognising how fundamental it is to read the letters of the male gentry very carefully. I appreciate that we cannot, from the evidence of the Armburgh letters alone, determine whether the way that these gentry letter-writers were incorporating the language into their writing was more indicative of skilled and elite rhetoric or whether we are witnessing a use of the day-to-day vocabulary that the late-medieval gentry might have used to determine their relationships. However, as this thesis is proving we need to do more to evaluate those very specific personal letters in order to see that clear male gentry voice and the letters of Robert Armburgh are some of the most important sources in this endeavour.

CHAPTER SEVEN – The Voice of Joan Armburgh: Trust, Morality and Retribution

The persona of Joan Armburgh is a constant presence throughout the Armburgh Roll as she was the beneficiary to the Brokholes inheritance around whom the dispute was centred. The focus of this chapter is to consider the letters which appear to be authored or influenced by Joan and to determine to what extent we can use that limited written evidence to reveal her individual voice and her personal attitudes or beliefs. Undoubtedly she was pivotal to the conflict and I believe that it is essential, if we are to fully appreciate the Armburgh Roll and its message of broken trust, the abuse of honesty and injustice, that we focus on Joan's words and endeavour to find her voice within the significance of the Roll. Therefore, this chapter aims to explore the writing attributed to her to consider the concerns, that I see as fundamental to the conflict and the message of the Roll itself – those of trust, morality and retribution.

A contextual background

Joan's position as a potential beneficiary to a sizable estate and her roles, both as a widow and then subsequently through remarriage as a wife once more, are situations that have been identified as occurring in the period after the Black Death.¹

¹ The questions surrounding the demographic impact of the Black Death on social mobility are widely studied but the issue of inheritance down the female line for the landed aristocracy is specifically considered in S.J. Payling, 'Social mobility, demographic change, and the landed society in late medieval England', *EHR*, 45, (1992), 51-73. Payling considers how the impact of the demographic crisis impinged on succession patterns, how established families saw an increase in their wealth but more significantly how there was a decided shift in land-holdings with an upward mobility of new wealth into the landed class. He concludes that the marriage of heiresses allowed new families into the elite strata and that this saw the beginning social mobility into the landed society which continued over the next century or more.

The recognition of a woman's role in the challenging and sometimes contentious situations of marriage and widowhood has formed an important part of the recent studies that have considered the status of late-medieval women.² The evidence derived from the Brokholes dispute is certainly a significant addition to the sources available to us from which we can appreciate the complex cultural situations that surrounded women as widows and as heiresses. In this respect I think we must regard Joan an important individual in our evaluation of the social character, identity and status of late-medieval women. Joan is a rare example of a woman's active and vocal role within the remit of a very specific legal conflict.³ Her voice is perhaps 'the

² Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): Hanawalt's study identifies the importance of women within the economy of London and how inheritance laws aided their contribution to wealth production and security through marriage, dowries, inherited property alongside the legal protection of widows but that it was still a predominantly male culture. However, in her conclusion Hanawalt states: 'Women learned to work within the web of the dominant culture and to make their own way, if they were clever and able to do so', 215. Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995): Leyser looks at the various roles of women within the family – marriage, motherhood, work and widowhood and provides a comprehensive bibliography for each of the chapters. The importance of widows is stressed by Leyser who highlights the number of widows within society who at a conservative estimate were running and in charge of at least 10 per cent of all households, 168. Sue Sheridan Walker, *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993). Mavis E. Mate, *Daughters, Wives and Widows after the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350-1535* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998): Mate's study counters the accepted view that the post-Black Death period was one of unequal and positive opportunities for women; *eadem*, *Women In English Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): Mate's concludes that although the period following the Black Death led to an increase in the number of heiresses (and women in general within the workforce) it did not lead to a social transformation in the role of women and that the late medieval period was not a 'golden-age' for women, 100.

³ Women were, of course, not silent in terms of the legal processes, nor, as the letters of the Paston women indicate in other areas of economic or social management. The petition of Alison Beek contained in the Roll made in support of her brother is a further example of a woman's role in the defence process: *AP* 195-99. There are many studies which attest to the role of women in literature, letter writing, law and day to day household activities those that I considered were appropriate to this

most striking example of a medieval woman's voice [that] may still be heard'.⁴ The analysis of Joan's writing and what I would consider to be her emotional engagement with the process of writing, as well as the wider procedures of the conflict, is therefore important. I think that we need to base the consideration of Joan's writing on the fine detail and as Meale identifies the minutiae. Therefore, it is the finer points of Joan's vocabulary use and writing style, the suggestions of her literary appreciations that I see in her writing that have been a primary aspect of my close-reading. Understanding how Joan wrote and contextualised her letters can add to our ability to evaluate women's standing within late medieval society and the approach fits well into the current methods used in the study of medieval women. As Meale established:

the study of the story of women must be incremental, layer upon layer of rediscovered fact and individual interpretation forming a complex, stratified landscape in which the observation of the minutiae is all-important.⁵

Recent work has shown that some women were, in certain circumstances and especially where their livelihoods were threatened, both assertive and confident of

study include: Beattie, 'Single Women, Work, and Family' 177-202; Beattie, *Medieval Single Women. Dear Sister – Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Emma Hawkes, "'[S]he will...protect and defend her rights boldly by law and reason...". Women's Knowledge of Common Law and Equity Courts in Late-Medieval England' in *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. Noel James Menuge, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 145-161; *Medieval Women in their communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 1997).

⁴ Meale, 'Women's Voices' in *Companion to Medieval English Literature*, ed. Brown, 74-90, (p.77).

⁵ *Ibid.* 75.

their rights.⁶ They appear to have understood the law, their rights and the legal processes and were frequently found pleading their cases in their own voices in the courts.⁷ Their participation in the legal process, and in what was an essentially male dominated domain, indicates an increasing literacy and engagement with complex language-based procedures.⁸ Joan seems to have had some knowledge of the law, possibly as a result of Robert's influence, his advice and his own legal expertise.⁹ It

⁶ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, 183; Leyser looks at widows in different social circumstances - remarriage to protect property or status was not confined to the gentry/aristocracy but peasant widows post Black Death remarried to compensate for the difficulties in employing extra labour, 181; in spite of lack of literacy Leyser concludes that 'widowed village women were figures of significant authority', but that more research into this is required, 186.

⁷ Hanawalt, *Wealth of Wives*, 215.

⁸ The questions surrounding women's literacy alongside the wider issues of gentry literacy are numerous and the study of this subject has given rise to a wide corpus of supporting literature although as Alison Truelove identifies there is not yet a 'book-length general survey of the subject', Alison Truelove, 'Literacy' in *Gentry Culture*, ed. Radulescu and Truelove, 84-99 (p.84). Krug's seminal book, *Reading Families* provides an excellent approach to the study of how women engaged with the written word identifying that engagement as a practical and pragmatic response to social change and looks at not just how they engaged, through for example the medium of letters, but why text-based activity was so crucial to management of their families economically and socially. Krug also provides an extensive and valuable bibliography. For a useful general introduction to the Paston women writers see Diane Watt, *The Paston Women: Selected Letters* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004); Watt's interpretative essay 'In the Absence of a Good Secretary' at the end of this book emphasises the fact that the Paston women had a good working knowledge of the law and the economic realities of land management and how letter writing was a vital activity for women in the running of their lives, 134-58 and the useful references associated with the essay. Diane Watt, "'No Writing for Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women' in *Dear Sister*, ed. Cherewatuk and Wiethaus, 122-38; Rowena E. Archer, "'How Ladies...Who Live on Their Manors Ought to Manage Their Households and Estates': Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages', in *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society, c.1200-1500* ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire, 1992), 149-81. Meale's bibliography attached to 'Women's Voices' in *Companion to Medieval English Literature*, ed. Brown, 88-90, provides a broad base of literary studies examining women's voices.

⁹ The caveat to this is the limited evidence to make sound comparisons. Paston letters do provide sufficient examples. Margaret Paston also had the advantage of a lawyer husband and from her writings John's influence is apparent. See Krug, *Literate Practice*, especially the chapter 'Husbands

can, of course, only be conjectured but I would argue that in her marriage to Robert we can see a crucial action. Certainly her marriage to Robert had advantages in the protection of her interests and the fact that Robert pursued the claim to the Brokhole lands. My contention is that in the writing we can attribute to Joan we are able to see both the determined personality of a gentry woman letter-writer and one whom I think should be recognised as writing with confidence. In this respect I contend that her writing is comparable to other women's writings of the period.¹⁰ It is, however, once we begin to consider Joan's personal opinions within her letters that we begin to engage with, what I contend, is a rare if not unique opportunity to further evaluate the style of women's writing.¹¹ Richardson sees the stylisation of women's letter

and Sons', 17-64, which looks at Margaret's attitudes and abilities in writing and looks at how she adopted John I's textual practices.

¹⁰ The strength of women's voices and the confidence of their engagement with the written word have provoked varying methodological and historiographical interpretations with the feminist approach to historiography not always to the advantage of rediscovering or recovering the actuality of women's voices. *Listening to Their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women*, ed. Molly Meijer Wertheimer (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1997): this is a collection of essays that moves away from the narrow strictures of feminist interpretations and re-evaluates the skilled achievements of women writers and it opens new avenues for looking at women's rhetorical abilities. Malcolm Richardson's chapter, 'Women, Commerce, and Rhetoric in Medieval England', 133-49, in *Listening to Their Voices*, ed. Meijer Wertheimer, assesses the way women reflected and adopted, by necessity, the patriarchal structured letter writing styles when they had to engage in the use of correspondence to conduct their business, such as the running of estates, and that there was little development of their own style. Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2007); this study presents a powerful argument for how literature and the assessment of women writers should be reconsidered and although this study deals predominately with literary texts it is a sound basis from which to develop approaches to all women's writing and to evaluate the strength of their voices within their own realms of textual engagement.

¹¹ Joel T. Rosenthal, *Telling Tales: Sources and Narration in Late Medieval England* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003): see especially the chapter 'Margaret Paston: The Lady and the Letters', 95-147, which explores Margaret Paston as an individual and examines her voice by 'an examination of the mechanics of its articulation and the modes of cognition revealed in her letters'

writing as following a determinedly patriarchal model; he stresses that the physicality of writing must also have had an impact on style, if not content as most scribes and secretaries were, of course, male. He observes that had more women's thoughts been written down by women then there is 'little question that we would have a different view of the medieval world'.¹² My argument is that, although we have limited material with which to assess Joan's thoughts, we must consider that what evidence we do have is valuable in that it offers us a further opportunity to glimpse that different view.

The letters and copy documents attributed to Joan

There are five letters in the Roll which Carpenter has attributed to Joan and a further three documents that are directly associated with her.¹³ Although these eight texts represent less than ten percent of the total of ninety-four copied documents I do not see this as diminishing the importance of the influence of Joan's voice within the manuscript. We do, however, have to consider the problem as to the certainty that Joan actually authored these letters. I recognise that this cannot be guaranteed nor do we have any way of knowing what the scribal influence might have been or what influence Robert may have had in their writing. I contend that the only way we can answer this problem, or accept an answer to it is by considering the personal aspects

96. It is a useful examination that can be used as a base for further work on women's letters.

Rosenthal's assesses women from the evidence remaining as second-class and that the remainder letters are representative of that social positioning, p.xx.

¹² Richardson, 'Women, Commerce and Rhetoric' in *Listening to Their Voices*, ed. Wertheimer, 146.

¹³ To Lady Ferrers February 1428: *AP* 92-93; to John Horell in c.1429/30: *AP* 120-23; two letters are to unknown recipients at one of the disputed properties of Radwinter, written c.1429/30: *AP* 119-20, 123-4; to John Rigges before 1443: *AP* 75-76); a petition to chancery dated between 1437 and 1439: *AP* 87-88) and a formal statement of the inheritance claim written from her perspective c.1428-32: *AP* 193-94); the Remembrance at the beginning of the Roll: *AP* 61-67. Carpenter suggests that the Remembrance is possibly a document which may well have been influenced by Joan.

that feature in the texts themselves. For example, in the letter to Lady Ferrers, Joan identified herself with reference to her mother Dame Ellen Brokholes, her father Sir Geoffrey Brokholes and she wrote of herself as a kinswoman to Lady Ferrers.¹⁴ In the letter to John Horell Joan identified her position by reference to the manor of Radwinter, her family home, reference to her mother and her mother's connection with the manor as well as her own.¹⁵ In both these letters Joan also used the personal pronoun 'I' throughout the texts. My contention is that these letters were written by Joan. I think in the letter to Lady Ferrers we see a personal appeal from Joan to her alleged kinswoman and in the powerfully expressive letter to Horell I am persuaded, from the subject, the context and the emotional content that the author was Joan. I do, however, recognise that it is less clear what Joan's position is in the two letters to the unknown tenants of Radwinter which sit either side of the letter to Horell; Carpenter suggests these could have been written by either Robert or Joan. Equally we must recognise that in her statements and petitions these may well have been influenced by either a scribe or by Robert (I have considered these documents in other sections of the thesis and do not re-evaluate them here).

For the purposes of my evaluation of the concepts of trust, morality and retribution I have focussed on three of Joan's letters and these form the framework for the chapter. The letters that I use are the letter to John Horell and the two letters written to the unknown recipients at Radwinter (which are positioned either side of Horell's letter within the Roll). These two letters to the unknown recipients dealt with the destruction of woodland at Radwinter Manor which had been felled and sold against the Armburghs' wishes or even knowledge. This run of letters is

¹⁴ AP 92.

¹⁵ AP 120; AP 122.

preceded by a letter, which again dealt with this despoliation of the woodland, but this first of the four letters does appear to have been composed by Robert and was addressed to the bailiff (or other agent) of the manor (identified as ‘Constabal’). All of these letters dealt with the damage to the Radwinter Manor and they indicate how angry Armburghs were at the harm caused. It is an incident which is also discussed in the Horell letter.

The two letters either side of the letter to Horell both relate to the removal of the wood and woodlands that belonged to the manor of Radwinter and the valuable timber that had been taken by the Armburghs’ rivals.¹⁶ I consider that the position of these two letters is in itself interesting and suggest that this would not appear to be an arbitrary positioning or a by-chance copying but a conscious decision to frame the letter to Horell. My interpretation is that by setting these two letters either side of the letter to Horell was an effective means of intensifying the message. It highlights the problems over the destruction and it intensifies the message that the Armburghs’ saw themselves as having been abused by the dishonest actions. I see the position of the letters as having a considered impact on the reading of Joan’s missive to Horell which only strengthens the vitriol.

These two letters are framed by the conventional: ‘Dere frendys I grete you wel’ and again they rehearsed the narrative of the ‘bastardes doughters of John Sumpter of Colchester’ and the claims to the title of the Radwinter Manor (*AP* 119, 123). The abuse of trust and the breakdown of the requisite rules of obligations that formed the relationship between the Armburghs and the recipients of the letters is

¹⁶ *AP* 118-19.

strongly expressed as is the fact that the Armburghs were surprised that the tenants of the land should have acted so recklessly in siding with the Armburghs' opponents in the removal of the wood: 'that ye wol takyn vpon you to entryn in to the said maner and hewe donn the wode or carye away or makyn maistris theryn without my love and my leve' (AP 123). The author of the letter made the threat that: 'be the trouthe that I owe to God, I shal do you endityn of felonie with yn a short tyme and do the worst that I can do to you be the comune lawe' (AP 120).¹⁷ A focus in the second letter was to highlight the futility of the destructive actions: 'I shal yeue you a cause with yn short time to wesshe that ye had laboured in a nother place. Task lugard that is to say meteles with oute hire' (AP 124).¹⁸

A passage that stands out to me as significant and one where I consider that we can most probably see how Joan might have influenced the writing is this passage taken from the first letter to the Radwinter addressees:

For I had leuer ye stroyde me x so moche wode in a nother place as the wode that stont aboute in the gardyn, the which is a couert to all the place. With oute the which couert the place is not able to stonde no while, ne yt is not able to be dwellyd in and therefore ye mowe fele by youre owne discrecions thei haue no title to the maner that wol destroye that (AP 120).

Here we can see the same sentiments about the manor that Joan expresses in her letter to Horell. The effect of the loss of the wooded cover to the garden was

¹⁷ *felonie* - the felony would be for the theft of the timber: AP 120, n.257.

¹⁸ Carpenter determines that the meaning of this phrase beginning with 'task lugard' could mean 'this is a job for which you will receive no return': AP 124, n.269.

emphasised in that it altered the aspect and by inference the security of the manor to the extent that it could not be properly occupied. The impact over the loss is made more acute by the fact that the author stated that it would have been better to have ten times as much wood destroyed on another property than the wood around Radwinter. I interpret this as a piece of moralising writing which reproved the recipient through the resonance that the message had with biblical overtones and certainly attitudes that are reflective of the judgements of Solomon. These views are expressed in the phrase: ‘thei haue no title to the maner that wol destroye that’. The argument was subtly expressed, the rightful owners of the manor would not devalue it by destroying its inherent value, and, therefore, those that have perpetrated the damage cannot be the rightful owners. This sentence excluded the need for any further lengthy explanations as to the rights of ownership by drawing in deep-rooted religious understandings and persuasive paradigms which we might read as being directed towards the guilt and conscience of the recipient.

It is apparent from the way the language, the content and the context of these letters came together with critical turns of phrase and reproving vocabulary that the removal and sale of this woodland was the cause of a great deal of anger and frustration to the Armburghs, but perhaps most significantly to Joan. I think we can identify that this wrath was not just generated by the economic loss, although this would have been significant for the manor, but that it appeared to have been symbolic of the other abuses within the wrangles over the division of the property.¹⁹

¹⁹ Bruce M.S. Campbell, ‘The land’, in *Social History of England*, ed. Horrox and Ormrod, 179-237: the economics of woodland management and the commercial value of coppiced woods was an integral aspect of landowners financial situations, Campbell estimates that between a tenth and a fifth of agricultural areas was used in the production of trees and wood, 189-90. The loss of woodland and

In Robert's letter to Constabal his language indicated his despondency over the sale of the wood: 'I am right sory fore and specially for the tymbre that growyth in the gardyn the whiche was a grete couert for the place', stating that, 'yt was neuer my purpos to haue sold stikke' (*AP* 118-19).

From the form and tone of these communications it is evident that Armburghs, and Joan in particular, had an attachment to the Radwinter property. We can determine that it was not simply a matter of the economics or of the social status associated with the manorial lands but that the ownership and control of the family land was more deep-rooted in familial affection and history. Joan stated of Radwinter: 'that maner that hath ben an habitacion and a dwellyng place for many a worthi man of my antisetters from the conquest in to this tyme' (*AP* 121). Perhaps we should consider that the belligerent, and, often futile actions taken by the Armburghs were, in part, motivated by the desire to keep familial land the value of which was measured in more than simple economic terms. Certainly these letters reveal the strongly held belief in the ancestral value of the land. I think they also show us how emotional attitudes could be expressed through complex and stylised letter writing.

The focus of Joan's letter to Horell was his abuse of his longstanding relationship with her family.²⁰ Joan specifically identified his betrayal through the support he had apparently given to her rivals in the inheritance dispute, alongside the assistance he had given to her adversaries for the unlawful possession of the property at Radwinter. From the outset the tone of the letter is uncompromising. There is a

productive trees was therefore of financial significance to the Armburghs especially when they were facing financial difficulties.

²⁰ Carpenter suggests that Horell's offence was to offer the Sumpter girls privileged information which had they been impostors they would not have been in possession of: *AP* 8.

bitter twist to the conventional opening of 'Dear Friend' as Joan immediately established her anger with the condemnatory address of 'Bare frende' and that he deserved no more 'as thu hast deseruyd I grete the' (AP 120). The use here of the pronouns 'thu' and 'the' is a critical aspect of the condemnation as it heightens the denunciation. Norman Davis identifies that the use of these within the Paston correspondence only occurs when the writer wants to imply anger, contempt or hostility.²¹ Margaret Paston's use of 'the' in her account of the attack on James Gloys, her chaplain, was illustrative of the whole tone of that recorded event.²² Joan's derisory address to Horell has the same effect; it would have left a contemporary reader in no doubt as to the disdain with which he was held. An appreciation of this subtle variation in the use of the personal pronouns is extremely important. In terms of the force of this specific scornful message it adds yet another barbed verbal attack. At a more general level it adds to our overall understanding of the sophistication and skilled composition that these early English letter writers were able to achieve and indicates that there was, in certain situations, a move away from the patriarchal or business letter model to a more freely composed rhetorical style. Joan used 'thu', 'the', 'thi', throughout the letter as she delivered her powerful attack on Horell. The repetitive nature of the scorn encompassed in this simple linguistic change from the use of one form of pronoun to another intensifies the censure. Joan

²¹ Norman Davis, 'The Language of the Pastons' (Read 19 May 1954), *Middle English Literature, British Academy Gollancz Lectures*, Selected and Introduced by J.A. Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 45-70, (p.61): Davis gives examples from the Paston Letters that use this form of personal pronoun derisively, 61-2. Margaret's account of the attack on James Gloys, her chaplain, the use of 'thu' 'exemplifies the tone'. Examples from the MED 'the' (pron. (2)) - 1(e) and 3(e) support the use of 'the' as being used for someone to whom scorn and anger is directed

²² Davis, I, p.224

only once reverted to 'ye' at the beginning of the moral narrative which forms the central part of the letter.²³

Joan was relentless in her damning of Horell. Immediately following the aggressive opening of 'Bare frende' she embarked on her damning of his character:

yt is not vnknowen to the and oopynly knowen in all the cuntre that thi chef
makyng hath be thorough the maner of Radewynter, first be my lady my
modres day and sithern in my tyme' (*AP* 120).

Joan invoked a most powerful image to denounce Horell by likening him both to the cuckoo that kills the hedge-sparrow who has raised it and the bird that fouls its own nest: 'as a kukkowysbird devouring the heysogge whan she hath bred hym vp and as an vnkynd bird that foulyth his owne nest' (*AP* 120). Behind these powerful metaphors lie complex cultural ideologies of which the abuse and neglect of familial responsibility is representative of a wider abuse of the cornerstones of medieval society: order and duty.²⁴ As the letter continues the principles of order and duty and the prerequisite of these in the form of trust and honesty are widened as Joan draws on many examples to condemn Horell and expose his treachery. They are used to emphasise that his sinful behaviour, his abuse of trust and his immorality go against

²³ *AP* 122.

²⁴ Simon Walker, 'Order and law', in *Social History of England*, ed. Horrox and Ormrod, 91-112. Walker determines the importance of order and law and how contemporaries considered that social cohesion was dependent on each individual's conscientious performance of social obligations. Even with a family or within a household any disobedience was regarded as 'a kind of treason, the first step down the road towards general insurrection', 91.

God's law, natural law and common law. There is a symmetry in the composition and towards the end of the letter Joan returned again to the analogy of the 'vnkynd birde [that] hast defoulyd thi nest' and the 'fals kukhowys birde' which has laboured to 'devoure thi damme', Ellen and Joan, 'the whiche haue be modres of thi trist and thi bryngers vp'. Horell was labelled as a dishonest man, 'a knave of a nought' for the way in which he has counselled Joan's adversaries to destroy the manor of Radwinter (*AP* 122).

The theme of dishonesty reverberates throughout the letter, where the premise of the inheritance dispute is repeated. Horell's part in the deceit was highlighted by a strongly condemnatory passage in which he was accused of giving false information to the justices and the juries on many occasions in order to disinherit Joan:

so fer forth that thu as the develes child, fadre of falshode, whos kynde is alwey to do evil a yenst good, hast forsworn the diuerse tymes before chetours and justices to yeue the cuntres fals enformacion (*AP* 121).

Joan confronted Horell with the fact that he has 'steryd' her adversaries to 'do stripe and waste with yn my ground and to throwe donn my wodes' (*AP* 121) and in particular the timber that grew in the garden and which protected the property. So much of this timber had been destroyed that there was nothing left standing, neither the pear or apple trees: 'nor no maner trees that berith frut'. Joan determined that this: 'grevith me more than all the wronges that thei han do to me in to this tyme' (*AP* 121). Again there is the emotive element being expressed with regard to

the manorial land. A further aspect could also be the question of possession where violent entry to a property could be a technical way of claiming title and the action over the timber might have been the means by which Joan's adversaries were attempting to prove their rights over Radwinter manor.²⁵ The issue of the destruction of the woodland therefore moves beyond the actuality of the act, through the description in the letter, to be both a physical example of wrongdoing as well as providing a symbolic representation of the wrongs being meted out. This is supported by the other letters, where warnings are issued to those who were profiting by the sale of the wood at Radwinter, with the constant reminder of the lawful ownership and title that rested with the Armburghs.

I feel that the subject of the sale of timber is used in a sophisticated manner throughout all these letters, in that the subject was expanded beyond the economic concerns to show the wider considerations of the Armburghs' situation. An example of this use of the symbolism of the timber is when Joan reflected on the considerable destruction of the woodland; the passage begins by condemnation of the adversaries who: 'levyn not a stykke stondyng vpon the ground' (*AP* 122). However, it was turned into a precise and perfect medium for the vitriol when Joan wrote: 'I thanke God I am strong y nogh to by tymbre for a peyre galwys to hange the vpon' (*AP* 122). This crisp sentence draws together the essential message: the Armburghs were in the right and God was on their side and through these they have maintained their moral supremacy. Joan determined that they were still able to purchase timber, symbolic of the fact that they had sufficient resources to carry out their threats and achieve retribution. The association of the wood and the timber is cleverly drawn

²⁵ Gerald Harriss, 'Political Society and the Growth of Government in Late Medieval England', *P&P* 138 (1993), 28-57, (pp.50-51).

together with the emphasis on the material's strength and the ultimate punishment for Horell's sins, death by hanging, a deserved end for a felon. The narrative of the 'peyre galwys' was repeated where Joan drew in an earlier legal right, that of setting up a gallows on the land: 'a peire galweys set vp with yn the same ffraunchise for thi necke' (*AP* 121).²⁶ This added yet a further dimension to the text and the discourse as it brought in the long-standing traditions of common law and English custom that continued to impact on how late medieval justice was being interpreted. It can also be seen as indicative of a knowledge of the law.²⁷

The erudite style of the letter brings into sharp focus the litany of complaints against Horell and the language used serves as a constant reiteration of Horell's untrustworthy and sinful nature. In building the condemnation of Horell Joan used not only the situations that had been perpetrated against her or her family, but she added in further proof:

²⁶ 'ffraunchise' which as Carpenter identifies is a reference to an old franchisal right that of infangenthef, which means the hanging of a thief who is 'caught red-handed on one's lordship': *AP* 121, n.264.

²⁷ The concept of justice and law is recognised as pivotal to medieval society and the framework of order these ideals are readily seen as an inherent part of many of the Roll's letters. A study that examines the principles of justice and law and the abstract ideology behind them is Norman Doe, *Fundamental Authority in Late Medieval English Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Doe draws on many contemporary writers, but largely focuses on the works of John Fortescue and Reginald Pecock, to found his analysis. In particular the chapter 'Iustitia, Regor Iuris and Aequitas' provides a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of justice as developed through the paradigm of justice being made by God and not man-made. The chapter is divided into sub-sections which deal with different aspects, for example 'Justice and the consideration of others' and 'Justice as giving each his due'; the ideal of virtue and the responsibility of moral action to neighbours can be deduced as again fundamentals: Doe, *Fundamental Authority*, 84-107.

thu robbest tweyn women of Samford, the whiche is wel knowyn of whiche
oon of hem thu settyst vpon a tre and that other thu laiest by a yerst here will
in the porters hous with yn the maner of Radewynter (*AP* 122).

The development of the case against Horell was cleverly built; once more he was seen as abusing the place of his upbringing, by performing such an appalling crime within the bounds of the manor. The layering of Horell's treacherous behaviour continued when he was accused of using Joan's former husband's seal falsely in the hope of disinheritng her. He was accused of stealing livestock and the moveable household goods from Radwinter that should have been sold by Joan's mother's executors and which would have 'doon for here soule' (*AP* 124). I think we must accept that the impact of this final condemnation on the reader of the letter, which would have been seen as a transgression against the fundamental medieval doctrine of belief in the afterlife and the responsibility of the living to provide for the souls of the departed, would have needed no further explanation. Indeed, the words stood as sufficiently judgmental and damning of Horell's character and, perhaps more importantly, his reputation among his peers.

The phraseology that is used throughout to damn Horell's character is effective. Joan accused Horell of: 'reioisng in thyn hert' to see Radwinter 'devouryd' and destroyed. The placement of this 'devouryd' in the same phrase as the 'reioisng' has the effect of highlighting both by the very fact of the opposite sentiments and meanings they engender. It adds a degree of tension to the passage. The intensity of the writing continued as Horell was denounced for sitting in taverns among his 'felowys' and bragging and gossiping: 'thu hast a comyn byword' but 'as

a fals prophete' and that 'thu hopist to se the day to do an hare stirtyn vpon the herth stone'.²⁸ Horell's prediction of the misfortune likely to befall the Armburghs, through the imagery of the hare, was completely undermined; Horell was condemned again this time as a liar. I consider this to be a shrewd piece of writing in that Joan was emphatic, and that any endeavour to destroy the Armburghs' reputation by rumour, which was based on a false premise, would fail.

The letter's clever construction continued weaving these powerful notions of right and wrong, sin and evil, tightly against the issue of the inheritance. It is apparent that Joan attempted to establish beyond doubt what she saw as her legal rights. Yet more than this she was establishing her moral right to the inheritance. By drawing on these compelling analogies, in terms of establishing Joan's lawful position as the rightful heir to the property, a contemporary reader would surely have recognised that Horell was seen as not only immoral, but also as a man who could not be trusted and this, by inference, would have ultimately justified Joan's position.

The choices of moral examples instil the text with profound allegorical properties. One of the most emphatic and vivid illustrations of all these moral anecdotal narratives is placed in the middle of the letter, drawing out the story of the eagle and its young with concentrated religious symbolism:

this egle in holy writ is lykned to Crist the whiche is fadre and modre to all
crystyn peple. Hes birdys ar lyknyd to the peple here on erthe, the which

²⁸ Carpenter identifies 'the image of the hare on the hearthstone as a symbol of devastation was a traditional one in medieval literature', and further that the symbolism of the hare 'was said to be a harbinger of misfortune': *AP* 121, n.263

ought to be alle his children, the sunne is lykned to rightwosnesse and trouthe
(*AP* 122).²⁹

This central section sees a change of character in the writing and it lifts the prose to yet another level with a strongly didactic character. It indicates how exemplars might have been absorbed into common usage and everyday writing. The narrative reads with the sense that it was written to be spoken. The text is substantial and detailed and its placement in the letter, framed as it is by other examples of Horell's wrongdoing, give it not just a prominence in terms of the structure of the letter, but also for what it is determining, again the fundamental issues of punishment and righteousness. The actual homily is also bounded by both introductory and concluding sentences which accentuate the narrative style. The use of the words 'Wherfore' and 'therfore', open and conclude the story. At the outset Joan called upon God:

Wherfore I trust to God that he wol vouchesaf to yeve me pouer to serue ye
as the egle seruyth his birdys whiche he fynt vnkynde (*AP* 122).

And at the conclusion:

And therefore by leve of that good lord I takyn example at the egle and for as
moch as thou lyk to the eaglys birde that may not behold in the sunne of
rightwysnesse, that is for to sayn hast made thi self blynd as thorough

²⁹ As Carpenter identifies 'the image of the eagle and its young, sometimes with the Christian symbolism explained, was a commonplace in medieval bestiaries': *AP* 122, n.266.

briberie and mede that thu has takyn of myn aduersariis and woll not knowe the trouthe (*AP* 122).

The idea that through his deceit Horell has made himself blind to the truth is prefaced by how those birds that have been found ‘vnkynde’ to the ‘damme’ will be punished and those that have been found kind will be bred up until they are: ‘myghty i nogh of hem self to fle where hem lust’ (*AP* 122). The passage explains how the eagle determines which of his birds are kind and good and should be allowed to live and how those that are ‘foundyn vnkynd’, will be destroyed. The notion of retribution for immoral behaviour, and conversely reward for the correct behaviour, is keenly explored in these passages.

Those that: ‘loke werily in the sunne with oute eny twynklyng or blenchyng of her ie as here kynde askyth, be bredyth hem vp...’ (*AP* 122).

And those that: ‘mowe not lokyn a yenst the sunne with oute twynklyng of here eye...he drawyth hem owt of his nest and drowith hem down a yenst the ground and brekyth here nekkys’ (*AP* 122).

Just how the punishment is meted out, with the unmistakable threat of retribution, has many echoes of the reckonings detailed in the ‘Remembrance’ at the beginning of the Roll.³⁰ The language used to condemn the many named antagonists whose lives are foreshortened by God as I identified in chapter three is mirrored in the language used here. The ‘unkynde childryn’ who do not look to righteousness or

³⁰ *AP* 61-67.

follow the commandments but who abuse all the right ways shall be punished. It identifies that those who transgressed against God would have their lives shortened and they would be thrown out of the safety of the world and into the pit of hell:

out in the maner and forme as yt is before rehersed, so the good lord shal serue the unkynde childryn of this world that wol not loke in the sunne of rightwysnesse ne goon in the wey of his comaundementes but robbyn and revyn and doo extorcions and benym men here goodes, here lyflodys and here lyves with fals forsweryng, he shal shortyn here dayes and drawe hem out of here nest that thei haue be brought vp yn, that is for to say out of this world and drowe hem in to the pytte of helle (*AP* 122).

The vocabulary is explicit and reiterates all the allegations made against Horell, but equally it emphasises that Joan had placed not only her trust in God but she has also followed His example.

At the end of the letter Joan returned to two of the recurrent themes where she threatened to take Horell to law, whatever the cost might be. She concluded that Horell would be pulled from the ‘nest that thu hast gotyn yn’ and which he worked to destroy. Prefaced by the convention of, ‘I can no more at this tyme’ is the final reckoning, a rope and ladder; it is the perfect symmetry with the beginning of the letter, as to what Horell earned from his deceitful behaviour, which stated that it was no more than he ‘hast deseruyd’:

I sure the my trouthe, yt shal not be longe, though yt shuld cost me xi li., but that I shal gete me a juge to syttyn vndyr commission as ney the ffranchise of Radewynter as I may and yf lawe wol serue, with the grace of God thou shalt be pullyd out of that nest that thou hast gotyn yn thi trist and labouryd so sore to stroy yt and made to brekyn thi nekke on a peire of galwys. I can no more at this tyme but I pray God send the that thou hast deseruyd, that is to say a rope and a ladder (*AP* 124)

From this concluding paragraph, as in the rest of the letter, it is evident that Joan's words are an active example of the belief that human law derived its authority from a divinely created morality.³¹

The final letter that is used in this chapter is used to support the considerations of trust. It is a letter that was written by Robert Kedington, Joan's son by her first husband, to his godfather Thomas Bendyssh.³² There are several reasons why I have included this letter in this chapter in which I am predominantly considering the individual voice of Joan. First I think that Robert Kedington's letter adds to our appreciation of Joan and the choices she was forced to make in the protection of her family and her inheritance, largely because it was written by her son. Also, although the letter does not relate directly to the Brokhole inheritance dispute, but concerns the lands left by Joan's first husband Philip Kedington, the emphasis of the letter is once more on the impact that the exploitation of her family by a 'trusted' family friend had on Joan. It deals with the fraudulent behaviour of

³¹ Doe, *Fundamental Authority*, 'Morality of divine origin was considered not merely as an ideal imperative standing outside human law,' it was being absorbed into actual law, 5-6.

³² *AP* 90-91.

Thomas Bendysssh, one of the feoffees and an executor for Philip Kedington. Bendysssh not only deprived Joan, her son and daughter of their rightful inheritance, keeping for himself the money and land, he also compounded his abuse of trust by then siding with John Sumpter and the other adversaries, supporting them in their pursuit of the Brokhole lands. Trust and how that trust was abused are at the core of this letter which portrays Joan and her family as the victims of that betrayal.

Understanding this betrayal and the relationships behind it can only add to our knowledge of Joan. Although the letter related in part to the duplicity of the Armburghs' enemies, the content and context focus primarily on an earlier disloyalty that affected Joan and her family. In this respect the message again adds emphasis and impact to the overall message of the Roll. The inclusion of this letter as a piece of damning evidence supports the belief that the Roll resulted from a deliberate compilation of various forms of proof for the upholding of the Armburghs' moral and legal rights and for the long-term record of the dispute.

The question of trust is explicitly explored around the issue of the disposal of Kedington's inheritance. Bendysssh was made the feoffee to Kedington's father's estate, but he abused the trust by keeping the estate for his own use while pretending that he was doing it for the benefit of Robert Kedington: 'but it is done me to undirstonde that youre sayng is that ye schuld take this accion to myn eus and profyt' (*AP* 90). The letters stated that Kedington's father had such trust in Bendysssh that he: 'fefyd yow with other in all the londys and tenementis that he had to that entent that ye schuld refeffyd my moder and my bredern' (*AP* 90). Furthermore, part of the estate should have been sold to perform his father's will, but the estate was kept and

subsequently sold at which point Bendyssh: ‘kept stille the most part of the goold to this day, so that my faders will myght neuer be performed in the fordering of hys soule’. Kedington could not ‘stonde as frely in my lond whan I schuld come ther to’ (AP 90). The problems encountered over enfeoffment were not uncommon during this period and gave rise to countless accusations and legal disputes of which there are examples within this conflict. Moreover, such disputes were notoriously difficult to resolve in the plaintiff’s favour at common law and the wronged party frequently had to resort to the equitable jurisdiction of chancery to secure a remedy.³³ Equally the problems that might be encountered with such ‘best trusted friends’ appointed to take care of the land and perform the deceased’s wishes have been recognised by scholars.³⁴ What is important here is the way in which Robert Kedington related to his mother, Joan, and explained and explored her situation, identifying her role and the responsibility given to her. She was seen as the one upon whom the property should have been settled (‘ye schuld a refeffyd my moder’) and as the principal executor to her late husband’s will (‘be my faders executours of the wyche my moder was principall’) (AP 90). Joan’s decisions and actions were compromised by Bendyssh’s actions over the estate and it would appear that there was no legal route by which Joan could remedy the problem. The lack of power was emphasised by further accusations against Bendyssh, accusations that also highlight the very personal nature of the situation. When after determining that through the help of his friends Kedington would resolve the situation and carry out his father’s wishes he wrote:

³³ enfeoffment – disputes over land and inheritance. See Simon Walker, ‘Order and Law’ in *Social History of England*, ed. Horrox and Ormrod, 91-112, (p.102)

³⁴ Maddern, in her paper ‘Best Trusted Friends’ in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Rogers, explores the choice of friends as trustees, 100-17.

And fordermore aftyr the decces of my fader ye stale me fro my frendys and delyuered me vp to the erle of Oxinford vndyr whos gouernance I was so euyllly kept that I schall fare the werse of my body all the dayes of my lyef. And there, saue reuerence that ye be my godfadyr, thorgh youre vntrogth the erle hyndud and vndede so my moder at that tyme that sche was neuer in power to helpe ne fordere me ne none of here childryn into this tyme (*AP* 91).

The language is compelling; phrases such as ‘ye stale me’ or ‘I was so euyllly kept that I schall fare the werse of my body all the dayes of my lyef’ reveal aspects of the underlying brutality of family relationships that are so often hidden to us. I consider that this makes the letter a valuable resource when we are endeavouring to develop our knowledge of personal interactions and the attitudes that the letter-writers may well have held. The damage inflicted on the Kedington family was revealed as the letter shows the vulnerability of those whose fortunes were controlled by more powerful individuals. This predicament is revealed in relation to Joan who because of the earl’s actions ‘was neuer in power to helpe ne fordere me ne none of here childryn into this tyme’ (*AP* 91).³⁵ It exposes how Joan was handicapped and that she was powerless to act or to help her children. Kedington’s account provides an insight into the personal background to this type of conflict, where trust and responsibility for the family has in effect been handed over to another, and it reveals how the breakdown of a contract based upon trust could impact on individuals and on families. It also provides an insight into how those families might have faced their problems together, to have discussed the situation within their own ranks and with

³⁵ Richard, Earl of Oxford: *AP* 91, n.145.

friends as a means of finding resolutions. Kedington hoped, ‘in tyme comyng thorgh helpe of my frendys’ that he shall ‘mende’ the situation and gain his inheritance (*AP* 91-92).

Bendyssh’s abuse of trust and his deceit is reinforced by other examples of his dishonest behaviour in the same way that Horell’s dishonesty is revealed. But it is in his role of godfather that the main responsibility is placed, just as it was with Horell who was raised as a member of the family. In both cases the abuse of this familial responsibility stands out as the greatest sin. Kedington reflected Joan’s style in the use of religious references to emphasise his message. At the end he quoted from the *Psalms*: ‘ye schul mowe syng as for ony profyt that ye schul take be these accions that songe that Daudid spokyth in the sauter “*Innanum laboraverunt*”’ (*AP* 91).³⁶ It echoes themes Joan herself had used in that those that go against God’s will would not profit. At the end Kedington cautioned Bendyssh to do the honourable thing in preparation for his death:

I schal haue no cause to bydde non other bedys for yow, were neuer that ye be my godfadyre but ‘*Deus laudem*’. I can no more at this tyme but I pray God yf yow grace to gouerne yow so now a gens youre last ende that ye mow come to the blisse that he bowt yow to (*AP* 91)³⁷

Once more there are clear association of ideas from the first letter to the Radwinter recipients where they were cautioned to correct their behaviour and do the right

³⁶ *AP* 91, n.148. Quote from the Vulgate (*Psalms*, 126 v.1) and translated from the Latin text, ‘Unless the Lord has built the house, those who build it have laboured in vain’.

³⁷ ‘*Deus laudem*’ Praise God.

thing: 'I can no more at this tyme but I conseil you to do that that wol be most profit to you here afterward' (*AP* 120). Kedington's letter reflected much of his mother's manner and language, and my interpretation is that Joan's influence sits behind this letter and in the approach that he took both against his opponents and how he wrote of them.

Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to examine Joan's voice and to consider how the writing that we can attribute to her can help us in our evaluation of the Roll and the themes that I see as central to the Armburghs' overriding message – those of trust, morality and retribution. As I established it is impossible to guarantee that the letters that we regard as having been authored by Joan are indeed her own writing. My argument is that we should accept certainly the letter to Lady Ferrers and undoubtedly the letter to John Horell as Joan's. My conclusion is also that these letters, and the other letters that are to be found around them or aligned with them, give us a well-founded opportunity in which to see how concepts of morality were being explored in contentious situations. In this respect the writing reveals wider and more nuanced aspects of the specific personal and ethical attitudes that were being expounded with regard to conflict over land. The conflict with John Horell, for example, reveals the deeply felt responsibility that Joan had to her inheritance and her heritage and how the abuse of that was keenly experienced and passionately expressed.

Furthermore I think that these letters provide a rare opportunity to consider the emotive element of familial relationships. Certainly they have value in that they

add to our awareness as to how families appear to have communicated and negotiated and discussed their problems. Equally they augment our analysis of personal letter writing, by showing specifically how through the careful choice of language the writers could expose their emotions of anger, resentment and disappointment. This consideration of the letters attributed to Joan, in which I have looked at the language, and the ideas behind that language, adds to our understanding of the questions of trust, morality and retribution which we can read as relevant throughout the context of the Roll. I maintain that instead of seeing these simply as abstract ideological concerns, they can be seen, through the content and context of the writing, as far more emotional considerations which affected how decisions were taken and how the breakdown of trust had a bearing on far more than the financial situation of a family. Ultimately these letters do provide clues as to how lives were lived through personal trauma and conflict. As texts that reveal much about fifteenth-century gentry culture they are invaluable; as sources they provide another means of evaluating personal interactions and the multiplicity of social acts that comprised social practice.³⁸

Finally, and unquestionably, the analysis of Joan's voice and what we must consider to be her own writing, enhances our understanding of late-medieval women's roles and responsibilities. I see it as reinforcing Mavis Mate's view of women's position in society generally that women were not necessarily advantaged during this period.³⁹ There were certain barriers that they could not cross, and their decisions and moves could be handicapped by deceit and wrongdoing, while their

³⁸ Coss, 'Hilton, Lordship and the Culture of the Gentry', 50.

³⁹ See both of Mate's studies: *Daughters, Wives and Widows after the Black Death* and *Women In English Society*.

ability to secure remedy could be thwarted by the power of lordship. The analysis highlights how the abuse of trust negated women's opportunities and although some gentlewomen may have had a good understanding of the law, it frequently did not work to their advantage and their options were limited. In one sense Joan comes across as a woman frustrated by her lack of power to actually achieve a resolution and she resorted to the only weapon at her disposal – her writing. Joan's letter writing, and her influence on the letters written by others, adds weight to the argument that women were engaging in literate practice with more authority in the later Middle Ages, and it also lends substance to the idea that women were moving away from the patriarchal model of letter-writing and finding their own styles and voices. Our appreciation of this is limited simply by the vagaries of archival survival: it is not that late medieval women did not write, it is simply that so little of that writing has survived to enable us to recover those individual voices.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that the vernacular letters of the late-medieval gentry can reveal more about the gentry writers' social attitudes and personal values, especially in terms of their close relationships, than has been previously acknowledged. The focus of the thesis was the individual authorial voices of the gentry as heard in the context of conflict. The study had three main aims. The first aim was to consider how the gentry letter-writers saw themselves within their relationships. The second was to consider how we can use this perception of the gentry's personal and individual identity to add to our general knowledge of fifteenth-century gentry society and culture. The final aim was to develop our historiographical approach to the evaluation of late-medieval vernacular letter writing and to increase our understanding of these important sources.

In the first part of the thesis I established my research methodology and put forward my hypothesis that the letters needed to be considered through the politics of the writing. My arguments were based on the belief that in order to fully appreciate these rare texts we need to explore them with a more imaginative and comprehensive approach. Throughout the thesis I have therefore considered the letters by reading them not solely in terms of their descriptive content but with the emphasis on the construction, context and tone of the writing. I have considered the processes behind the writing, in essence the governance of the writing, which evolved by looking at how these documents could be seen to have been developed, compiled, preserved

and presented. I regarded the concepts of authorship, function, subject and reception as the fundamental areas of enquiry alongside a critical analysis of the language.

In the second part of the thesis I took a thematic approach to the enquiry and developed the arguments through a consideration of the important concepts of late-medieval culture which I saw as essential to an appreciation of gentry identity and status, those of worship, service and social hierarchy. Furthermore, I recognised from my evaluation of the copy documents contained in the Armburgh Roll that this collection of letters and personal papers provided the singular opportunity by which we could add a greater depth to our understanding of the late-medieval period's social condition in terms of the abuse of power. It was evident that these personal texts gave a special opportunity to appraise contemporary attitudes towards morality and the ideology of retribution. The close associations of secular injustice and divine justice which could be seen as integral considerations to the whole conflict were essential parts of the writing of the Roll. The important aspect of this was that these concepts could be read and interpreted not simply theoretically but through the language used directly of the actual experiences of a gentry family engaged in a contentious land dispute.

My approach reaffirms that the vernacular letters of the fifteenth-century gentry are among the most valuable sources available to the late-medieval social historian. Equally it confirms that vernacular letter-writing was an essential element of the common social practice of the gentry. It substantiates the fact that awareness of the power of the written word, the where and how it was used, was a vital and central feature of both day to day business as well as being an essential in the

endeavours to resolve personal and public conflict. This aspect was certainly proved by my work on the Shillingford letters. My investigation into the original documents revealed how important the careful crafting, the saving of the drafts and the preservation of the texts must have been to the management of the Exeter conflict.

My first consideration was to the materiality of the manuscripts of both the Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters. Here I recognised that without a critical analysis of the material characteristics we cannot achieve a thorough awareness of the contemporary production and therefore we cannot begin to uncover the contemporary attitudes towards the texts.¹ I did not see this simply as a deliberation of the physical aspect of the manuscripts but rather as an adjunct to looking at the authors' personal image and self-identity as reflected by the writing and the means by which they saved it. In both the Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters this can be appreciated as an elemental concern of preserving the right message for posterity and as an assurance against any future misinterpretations of their actions.

In terms of the disputed Brokholes inheritance the actual physical artefact of the Armburgh Roll was representative of where Joan and her family had come from and what had been the circumstances of their protracted inheritance struggle. My interpretation of the manuscript took account of the fact that when we regard the written evidence we must evaluate it from the perspective of the inherent ideologies of late-medieval people and their belief in life after death. I considered that the

¹ An important work on this subject that has recently been published is Daybell's *The Material Letter In Early Modern England*.

thoughts that underpinned the writing of the Roll reflected the importance of the decisions that were taken and how the Armburghs endeavoured to ensure the correct interpretation of their actions or decisions and how they would be viewed in the future. Understanding the purpose and context of the Roll has been an essential part of this thesis. I believe we need to read it as the contemporary reader might have done and to see it as representative of both a history as well as a means of determining a memory of the conflict. It was also the means whereby the Armburghs could reveal a powerfully moral message which reflected their belief that they were undone by injustice and the abuse of power. My conclusion is that the sophistication seen in this form of evidence preservation adds to our awareness of the intellectualism of literate gentry culture. A substantial part of my argument here has rested on my belief that the Armburgh Roll was a determined collation of a variety of documentary evidence. I have argued that it was not an *ad hoc* collection where scribes interpolated copy documents unrelated to the conflict. From the semiotic text of the Remembrance at the beginning of the Roll through to the verse and the unrelated letters, I see this manuscript as being compiled with very deliberate purpose.

Central to this thesis has been the idea that the surviving gentry letters do indeed present evidence as to how the letter-writers wished to be seen; we can definitely see this in all the letters considered here. However, my research has further developed this thought. I have shown that it is important that we do not just examine the individual texts in isolation to support this proposition but consider them in their totality. My assessment of the Armburgh Roll and Shillingford letters has demonstrated the values attached to the means of preservation which I have argued

were inextricably bound with the writers' future considerations of reputation and how they could guarantee their repute and status within the security of the physical and tangible characteristics of the written documentation. Therefore, how and what was collated and retained, and how it was preserved I see as fundamental to our determining of the gentry projected image or identity. Equally this adds to our overall appreciation of the essential literate gentry culture in that we can determine with more confidence the fifteenth-century gentry's astute approach to the preservation of their written material.

This thesis has proposed that a significant value of these letters is that they represent the unmediated voice of the gentry writer. The individual and personal nature of the writing provides us with the opportunity to recover the emotional engagement that I believe sits behind the writing and indeed to begin to see the emotions of the writers themselves. I have argued this appreciation of the emotional aspects of the texts is critical if we are to move our perception of social attitude forward. It is, of course, somewhat ironic that twenty-three years on from the discovery of the Armburgh Roll the voices of the Armburghs have remained so muted. This in spite of Carpenter's comments in the preface to her edition that the Armburgh letters add significantly to the corpus of fifteenth-century prose and even more in that:

they serve as a reminder, which historians would do well to take to heart, that, even if these people lived centuries ago, and if many of their concerns

were alien to ours, they were real people, possessed of as powerful emotions as anything we are likely to find today.²

The study of these individual and personal texts adds to our appreciation of the emotional commitment or involvement of the typical gentry man or woman with those around them. The language, the vocabulary and the construction of the writing used to express Robert Armburgh's needs were frequently expressive and forceful, sometimes placatory and persuasive and on occasion hostile or antagonistic. From these texts, therefore, we can see expressions within the language and vocabulary that indicate an emergent emotional engagement with the processes of writing. The value of these texts therefore cannot be underestimated as they give us the wherewithal to appreciate the demonstrative and emotive element of individual personalities from within a social stratum that still remains enigmatic. They reveal vital clues to aspects of the personal gentry relationships and their concomitant emotional engagement. This thesis argues that from these letters we can start to see the subjective background and base of the associations that the gentry men had both with their equals as well as those from higher or lower social ranks. The exploration of these emotional attachments is an area that needs to be further developed in order that we continue our expanding knowledge of the gentry's perceptions of relationships and thereby their own identity.³

² AP 2.

³ There are few studies where a consideration of the emotive writing discovered in the letters can be found. See however, for a consideration of reactive writing Roger Dalrymple, 'Reaction, Consolation and Redress in the Letters of the Paston Women', in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing*, ed. Daybell, 16-28. Also see Joel T Rosenthal, *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 62-66. Rosenthal alludes briefly to

An aim of my thesis has been to develop our understanding of the Armburgh Roll in order that the important voices of the Armburghs can become a part of the development of the social historiography of the fifteenth-century and in this respect the thesis determines that we can begin to see from these letters the first signs that letter-writing was becoming more individual in style. The letters were written with a greater emphasis on the personal aspect of the messages, even though they were still not private or confidential forms of communication. It confirms that letters written in the vernacular were opening up the opportunity for more individual expression than had previously been engaged in. Malcolm Richardson comments that the Armburgh letters are ‘considerably less guarded’ and that they contain letters of ‘unusual emotional force’.⁴ We do however need to read them recognising that although these are rare sources now it is highly improbable that they were exceptional in their time and that as with all the other extant letter collections the Armburgh and Shillingford letters represent the lucky survival of the written texts. In this way we can see them far more productively in our endeavours to build a comprehensive picture of gentry identity and ultimately that strata’s societal and cultural attitudes.

As some of the earliest extant examples of personal correspondence in the vernacular the Armburgh letters indicate the first stages in the growth of a deeper individuality in writing. We can see this as concurrent with the increased use of English in all forms of written communication alongside the less convention-bound

how men’s letters could be used to show sentiment or affection in his consideration of the father son relationship.

⁴ Richardson, *Middle-class writing in late medieval London*, 117.

form of epistolary structure. As has been identified there were changes to the formality of letter-writing brought about because of the changing social relationships coinciding with the widening of the social classes of the actual letter-writers.⁵ Expressed in a style that would appear to mirror the spoken vernacular the letters show both a divergent and apparent increased freedom of language and construction.⁶ This thesis has argued that the texts should be seen as primarily and essentially political tools of communication which were written often from a practical viewpoint but which also frequently, and skilfully, incorporated a strongly influential literary or ideological point of view. This study has shown how extensive the literate skills of the late-medieval letter-writers were in terms of their ability to communicate their thoughts and ideas, beliefs and ideologies, and further proves what adept communicators they were.

One of the primary concerns of this thesis has been the questions surrounding relationships. I saw the appraisal of relationships as fundamental to the enquiry into personal attitudes and social values. A significant relationship which the methodology of this thesis revealed is the importance of establishing the connection that the writer of the texts had with his or her own writing. John Shillingford's attention to the fine detail of his letters and the examples of the many changes that he made to the drafts indicate that the correlation between his thought processes and the message he wanted to convey were fundamental to the creative process. We can infer that where Shillingford was at the time of writing, and to whom he was writing, had

⁵ Malcolm Richardson, 'The Fading Influence of the Medieval *Ars Dictaminis* in England After 1400.' *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19, (2001), 225-247 (p.246): Richardson comments that this included the rise of common lawyers, the law-related professions and a weakness in civil law.

⁶ Carpenter also comments on the freedom of the language: *AP* 2.

a keen influence upon his choice of words and he presents us with a distinctive opportunity to consider the techniques of letter-writing as a direct and active form of social practice. These letters provide us with further proof as to how written correspondence was being developed to manage concerns and issues at a distance through such detailed communications and instructions.

The way in which Shillingford wrote his narrative descriptions indicated that not only was his public image of importance but that just as significant was his personal identity and status. The tone, construct, word choice and approach to his writing have highlighted the attitudes that Shillingford had towards his fellow civic peers in Exeter which were not always complimentary or trusting of their abilities. We have a deeper appreciation of the attitudes that someone in Shillingford's position had towards civic duty during a time of conflict and how personal appraisal and image were significant elements in working towards a negotiated and successful outcome. My conclusion is that the distinctive voice we determine from them provides us with the opportunity to develop the study of the outlook of the late-medieval gentry man in terms of the defensive and protective roles that he undertook in personal and public life. Therefore, we can conclude that not only are the letters of value in that they present us with a view as to how a writer such as Shillingford, in a public role, wished to be regarded but equally that the writing reveals the background values of justification, alongside those of compromise and cooperation, that underpinned the messages that were being conveyed.

It is evident that a new edition of the Shillingford letters is required in order that we can fully appreciate the writing of John Shillingford. We can no longer

depend on Moore's nineteenth-century edition to provide us with the wherewithal to explore these important texts with confidence, and there is unquestionably more that can be discovered within them than this thesis has been able to include. I see this thesis as a starting-point and the work I have undertaken here on both collections as a place to begin our re-evaluation of such sources and the relationship of the gentry writers to their writing. My conclusion is that we need to develop our approach to the composition and the circumstances surrounding the composition of all the extant gentry letters. The Shillingford letters provide such a valuable opportunity. This thesis has proved when we adopt a more critical methodology we can achieve a clearer representation of purpose and context and this in itself allows us to develop a greater awareness of individual gentry relationships.

Just as Shillingford's letters allow us to see behind the public face of his role as mayor so Robert Armburgh's writing presents us with the chance to delve behind the front of the familial and personal social relationships. Robert Armburgh was representative of his family and his identity was framed within that familial setting, but where I see his letters as especially revealing is when we consider how Robert himself used these familial and private relationships in the endeavour to safeguard his public image and persona. This approach can be determined from many of the letters - for example those written to his brother William with regard to Robert's fear of the loss of his worship - but most especially the letters to the Armburgh tenants and his close social equals, which provide clear and explicit explanations of the Armburghs' fragile economic and social standing, but which reveal far more than a favourable projected image. Robert's need for an established social status and

reputable identity are presented in writing that was often defensive and frequently aggressive.

In terms of our wider historiographical social understanding of the early to middle years of the fifteenth century the way in which Robert couched his appeals enables us to re-evaluate aspects of the common social associations and the conflicts that beset them. He was representative of the new and growing gentry echelon who bought or married into land for the status it provided, but whose positions and identities had not been fully established within the societal hierarchy. The evidence from his letters suggests that these status-linked changes had not been fully integrated into communal social practice and could potentially give rise to further conflict where, and when, the social boundaries were being challenged, such as in Robert's contractual relationships with his tenants. Both the context and content of the letters present the opportunity to see where social structures were being challenged and to consider how those directly involved in these social changes were engaging and writing of their immediate experiences. From the defensive attitudes that Robert adopted we can see that he was not assured of his position and was continually exposed to socially threatening situations. This is significant in that it provides the chance to consider the very personal social vulnerability of a gentry landowner during a period of economic and political change.

The questions surrounding vulnerability are, therefore, significant and increase the need to see how exposure to censure could play a significant part in resolving, or not resolving, conflicts over land. The Brokholes dispute presents an example where we can consider how exposure to lack of local knowledge linked to

the inherent social problems that came from being a stranger within a rural community impacted on the social divisions and ultimately the economic decisions taken. Both Robert Armburgh and John Shillingford clearly endeavoured to refute any question of vulnerability or weakness, the difference being that in Robert Armburgh's case he became highly defensive whereas John Shillingford's approach was more diplomatic.

Robert Armburgh continually sought wider and communal approval with his fear of shame and a damning of his reputation as a mainstay of his appeals whereas John Shillingford's need was for personal approval of himself in the role as mayor and principal in the conflict negotiations. The two faces of social approval, personal and public, appear to be reversed and in contrast to the features of the disputes. The Exeter dispute was being played out in full view of the chancery, the Exeter civic and ecclesiastical authorities and seemingly the wider public of Exeter and throughout John Shillingford was seeking personal approval for his actions and decisions. While the Brokholes dispute, in contrast a very minor conflict, gave rise to the need for communal approbation for Robert from the Armburghs' social and familial circle. Both John Shillingford and Robert Armburgh's associations and how they related to them remained important aspects of the acquiring, and the projection, of their identities.

I believe that the Armburgh letters can add a further layer of understanding as to the way that women regarded men and men regarded women during this period. This is seen especially in the letters where Joan Armburgh wrote to Horell, Margaret

Walkerne wrote of her husband and when John Palmer wrote to his mother.⁷ The letters also re-establish the importance that we must attach to the recovery of the woman's voice within both a familial context as well as within a wider social framework. From the writing of Joan Armburgh we can see that her family land was the basis of hers and her family's identity. The passion that comes through her words when she condemned both Horell and those who had endeavoured to destroy the manor of Radwinter demonstrated a powerfully determined defence of her inheritance. Joan's literate engagement, with the strong themes of abuse against God's law, seen in her crafted use of the imagery of the cuckoo in the nest, stem from the period's deep religious ideology. Her message presents a complex, evocative and intellectual discourse from which we cannot be anything other than acutely aware of her identity as integral to her association with her family's land.

Finally, this thesis determines that it is essential if we are to move our understanding of late-medieval gentry society and culture forward that we reconsider our approach to the study of the letters written by the gentry men. To date there have been no equivalent studies which evaluate fifteenth-century gentry men's letters in the same way that the women's letters of the late-medieval and early modern eras have been evaluated. Effectively, the individual voice of the male gentry letter-writer has been compromised by the descriptive historiographical approach to the interpretation of the gentry correspondences. Women's letters have been appraised in a different way, often for what they can reveal in terms of relationships, the late-medieval gentry woman's roles and responsibilities and their qualities and characteristics in their many familial guises. These evaluations have often included

⁷ *AP* 120-23; *AP* 126-27; *AP* 184-85.

the deliberation as to their emotional responses to situations, as read in their letters and certainly this approach to the women's writing is invaluable. It has opened channels for seeing and examining the role of women, their status and positions, and has added to our overall understanding of late-medieval society.⁸ The investigation needs to be rebalanced by the equivalent consideration of the man's voice.

We cannot afford to take the extant letters in isolation and this thesis proves that we need to develop a methodology that enables us to make comparative studies of the letters as a matter of course. The comparative nature of this thesis in examining the two quite different sources has added to the evaluation of both. As this thesis has identified, there has been a failure to embrace and appreciate both the Armburgh letters as well as the Shillingford letters; however I think this can be more readily understood when set against the lack of enquiry into the letters of the late-medieval male writers as an entity. It is a sorry gap in the elucidation of the period and the writing of the gentry culture in general.

Ultimately, my conclusions to this thesis are these. First, that the writers of these texts had a clear, perceptive and expressive view of their world. However, scholars have tended to read these texts for what they say, rather than how they say it, and thus we have failed to fully embrace or appreciate them completely in terms of late-medieval literate gentry culture. Second, that these rare sources remain

⁸ See Daybell's work: *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing 1450-1700*; *Women Letter-Writers In Tudor England*. Also see: *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700, Form and Persuasion*, ed. Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) and *Dear Sister*, ed. Cherevatuk and Wiethaus.

underused, yet as I have proved through close-reading and an imaginative effort to engage with the writers' thought processes and concerns, these letters can yield important insights into both how individual members of the gentry fashioned their self-identity and how the gentry as a whole regarded and represented itself. Third, that these texts, as products of the unmediated individual voice, are far more revealing in terms of close personal gentry relationships and the concomitant emotional engagement than has been recognised in previous studies. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I have shown that there is a need to rebalance the period's social and cultural historiography by reconsidering the research approach taken to the study of the letter-writing of the male gentry. I believe that we need to adopt a more subjective attitude to their writing, such as that which has been sometimes used in the evaluation of women's letters, particularly those written in the early modern period.

This thesis asserts that both the Armburgh Roll and the Shillingford letters provide a distinct opportunity to found an exploration of the letters of the late-medieval gentry and that these two sources should now take a central role in the period's historiography. My thesis has demonstrated the value of a comparative analysis of two different letter collections and that such a study of all the late-medieval letter collections, to be read and interpreted in the way that has been undertaken here, is now required if we are to fully incorporate each of these remarkable sources into a comprehensive appreciation of gentry society and its growing literate culture.

Appendix: List of Documents in the Armburgh Roll

Letter/Doc. No.	Reference – membrane/disc location	Letters From/To & detailing of documents – headings taken from Carpenter’s edition	Dates – taken from Carpenter’s edition	Hand *	Carpenter’s edition page numbers
1	m.1 - disc 04	An anonymous account of the case up to c.1443/8	to c.1443/8	1	61-67
2	m.1 - disc 04	Letter to Sybil Palmer	after 1443/8 probably c. 1450-5	1	67-68
3	m.1 - disc 04	Robert Armburgh to Sir John Barbour (priest) of Mancetter	c. 20 September 1451.	1	68-69
4	m.1 - disc 04	Robert Armburgh to Clement Draper of Atherstone	probably late 1440’s	1	69
5	part way through letter changes from m.1 to m.2 – disc 04	Robert Armburgh to John Rugeley abbot of Merevale	after November 1449; perhaps late 1449/early 1450	1	69-70
6	m.2 - disc 05	A remembrance by Robert Armburgh of moneys paid to Reynold Armburgh, his nephew, from Mancetter	late 1450	1	70-71
7	m.2 - disc 05	Robert Armburgh to the coheirs to	probably late 1451	1	71-72

		Mancetter manor.			
8	m.2 - disc 05	Robert Armburgh to Sir John Barbour	probably late 1451	1	72
10	m.2 - disc 05	Robert Armburgh to the tenants of Mancetter	probably late 1450	1	73
11	m.2 – disc 05	To Clement Draper	probably c.1449	1	74
12	m.2 – disc 05	[postscript ? unexplained entry]		1	74
13	m.2 – disc 05	Robert Armburgh to John Ruggeley, abbot of Merevale	probably 1450	1	74-75
14	m.2 – disc 05	To John Rigges (?) of London perhaps from Joan Armburgh, if so before 1443		1	75-76
15	m.2 – disc 05	Robert Armburgh to John Ruggeley; probably 1450		1	76
16	m.2 – disc 05	Robert Armburgh, at Westminster, to Sir John Barbour	early to mid 1451	1	77
17	m.3 – disc 06	Robert Armburgh's account of the financial dealings of Joan Armburgh and her second husband, Thomas Aspall esquire, with Richard Ketford, London citizen from 1417 to 1420 and Armburgh's own subsequent involvement	written c.1420 or 1421	1	77-81

18	m.3 – disc 06	Various evidences concerning Richard Ketford's financial dealings with Joan, Aspall and Armburgh, 1417-23	1417-23	1	81-83
19	m.3 – disc 06 changes part way through to m.4 – disc 07 (changes on p.84)	Further replication of the defence of Joan and Robert Armburgh against Ketford's demands		1	83-86
20	m.4 – disc 07	Proceedings before the London sheriffs: Ketford versus Armburgh (February 1423) with part of the king's writ of <i>corpus cum causa</i> ordering Armburgh's release from the sheriff's custody as he is litigating in the Common Pleas, a superior court	(February 1423)	1	86-87
21	m.4 - disc 07	Petition to chancery of Joan Armburgh	before November 1439	1	87-88
22	m.4 - disc 07	Part of the inquisition post mortem for John Sumpter jr.:	5 October 1426	1	88-89
23	m.5 - disc 08	Robert Armburgh to William Harpour of Mancetter and Richard Barbour of Atherstone	c. late 1427	2	89
24	m.5 - disc 08	Robert Kedington, son of Joan	c. 1427-8	2	90-91

		Armburgh, to Thomas Bendyssh of Essex			
25	m.5 - disc 08	Joan Armburgh at Westminster to Ellen, Lady Ferrers of Chartley	February 1428	2	92-93
26	m.5 - disc 08	Robert Armburgh to Simon Mate of Colchester	c. late 1420s	2	93
27	m.5 - disc 08	Armburgh to Ralph Beauchamp	c. late 1420s	2	93-94
28	m.5 - disc 08	Armburgh to Ralph Beauchamp	c. late 1420	2	94-95
29	m.5-m.6 -disc 08/09 (changes on p.97)	Robert Armburgh to John Coll bailiff of Huntingdon	c. early 1420s	2	96-97
30	m.6 - disc 09	Robert Trenchemere of West Barry, Glamorgan to Sir Thomas Erpingham	probably c.1417	2	98-100
31	m.6 - disc 09	To ?William Swan	c.1419-20. ‘	2	100-02
32	m.6 - disc 09	Armburgh to William Armburgh	c. 1428-9.	2	102-03
33	m.6 - disc 09	Robert Armburgh to an unknown abbot (?possibly of Bury St. Edmunds)	perhaps c.1428-9	2	103-04
34	m.7 – disc 10	Robert Armburgh to William Harpour and Richard Barbour; probably	c. 1427-9, written between 26 November and 19 January	2	104-05
35	m.7 – disc 10	Armburgh to Harpour and Barbour	probably late 1429 or early 1430 or late 1430	2	106-09

36	m.7 – disc 10	Robert Armburgh to William Armburgh	probably Nov. 1428 – Feb. 1430	2	110-11
37	m.7 - disc 10	Robert Armburgh to William Harpour and Richard Barbour	shortly before November 1429	2	111-12
38	m.7 - disc 10	Robert Armburgh to an unknown recipient in Hertfordshire	perhaps mid-1429	2	113-14
39	m.7 - m.8 - disc 11 (changes p.116)	Robert Armburgh to Ellen, Lady Ferrers of Chartley	probably late 1429/early 1430 or late 1430	2	114-16
40	m.8 – disc 11	Robert Armburgh to William Harpour and Richard Barbour	probably early 1430, possibly early 1431	2	116-18
41	m.8 – disc 11/12	Robert Armburgh to Constabal, probably bailiff of Radwinter	1429/30	2	118-19
42	m.8 – disc 12	Robert or Joan Armburgh to unknown recipients at Radwinter (perhaps tenants or lessees)	1429/30	2	119-20
43	m.8 – disc 12	Joan Armburgh to John Horell of Essex	1429/30	2	120-23
44	m.8 - disc 12	Robert or Joan Armburgh to unknown recipients at Radwinter (perhaps tenants, lessees or the purchasers of the wood)	1429/30	2	123-24
45	m.9 - disc 13	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to William Harpour and Richard Barbour	8 July 1430	2	124-26
46	m.9 – disc 13	Margaret Walkerne to her step-father	c.1430	2	126-27

		Robert Armburgh			
47	m.9 – disc 13	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to William Armburgh	1 March 1430	2	127-28
48	m.9 – disc 13	Robert Armburgh to William Armburgh	probably c. March 1430	2	128-29
49	m.9 – disc 13	Robert Armburgh to his tenants in either Warwickshire, Hertfordshire or Essex	?	2	129
50	m.9 – disc 14	Robert Armburgh to [William Harpour and Richard Barbour]	c. mid 1430-	2	129-30
51	m.9 – disc 14	Robert Armburgh to Thomas Mylde of Clare, Suffolk and Thomas Bernard	probably late summer 1430, possibly late summer 1432	2	130-31
52	m.9 – disc 14	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to an unknown recipient	probably 24 March 1431 or 22 March 1432	3	131
53	m.9v – disc 15	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to William Harpour and Richard Barbour	15 September 1432	3	132-33
54	m.9v – disc 15	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to Ralph Beauchamp	15 November 1432	3	133
55	m.9v – disc 15	Robert Armburgh to Ralph Beauchamp, William Harpour and Richard Barbour	probably late 1432	3	134-37
56	m.8v – disc 16/17	Robert Armburgh to Laurence Sutton	probably late 1432	3	138-40
57	m.8v – disc 17	Robert Armburgh to an unknown recipient	perhaps early 1433	3	140-42
58	m.8v – disc 17	Robert Armburgh to an unknown	probably between 8	4	142-44

		recipient	July and 6 October 1433		
59	m.8v – disc 17	Robert Armburgh to Sir William Mountford	probably about the same date as the immediately preceding letter	4	144
60	m.8v – disc 17	Robert Armburgh at Westminster, perhaps to either William Harpour or Richard Barbour	18 December 1433	4	145
61	m.8v – disc 17	Robert Armburgh at Westminster, perhaps to either William Harpour or Richard Barbour	18 December 1433	4	145
62	m.7v – disc 18	Robert Armburgh to an unknown recipient	probably c. same date as the immediately succeeding letter	3	145-46
63	m.7v – disc 18	Robert Armburgh to Sir William Mountford	probably late 1433 or c. July 1435	3	147-48
64	m.7v – disc 18	Robert Armburgh to William Harpour and Richard Barbour	probably late 1433 or early 1434	3	148-49
65	m.7v – disc 18	Robert Armburgh to Laurence Sutton	between 25 November 1433 and 20 January 1434	3	149-51
66	m.7v – disc 18	Armburgh to John Campion	c. November or December 1433	3	151-52
67	m.7v – disc 18	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to unknown recipients in Essex, probably	26 July 1436	1	152-53

		Sampford			
68	m.6v – disc 19	Robert Armburgh to an unknown recipient in Warwickshire	June or July 1435	1	154
69	m.6v-m.5v - disc 19, 20 & 21 (changes on p.162)	A sequence of love poems of unknown date		2	155-68
70	m.1v - disc 26	Robert Armburgh to an unknown farmer	perhaps late 1440s or early 1450s	1	168
71	m.1v - disc 26	Robert Armburgh to Thomas Bedell of London	perhaps late 1440s or early 1450s	1	169-70
72	m.1v - disc 26	Robert Armburgh to William Warlyng	perhaps late 1440s or early 1450s	1	170
73	m.1v - disc 26	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to Richard Power of Warwickshire	28 July, year unknown.	1	170-71
74	m.1v – disc 26	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to Clement Draper or Atherstone, Warwickshire	27 April [1449]	1	171-72
75	m.1v – disc 26	Armburgh to Sir Philip Thornbury of Hertfordshire	probably 1450	1	173-74
76	m.1v – disc 26	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to Clement Spicer of Essex	22 April 1450.	1	174-75
77	m.1v-m.2v - disc 25 (changes part way through letter p.176)	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to Hanchach	18 April 1450	1	176-78
78	m.2v - disc 25/24	The co-holders of Mancetter at the	1 December 1451	1	178-79

		abbey of Merevale, Warkwickshire to Robert Armburgh			
79	m.2v - disc 24	John Rugeley, abbot of Merevale, to Robert Armburgh	probably early to mid 1450	1	179-80
80	m.2v - disc 24	John Rugeley, abbot of Merevale, to Robert Armburgh	about the same time as the immediately preceding letter	1	180-81
81	m.2v - disc 24	John Barbour, vicar of Mancetter, at Mancetter, to Robert Armburgh	30 September, probably 1450	1	181-82
82	m.2v - disc 24	Robert Armburgh to John Barbour	between 21 June and 29 September 1452	1	182
83	m.3v – disc 24	John Barbour, at Mancetter, to Robert Armburgh	5 October, probably 1452	1	183
84	m.3v – disc 24	A remembrance of the settlement made by Joan and Robert Armburgh of their part of Mancetter	November 1443	1	183-84
85	m.3v – disc 23	John Palmer to his mother Sybil Palmer	probably 1440	1	184-85
86	m.3v - disc 23	William Armburgh to his brother Robert Armburgh	before Easter, no later than 1443	1	186
87	m.3v - disc 23	William Armburgh to his brother Robert	perhaps same date as the letter immediately preceding or later	1	187
88	m.3v - disc 23	Robert Armburgh at Westminster to an unknown recipient in Warwickshire	22nd February 1450 or a little after	1	188
89	m.3v - disc 23	Final concord settling the estate of	Westminster	9 1	188-89

		Ellen and James Bellers on Thomas Pekke etc.,	February 1436		
90	m.3v - disc 23	Indentured agreement concerning the estate of Ellen and James Bellers following on from the above final concord	8 March 1437.	1	190-91
91	m.4v - disc 22	Petition to parliament of Robert Armburgh 1449 or 1450	1449 or 1450	1	191-92
92	m.4v - disc 22	Indentured agreement between John Chancy sr. and Robert Armburgh, Westminster	perhaps mid or late summer, probably 1450	1	192-93
93	m.4v - disc 22	Statement of Joan Armburgh's claim to the other half of the Brokholes inheritance	c.1428-32	1	193-94
94	m.4v - disc 22	Petition of Alison Beek	c.1450-52	1	195-99

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