

Lordship, Gentility and Local Administration in Berkshire, 1350–1400

Richard Gorski

Introduction

This paper is based on research carried out in the preparation of a doctoral thesis examining English local government personnel appointed during the fourteenth century, with particular reference to sheriffs.¹ In analysing the careers of sheriffs appointed to the joint shrievalty of Oxfordshire-Berkshire one particularly striking nominee came to light, John James (d. 1396) of Wallingford, sheriff of the two counties in 1373–4 and 1380–1. Such explicitly urban origins make James an interesting and unconventional figure in a political and administrative landscape that was dominated, on the whole, by the knights, esquires and gentlemen of England's county communities. Land, lineage and status are generally regarded as the defining characteristics of the 'charmed circle' of top shire officials.²

It seems that John James initially had little access to these important social lubricants, and one of my aims is to identify how he came to penetrate the rather narrow office-holding elite of Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Essentially, James offers a case study of social climbing and social relations. This is reasonably familiar territory. Colin Richmond, in his study of John Hopton, provided a model for 'setting a single, not very prominent individual in the context of his origins, his family circle, and the grouping of his friends, neighbours and acquaintances.'³ Though John James is not quite the anti-hero of John Hopton, there are similarities between the two men. Sadly James has not left a comparably rich corpus of estate records, but a proportion of his property transactions have been preserved in the fifteenth-century Boarstall cartulary.⁴ This, along with other scattered evidence, makes it possible to build up a reasonably detailed picture of John James and his circle of associates over a period of more than thirty years. Consequently we can make some observations about

John James the man, or the private dimension of his career. For present purposes, however, it is more interesting to examine John James the official, or the public dimension of his career. Or rather it is interesting to examine the relationship between the two; and this necessarily takes us away from the historiography of individuals and urban environments and into the historiography of the gentry and their activities.

Gentry and gentility continue to pose serious problems for historians working in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. People who had some claim, however slight, to membership of this shifting and amorphous group have been examined so rigorously – especially in the last thirty years – that we undoubtedly know more about their resources, their activities, and perhaps even their mentalités than ever before. Yet it could also be argued that ‘gentry studies’ have reached an impasse. In a number of key areas our perceptions of the gentry and their world are only loosely defined, in spite of a flourishing culture of detailed case studies. There is not even a clear consensus about who the later medieval gentry were. Each new study seems to deal with a slightly different group of people, based on the inconsistent use and interpretation of four principal factors – landed resources, military service, participation in shire administration and involvement in what Michael Bennett called the ‘network of trust and co-operation among the various lineages.’⁵ It is easy to conjure up an image of the gentry from these characteristics; but on close inspection, ‘gentry society’ quickly dissolves into a number of overlapping and fluid communities, sometimes pulling in different directions, each comprised individuals with contrasting resources, origins, interests, and ambitions.

John James, by virtue of his energetic administrative career and gradual accumulation of property, was one of those individuals. But at the same time he also belonged to a small community centred in and around the borough of Wallingford, straddling the border between Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Finally, James’ return to parliament for both counties could be indicative of a much wider social significance. Looking through the lens of an individual might, therefore, address one of the more troublesome problems in ‘gentry’ historiography – mapping the horizontal and vertical relationships that constituted ‘gentry society’. What forms of contact existed between landowners, and how far did they reach? Were formal, legal and administrative, structures more pervasive as forms of social cement than informal structures such as the family or magnate affinity? What determined the range of the gentry’s interests, and what characteristics distinguished the ‘parish’ gentry from their ‘county’ and ‘inter-county’ brethren? Several important county studies, the major tools of recent analysis, have addressed these issues;⁶ but most scholars would

admit that the medieval county was an artificial unit not necessarily recognised by the networks of kinship, lordship, contact, and identity that underpinned 'gentry society' in its broadest form. Of course the county had institutions that encouraged consultation, action and contact among a broader section of the resident landowners than might otherwise have been the case.⁷ But there are viable alternatives to the county approach, and besides looking at John James as an individual, this paper proposes to examine office-holding – a recognised 'gentry' activity – as filtered through the experiences of James and his peers in the later fourteenth century.

Landholding and Local Visibility

John James of Wallingford seems to be a classic example of the *nouveau riche*. His origins and parentage are unknown. What remains, however, is the picture of a man who, in the space of thirty years, emerged from obscurity, cultivated an important network of contacts, and established his family as an influential, though short-lived, force in Berkshire society. Was James therefore an exceptional townsman who aspired to join the ranks of the gentry? Or was he born into the parish gentry and ploughed his resources, perhaps accrued from dealings in Wallingford, into the gradual expansion of his estate? Both propositions are feasible; but whichever path he followed there can be no dispute that by his death in October 1396 James had established himself among the landed gentry of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, leaving property in both counties with a combined value of over £50 per annum.⁸ He also left a son, Robert, whose marriage to Katherine, daughter of Sir Edmund de la Pole, had already been contracted with the promise of a substantial inheritance. Though Robert's failure to produce an heir led to the family's extinction in the male line in 1432, the fact that he left property worth over £100 per annum suggests that he had assumed a position of considerable importance in local society.⁹

One of the few conclusions we can reach about John James' early career is that he was the first member of his family to rise beyond a purely local prominence. Records relating to Wallingford and its surrounding villages, where his earliest transactions were concentrated, provide scant evidence of any long-established connections, and it would seem that he was a self-made man in every sense of the phrase. An advantageous marriage may have provided James' first foothold in local society. By 1360 he had married Christina de Anesty, the daughter of a minor local landowner. If James was viewed as a suitable match then he may have already embarked upon a successful career in trade or perhaps

law.¹⁰ Indeed, James had been steadily accumulating property in his own right since 1350. His acquisitions in and around Wallingford can be traced in minute detail in the Boarstall cartulary.¹¹ This most valuable source points to the 1360s as his most prolific period of property speculation. In acquiring an acre here and a tenement there, James must have quickly established himself as a significant landowner in Clapcot, just over a mile from Wallingford, in Crowmarsh Gifford, and in Wallingford itself.¹² Not content with amassing property in and around the borough, James also sought to rationalise his estates through exchange: in January 1365 he swapped fifteen and a half acres in Crowmarsh Gifford with a similar amount of William Harewell's property in Clapcot.¹³

All in all, James must have amassed over seventy acres of land in this ten-year period, and he pursued the same policy of acquisition and rationalisation around Wallingford even when his interests became more diffuse.¹⁴ By the early 1360s James owned the Oxfordshire manor of Adwell.¹⁵ To this he added, by 1365, an interest in the Black Prince's manor of Nettlebed.¹⁶ And in May 1373 James arranged a more significant exchange of property involving, instead of a few acres, Sir Baldwin de Bereford's manor of Rush Court ('La Russhe') in Clapcot and forty shillings of rent that he swapped for a manor at Brightwell, Oxfordshire.¹⁷ Thus, from starting out as a man of obscure and probably urban origins, by around 1370 John James was moving in altogether different circles. The extent of this change can be more fully appreciated in a series of settlements made in September 1379 that afford a comprehensive list of his property. The lion's share was settled on his wife and eldest son, including Rush Court and other lands in Clapcot, forty tenements in Wallingford and Cholsey, the manor of Adwell, and assorted properties at Kingston Blont, Newnham Murren, Crowmarsh Gifford, Chalgrove, Nettlebed, Bixe Brande and Henley. At the same time the manor and appurtenances of 'Fifhide', Oxfordshire, were settled on a younger son, Arnold, who may have died soon after. John James' estates were substantially unchanged when they passed to Robert in 1396, and one may therefore speculate that his purchasing power had reached its practical limits, or that the land market was generally sluggish.¹⁸

Charters and deeds, moreover, offer the historian much more than a record of estate building. Lists of feoffees, trustees, and charter witnesses record networks of gentlemen acting in collaboration to augment or safeguard their estates, the most important defining feature of their social position. By examining the witnesses to John James' charters it is possible to reconstruct his circle of friends and associates (see *Appendix 2*). Some were neighbours, or perhaps tenants. Others were semi-professional agents and feoffees. The majority, however, were knights and esquires. Even

when his own purchases ceased after 1380, James was still in demand as a witness for the deeds of other local gentlemen, underlining the reciprocal nature of Bennett's 'network of trust'. An analysis of these associates may therefore show how John James evolved and where he fitted into a rather complex society.

Dabblings in the land market during the 1360s inevitably brought James into contact with an increasingly wide circle of local landowners but on the whole knights and esquires like Thomas Barentyn, Sir Hugh Berewik, and Sir Gilbert Wace supplemented, rather than displaced, his existing acquaintances. James evidently did not forget his roots. The earliest group of witnesses in the 1350s corresponds to John James the burgess, the rather enigmatic figure whose exact role and standing are difficult to define. His leases and purchases were from townsmen and smallholders, and men of this order naturally acted as witnesses. Over the next ten years, however, the scale and impetus of James' estate building increased markedly, prompting a subtle but significant change in the quality of his associates. Minor, and largely anonymous, landowners gradually gave way to members of Wallingford's urban elite who dominated both the borough's political life and its flourishing merchant gild.¹⁹ Indeed, several relationships dating from this period proved lifelong. A small group consisting of Henry de Redyng, Henry Deme and Nicholas de Kenelm invariably witnessed James' charters, participated more directly as feoffees and grantors, and occasionally accompanied him further afield. Other important links were made with Roger de Preston, Robert Boty, Walter le Yonge, John de Kenelm, Nicholas Payable, Richard atte Felde, Richard Brouns and Roger Milbourne. Though it is difficult to establish any precise interrelationships of kinship and commerce within this clique, the surviving Wallingford views of frankpledge for 1369-70 provide a fascinating illustration of borough politics at a time when John James was at their very centre as mayor. Presiding with him were aldermen William de Harewell, Nicholas Tannere and Henry de Redyng, and among the jurors were Richard atte Felde, Roger Milbourne and Alexander Louches, all of whom were closely acquainted with James' affairs. Several other associates come to life as petty offenders, most notably for breaking the assize of bread and ale.²⁰

If charter witnesses are a reliable barometer of social status, then by 1370 the metamorphosis of John James was complete: a series of deeds confirm his deepening entanglement in the affairs of Sir William Makeneye, Sir Hugh Berewik, Sir Gilbert Wace, Sir Thomas Tyrel, and Sir Baldwin de Bereford. At its most expansive the circle of knights and esquires known to him also included Sir John Golafre, Sir Richard de Abberbury, Sir Thomas Besiles, Sir Roger de Cotesford, Sir Reginald

Malyns, Thomas Barentyn and Richard Brouns, all of whom witnessed the exchange of property between James and Bereford in May 1373.²¹

Lordship

Property ownership, then, was central to the increasing visibility of John James in Wallingford and the surrounding area. Landed wealth brought its own lustre. 'Prosperity', after all, 'was the main thing' in what has been dubbed 'an age of ambition'.²² John James benefited little from the 'principal engine' of social change identified by Simon Payling, by which he meant the rich pickings to be derived from marriage into failed gentry families.²³ James' early speculation in the land market was instead self-financed, and the same land market, with all of its obligations and conventions, also brought James into direct contact with like-minded knights and esquires. But was the accumulation of property in itself enough to secure a place in county society? If this important piece of the gentry jigsaw fell into place, did others necessarily follow? By the 1370s John James was not only a landowner of some note but also an important fixture in the county establishment. And though it is very unlikely that he ever went on campaign, there is evidence that James nonetheless regarded himself as a member of the armigerous gentry – a claim reinforced by his son's marriage to Katherine de la Pole. However, very few of James' contemporaries made such a seamless transition from urban to rural society. Instructive comparisons can be drawn from the inhabitants of Wallingford and other nearby towns. John Kent, a mercer by trade, was a stalwart of Reading's borough administration and parliamentary representation for over thirty years, yet he only achieved a comparatively lowly position in county affairs as a tax collector and coroner.²⁴ William Catour and David atte Hacche, other Reading dignitaries, were also much involved in borough affairs where their property was concentrated, but little concerned with shire business.²⁵ Closer to home, neither John de Anesty nor Nicholas Payable played any significant role in local government, and neither amassed property outside Wallingford to any great extent.

Individually these men were comparable with John James in many important respects; but as a group they lacked either the resources or perhaps the ambition to break out of their urban environment. Crucially they may have also lacked influential connections, unlike John James who can be linked with a succession of aristocratic households. This factor probably more than any other eased his entry into Berkshire's political mainstream.

Wallingford was already well established as a royal borough by the

fourteenth century when the honour and castle were held in turn by Edward III, John, earl of Cornwall, the Black Prince until his death in 1376, and then by his widow Joan as part of her dower.²⁶ The ability to exploit these channels of lordship and patronage distinguished James from other burgesses who might have set their sights on a more rural, genteel lifestyle.²⁷ Ironically enough, however, his first known association with an aristocratic household took James away from Wallingford where he had only recently risen to prominence. In June 1364 John James and his wife were making preparations to travel overseas in the company of Sir John Beauchamp.²⁸ Sir John was almost certainly the son of Sir Giles Beauchamp of Powick, Worcestershire, and head of a cadet branch of the comital Beauchamp family with a pedigree stretching back to the beginning of the fourteenth century.²⁹ The Powick branch remained in close touch with the earls of Warwick, and Sir John in particular became closely involved in the affairs of earl Thomas and his brother Sir John Beauchamp of Warwick, for whom he acted as an executor.³⁰ However, none of this explains how John James came into the Beauchamp orbit, or, indeed, how he was employed. The only other fragment of evidence is a lease, dated September 1366, by Thomas Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, and John son of Giles Beauchamp to John James of ten acres in Clapcot which, with other lands, were delivered to Beauchamp by virtue of an action under the law merchant against John Bernard for a debt of £400. This small parcel of land may, therefore, have been a reward for legal counsel in the matter.³¹

His next documented association was altogether more important. An indenture of October 1364 granting James the Hampshire manor of Freshwater marked the beginning of a long attachment to Isabella, Edward III's eldest daughter.³² After Isabella's marriage to the French nobleman Ingelram de Coucy in 1365 both she and her husband, created earl of Bedford in 1366, spent prolonged periods of time in France, and James was one of those employed to manage their estates during these absences.³³ In September 1375, for example, the routine chores of administration resulted in the grant of a papal indult allowing James and his wife to have a portable altar. An identical concession to Sir Thomas Tyrel, a prominent and long-standing member of Isabella's household, can hardly be coincidental.³⁴ Service with the royal family was certainly beneficial. By December 1371 James, Tyrel and John de Estbury – another habitual crown servant – had been granted joint custody of two-thirds of Thomas, earl of Oxford's property in return for an annual payment of £300 at the exchequer. This potentially lucrative arrangement can be attributed to Isabella's long-term interest in the Vere estates.³⁵ One of the other fringe benefits was an introduction to Sir Thomas Tyrel whose lasting friendship

and access to the royal household were extremely useful. Indeed, Tyrel merits further investigation because his fortunes were inextricably bound together with John James for over a decade – the decade, moreover, that witnessed the greatest change in James' social position. Despite contrasting backgrounds, their careers had much in common. Both James and Tyrel enjoyed long and successful periods of service in a variety of noble households; both displayed obvious flair as seigneurial officials; and both invested the rewards of service in land. The latter's earliest exploits are difficult to disentangle from those of his father, Sir Thomas Tyrel of East Horndon, Essex, who was still alive in 1353.³⁶ In all likelihood, though, it was Thomas junior who was described as a yeoman of the household in 1351 with a record of 'long service' to the king and queen, and who received a yearly grant of £10 for good service to princess Isabella in 1354.³⁷ Other marks of favour quickly followed. In January 1362 he was appointed as steward of Isabella's household with an honorarium of 35 marks, and in the following February the newly-knighted Sir Thomas was discharged a £10 debt for good service to the king and his daughter, after which he frequently appears in the records acting on behalf of Isabella and her husband, often in association with John James.³⁸ By January 1376 Tyrel and James were acting respectively as Bedford's grand steward and receiver general, and they were naturally required to tidy up the administrative mess left by the earl's resignation and retirement to France following the death of Edward III in June 1377.³⁹ Tyrel, however, was far more than an estate official. He was also Isabella's confidant, and remained so until her death in 1379.⁴⁰ It seems that John James was robbed of a close friend, an accomplished colleague, and a valuable ally when Tyrel himself died in or around March 1382.⁴¹

Though the loss of Coucy and Isabella in the space of two years represented a serious setback, James may have already tapped an alternative and more natural source of lordship flowing from the honour of Wallingford, namely the affinity left by Edward, prince of Wales and partially inherited by his widow Joan, countess of Kent. After Edward's death in 1376 Joan took up residence at Wallingford castle and surrounded herself with a close-knit group of knights including Sir Lewis Clifford, Sir Aubrey de Vere, Sir Simon Burley, Sir Richard Stury and Sir Gilbert Wace, many of whom had been retained by her late husband.⁴² It is conceivable that Joan also depended upon experienced men like John James to safeguard her interests. How else can we explain her request for an exemption from government service on his behalf in August 1382, and, more importantly, the fact that he was one of only two witnesses to the will drawn up shortly before her death in August 1385?⁴³ Indeed, given his credentials as an administrator it is surprising that James was

not formally connected with the honour of Wallingford during Edward's lifetime.⁴⁴ Still, he was a tenant of the prince and some antiquarian observations on St Peter's church in Wallingford suggest that he had a strong emotional attachment to his lord. In 1644 Richard Symonds saw 'the [brass] effigies of a man in mayle in the forme of the Black Prince, four shields gone' with the inscription 'Hic jacet corpus Iohannis James de Walingford armigeri qui obiit ... anno domini MCCCCLXXXVI'.⁴⁵ This monument may well have been designed to give James a degree of military credibility by association with the warrior prince; but it was also an obvious visual statement of gentility. His mailed figure contrasts sharply with another Berkshire Burgess, John Kent, whose civilian effigy was set up in the church of St Laurence, Reading in the early fifteenth-century.⁴⁶ Gentility owed as much to mentality as it did to income.

Office-holding

By around 1380, then, the career of John James had turned full circle. Now a moderately wealthy esquire, he returned to Wallingford in the service of the Black Prince's widow, and soon after her death he withdrew from public life. Thus, the deeds preserved in the Boarstall cartulary and elsewhere allow us to evaluate the rewards of royal service, both direct and indirect. A successful career brought wealth; wealth brought respectability, new social contacts and new obligations to the crown and the local community. For example, the exchange of property between John James and Sir Baldwin de Bereford in May 1373 was witnessed by a formidable array of gentlemen.⁴⁷ They included Sir Gilbert Wace, Sir John Golafre, Sir Reginald Malyns, Sir Richard de Abberbury, Sir Roger de Cotesford, Sir Thomas Besiles, Richard Brouns and Thomas Barentyn. Such a gathering was not in itself unusual. But the striking thing about this particular group of Oxfordshire and Berkshire landowners was their collective domination of the area's administration in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, reflecting, as Langland put it, the growing contribution of the 'grete' towards the 'governance' of their localities.⁴⁸

Indeed, by the end of the century appointments to the three most prestigious institutions – parliament, the shrievalty and the peace commission – are thought to have been indications of social acceptance with real status value.⁴⁹ Escalating volumes of local administrative business led to the rapid formation of 'office-holding communities' in every county, each unique in terms of size and composition, but all characterised, at least on paper, by the concentration of authority in

very few hands. Oxfordshire and Berkshire were no exception. Taking the two counties together (they were linked as a single shrievalty and usually as a single escheatry), over five hundred individuals served on local commissions during the second half of the fourteenth century (Table 1, below). This figure represents the region's office-holding community at its most expansive. Their names appear in hundreds of enrolled letters patent and in several printed lists of key personnel, sources that have long provided historians with a convenient entry into the world of shire administration.⁵⁰ However, the convenience and accessibility of these documents should not disguise their faults. In addition to the unknown proportion of commissions overlooked by the chancery clerks and not enrolled, it is also often impossible to determine who really performed a particular task.⁵¹ Career reconstruction brings further problems of interpretation and identification.⁵² Still, setting aside issues of source reliability, administrative developments in Oxfordshire and Berkshire were consistent with those across the kingdom as a whole. Extreme short-term fluctuations in administrative activity were underscored by a steady increase in the number of commissions issued from year to year, and in the total manpower required to fill them.

Manpower requirements rose significantly from the 1350s onwards, peaking in the 1380s when over six hundred people were named on commissions swelled by the poll tax experiments and the peacekeeping measures introduced after 1381. Total manpower, though, is not the same as the total number of officials. One official could serve in a number of different capacities, and long administrative careers were common. By piecing these careers together it becomes clear that in a quiet year, without the need to return parliamentary representatives or appoint large panels of tax collectors, the two counties could be managed by a skeleton staff of less than thirty men. Otherwise the total could rise to well over a hundred, as in 1377 and 1382. It is also clear that local government in this region was hierarchical. A small corps of extremely active officials was supported by a larger, more fluid group of men who drifted in and out of the picture. Though counting appointments is not necessarily the best method of ranking shire officials, it nonetheless points to a conscious reliance upon a small band of officials even when the pool of potential candidates was very much larger.⁵³ Shire administration in Oxfordshire and Berkshire was therefore an extremely exclusive activity. Just ten individuals – including John James – held twenty or more commissions in Oxfordshire and Berkshire during the second half of the fourteenth century. Correspondingly, almost half of the area's officials served on one commission only. The career profiles of William Abberbury, whose only recorded experience of shire administration was a spell on

Berkshire's peace commission in 1385, and Peter Achard, who was a tax collector in 1360, are far more representative of the majority.⁵⁴

Opportunities to participate in shire affairs were not especially restricted. Newcomers were readily admitted into the ranks of the office-holding community, with an average of ten novices per year. Crucially, however, it seems that the odds of becoming established were stacked heavily against those on the margins of landed society. There was a division, albeit blurred, between urban and rural society. Few patricians from Wallingford, Oxford and Reading appeared as county commissioners.⁵⁵ Minor landowners, members of the so-called 'parish gentry', found themselves in the same predicament, and the handful of exceptions tended to be career tax collectors – not an office recognised as being part of the administrative *cursus*, perhaps rather unfairly.

Table 1: Local Administration in Oxfordshire and Berkshire, 1350–1400 – Volume of Business

Decade	Number of commissions held					Totals	
	×1	×2	×3	×4	5+	Commissioners	Commissions
1350s	54	19	9	1	11	94	196
1360s	40	19	8	3	11	81	191
1370s	112	42	12	8	32	206	509
1380s	120	42	30	17	33	242	626
1390s	75	19	8	5	9	116	229

Table 2: Local Administration in Oxfordshire and Berkshire, 1350–1400 – Type of Business

Office	Number of commissions held					Totals	
	×1	×2	×3	×4	5+	Commissioners	Commissions
Arrayer	30	20	8	7	9	74	176
Burgess	53	14	6	7	4	84	151
Misc.	58	12	8	6	1	85	136
MP	36	11	4	12	13	76	202
Peace	24	38	22	6	42	132	535
Sheriff	17	8	1	2	-	28	44
Taxer	174	57	28	12	20	291	559

Since the 'rump' of propertied society contributed very few of the core officials listed in *Appendix 1*, the assumption must be that local government was dominated by a group of wealthy landowning families.

Insofar as it goes, this assumption is correct; and it hardly alters the trajectory of recent scholarship on medieval office-holding and provincial politics. Nigel Saul is quite right to point out that 'the hierarchy of office-holders was constantly changing in composition as one family replaced another'.⁵⁶ What was true in Gloucestershire also held in Oxfordshire and Berkshire where each decade saw the most important posts filled by a dozen of so key administrators. During the 1350s this group included John de Alveton, Sir Thomas Besiles, Thomas Huscarl, John Laundels and Sir Thomas de Langeleye. By the end of Edward III's reign the names had changed but the pattern was the same: Alveton and the rest had been replaced by Sir John de Kentwode, Sir Reginald Malyns, Sir Roger de Cotesford, Sir Roger de Elmerigg, Sir Thomas de la Mare, Sir Gilbert Wace and, significantly, John James. Obviously, the office-holding community had to absorb losses and accommodate men on the rise through marriage or raw talent. At the same time, though, enough families supplied officials from one generation to the next to give local affairs an air of stability. Names that recur during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries include Abberbury, Besiles, Chelreye, Engelfeld, Langeford, Malyns and Spersholt. The 'county establishment' in Oxfordshire and Berkshire was just that – firmly established.

Conclusion: Lordship, Gentility and Local Administration

Property, then, was an important consideration in the choice of government personnel. Social conservatism found expression in minimum qualifications for the shrievalty and the bench, both of which finally settled at £20 per annum. Gentry historiography is consequently redolent with hierarchies and cliques nurtured by a cocktail of wealth and administrative service. Payling, for example, identified 'a clear hierarchy of offices' in fifteenth-century Nottinghamshire founded upon 'the social status of those who held them'.⁵⁷ Leicestershire in the same period also saw 'a clear correlation between status and office holding'.⁵⁸ Outwardly, the evidence from Oxfordshire and Berkshire points in the same direction. It is simple enough to fit John James into a world where landed resources brought social responsibility, and where the very fact of attending parliament or occupying the shrievalty reinforced his social position.

Yet in certain respects the careers of James and his associates challenge this straightforwardly symbiotic relationship between landownership and shire administration. Gentry society, however defined, was always much larger than the office-holding community: Oxfordshire and Berkshire endorse Susan Wright's findings for fifteenth-century Derbyshire, where

'political society' was 'not coterminous with Derbyshire society', and where local administration was dominated by 'a social elite'.⁵⁹ But the formation and sustenance of these social elites was due to much more than land, and this is why it is so important to study those officials who did not come from conventional landed backgrounds. Parvenus like John James and his close colleague Richard Brouns can indicate the qualities that distinguished the office-holding community, the political elite if you like, from the broader social elite. Brouns, a younger son from a very minor gentry family, used his legal expertise to good effect and gradually built up an estate, to which he unexpectedly added the patrimony on the death of his elder brother in about 1361. This good fortune helps to explain how Brouns came to represent Berkshire in seven parliaments, to serve as sheriff of Oxfordshire-Berkshire in 1381-2, and to occupy a seat on the local bench for over a decade.⁶⁰ John James, of course, had much in common with Brouns. The overall structure of his public career split predictably into two phases, roughly consistent with John James the burgess and John James the gentleman. It is difficult to identify a clear break between these phases but the balance between the two began to shift in 1371 when he was chosen as a tax collector for Berkshire, and was irrevocably tipped by his first appointment as sheriff in November 1373. From this point onwards James' interests were rooted in county rather than borough affairs. In February 1375 he made his first of many appearances on the Berkshire peace commission; in January 1376 he was appointed as a commissioner of array, again in Berkshire; and in January 1377 he was returned to parliament for Oxfordshire. Other appointments followed, including a second stint as sheriff, until he finally retired from shire affairs in 1387.

Indeed, both James and Brouns occupied positions at the very apex of the administrative hierarchy. They were among the forty-one men who held ten or more commissions in the period 1350-1400 (*Appendix 2*, below). Land was one of the common denominators in this list, especially in its upper reaches. But lordship, and specifically royal lordship, generated the subtlest connections within this corps of officials. Of the men in question a handful were minor landowners or lawyers,⁶¹ and several others were professional judges from the courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas, appointed to give judicial backbone to local commissions.⁶² However, most of the remaining officials were local knights and esquires with strong royal connections. Over half a century the patrons naturally changed; but the patronage itself remained constant. Under Edward III, Sir Roger Elmrigge, Sir John Foxle, and Sir Gilbert Talbot of Richards Castle, were knights of the royal household.⁶³ The honour and castle of Wallingford also provided the Black Prince's

household in waiting with a natural recruiting ground. In addition to the service opportunities offered to local inhabitants by the honour's internal administration, the prince's dealings with Wallingford brought in outsiders with still wider networks of association, like Sir Hugh Segrave. Sir John Kentwode was a long-established member of the prince's entourage, as were Sir Reginald Malyns, Sir Gilbert Wace, Sir Thomas Paynel, and Robert Wighthull who served Edward as his clerk and attorney in the court of King's Bench from 1351 onwards.⁶⁴ The partial preservation of the Black Prince's retinue by his widow has already been discussed, but even when the crown skipped a generation in 1377 several local members of Richard II's household emerged as prominent office-holders. Men like Sir Richard Abberbury the elder, a former servant of the Black Prince retained by his son as a chamber knight, a diplomat, a member of the Council, and as chamberlain to Queen Anne;⁶⁵ and William Wilcotes of North Leigh, Oxfordshire, a successful lawyer and chief steward of Queen Anne's estates from 1391 until his death;⁶⁶ and Laurence Drewe of Southcote, Berkshire, Richard II's attorney and adviser.⁶⁷ Alongside these royal retainers, the shrievalty, the bench and other important administrative posts were occupied by a second group of men who moved in the same circles and could, perhaps legitimately, count on the support of their well-connected colleagues. Sir Edmund Spersholt, Thomas Barentyn, Gilbert Shotesbroke, Nicholas Somerton and Richard Brouns, all of them active officials, were well-known to prominent courtiers like Sir Hugh Segrave and Sir John Golafre, both of whom were constables of Wallingford castle under Richard II.

There were, of course, exceptions. Like the Lancastrian affinity in its regional strongholds, royal servants never held a monopoly of shire administration in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.⁶⁸ Sir Thomas de Langeleye, Sir Thomas Besiles, and others were certainly touched by the networks of association issuing from the Wallingford circle, but, given the location of their respective estates, the honour is unlikely to have been the axis around which their lives turned.⁶⁹ Alternative sources of lordship were also available, including the bishopric of Winchester. Yet the depth and breadth of royal lordship was undeniable.

John James of Wallingford fitted perfectly into this world. Several factors enabled James to move in such distinguished circles: the steady accumulation of land, the cultivation of personal connections, and the prestige of royal service; and all were pieces of an individual gentry jigsaw. It is too early to judge whether the importance of lordship in defining the office-holding élite was universal, or merely confined to Oxfordshire and Berkshire where the opportunities to enter royal service were unusually fertile. In any event, there is nothing to suggest a deliberate

royal 'policy' regarding shire administration, and the resulting appointments do not smack of any pernicious 'bastard feudalism' of the kind practised by Richard II at the very end of his reign, when he forgot that good lordship meant patronage on the gentry's terms rather than overt political manipulation.⁷⁰ Rather, the evidence from this region over a period of fifty years points to the natural prominence of men known and approved by the royal family, and the equally natural exploitation of a useful resource. Though social mobility and bastard feudalism are weighty concepts, John James and his circle of associates offer interesting perspectives on both. What emerges from this brief study is the picture of a close-knit community centred on the honour of Wallingford; a community where everybody knew each other, and where distinctions of rank and status were, to some extent, transcended by royal service. Looking more widely, it can be seen that the office-holding community in Oxfordshire and Berkshire was an adaptable organism, externally mediated by the appointing bodies at Westminster but still reflecting the structure and inclination of its parent community.

To succeed, however, in the world of county politics, gentility was still an important consideration. If by 'gentility' we mean the possession of land, participation in Bennett's 'network of trust', and involvement in shire affairs, then John James was amply qualified. Though we are sadly missing one crucial piece of the gentry jigsaw, peer recognition, the situation in Oxfordshire and Berkshire bears out the younger Despenser's advice to Robert Baldock in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*:⁷¹

Baldock, learn this of me: a factious lord
Shall hardly do himself good, much less us,
But he that hath the favour of a king
May with one word advance us while we live.

Appendix 1: Office-holding Communities: Oxfordshire and Berkshire, 1350-1400

	<i>Ten or more Commissions</i>	<i>Five or more Commissions</i>
1351-60	Sir Thomas de Langeleye (Oxf)	John de Alveton (Oxf) Sir Thomas de Besiles (Brk) Richard de Burton (Oxf, Brk) Sir John Golafre (Oxf, Brk) John Laundels (Oxf, Brk) Sir John de Nowers (Oxf) Adam de Sharesull (Oxf, Brk) Sir William de Sharesull (Oxf, Brk) Sir John de Stouford
1361-70	Sir Roger de Elmerigg (Oxf, Brk)	John de Baldyngton (Oxf, Brk) Sir Roger de Cotesford (Oxf) Sir Nicholas Dammory (Oxf) John de Estbury (Brk) John de Evesham (Oxf, Brk) Sir John de Foxle (Oxf, Brk) Sir Warin de Lisle (Oxf, Brk) Sir John de Moubray (Oxf, Brk) Sir John Nowers (Oxf) Sir John de Trillowe (Oxf, Brk)
1371-80	John de Baldyngton (Oxf) Sir John de Foxle (Brk) John James (Oxf, Brk) Sir Warin de Lisle (Oxf, Brk) Sir Reginald Malyns (Oxf) Sir Thomas de la Mare (Brk) Sir Gilbert Wace (Oxf)	Sir Richard de Abberbury (Oxf) Richard atte Felde (Brk)* Sir Thomas de Broghton (Oxf) Richard Brouns (Brk) William Codeshale (Oxf)* Sir Roger de Cotesford (Oxf) Sir Roger de Elmrigg (Oxf) David Hanemere (Oxf, Brk) John Hardy (Oxf)† Thomas de Hoton (Brk) Sir John de Kentwode (Brk) Sir Thomas de Langeford (Brk)

Ten or more Commissions

Five or more Commissions

1381-90

Sir Richard de Abberbury (Oxf, Brk)	John de Leukenore (Oxf)
Thomas Barentyn (Oxf)	Sir John Nowers (Oxf)
Richard Brouns (Brk)	Henry Ropere (Brk)*†
Robert de Charleton (Oxf, Brk)	Sir Hugh de Segrave (Brk)
Sir John Lovell (Oxf, Brk)	Gilbert Shotesbroke (Brk)
Sir Thomas de la Mare (Brk)	Nicholas de Somerton (Oxf)
Sir Hugh Segrave (Oxf, Brk)	Edmund de Stonore (Oxf)
Sir Gilbert Talbot (Brk)	Sir Robert Symeon (Oxf)
Robert Tresilian (Oxf, Brk)	Robert Tresilian (Oxf, Brk)
Sir Gilbert Wace (Oxf, Brk)	John de Vernoun (Oxf)
	Robert Wighthull (Oxf, Brk)
	John de Arches (Brk)
	Sir Robert Bardolf (Oxf)
	Robert Bealknap (Oxf, Brk)
	John Becote (Brk)†
	John Braundys (Brk)†
	Sir Roger Curson (Brk)
	Sir John Cyfrewast (Brk)
	Laurence Drewe (Brk)
	Edmund Giffard (Oxf)
	John Hardewk (Oxf)†
	John Harleye (Oxf, Brk)
	John Harwedon (Oxf)
	John Hill (Oxf, Brk)
	John James (Brk)
	Thomas Lacok (Brk)†
	Sir Reginald Malyns (Oxf, Brk)
	Richard Mason (Oxf)†
	William Neweman (Brk)†
	Sir Thomas de la Poile (Oxf)
	Nicholas Somerton (Oxf)
	Sir Almaric de St Amand (Oxf, Brk)
	Thomas Themese (Brk)
	John Waryn (Oxf)†

	<i>Ten or more Commissions</i>	<i>Five or more Commissions</i>
1391-1400	Sir Richard de Abberbury (Oxf, Brk)	William Brouns (Brk)
	Thomas Barentyn (Oxf)	Laurence Drewe (Brk)
		Sir John Golafre (Oxf)
		John Hill (Oxf, Brk)
		Hugh Huls (Oxf, Brk)
		John Rede (Oxf, Brk)
		Reginald Sheffield (Brk)
		William Wilcotes (Oxf)

† Principally Tax Collectors; * Principally Burgesses

Appendix 2: Associates of John James of Wallingford

<i>Charter Witnesses</i>	<i>Local Officials</i>
Henry de Redyng (44)	Sir Gilbert Wace (33) Henry Deme (40) Thomas Barentyn (32) Nicholas de Kenelm (34) Sir Thomas de la Mare (27)
Roger de Preston (26)	Sir Richard Abberbury (26) Robert Boty (23) Sir Roger Elmrigge (23) Walter le Yonge (21) John James of Wallingford (23) John de Kenelm (20) John Baldyngton (22) Nicholas Payable (18)
Warin de Lisle (21)	Sir Richard Brouns (20) <i>Richard Brouns</i> (15)
Richard atte Felde (16)	John, Lord Lovell?? (20)
Roger Milbourne (12)	Sir John de Foxle (19) William de Harewell (11) <i>Sir John Golafre</i> (19)
Robert Holt (11)	<i>Sir Reginald Malyns</i> (19)
Thomas atte Corner (10)	Sir Hugh Segrave (19) William Brouns (8) Laurence Drewe (18)
Thomas Reynald (7)	Sir Almaric de St Amand (18) <i>Sir Gilbert Wace</i> (7) Sir Robert Tresilian (17) Robert Wouburn (5) John Hardewyk (16)
<i>Thomas Barentyn</i> (4)	Sir Thomas de Langeleye (16)
Thomas Benschef (4)	Sir John Nowers (16) Sir Baldwin de Bereford (4) John de Estbury (15) Sir William Makkeneye (4) John Hill (15)
William Spounte (4)	John de Arches (14)

Alexander Absolon (3)	Robert Charleton (14) Henry Aldryngton (3) Sir Roger de Cotesford (14) Roger Arnyat (3) John Harleye (13)
Sir Hugh de Berewik (3)	Sir John Kentwode (13)
<i>Sir John Golafre</i> (3)	John Laundels (13) Alexander Louches (3) Nicholas Somerton (13) <i>Sir Reginald Malyns</i> (3) Edmund Spersholt (13)
John Motte (3)	Sir Thomas Besiles (12) John Rede (12) Gilbert Shotesbroke (12) Sir Gilbert Talbot (12) William Wilcotes (12) David Hanemere (11) Henry Ropere (11) John Hardy (10) Thomas Lacok (10) Sir Thomas Paynel (10) Robert Wighthull (10)

Figures in parenthesis are (i) number of charters witnessed, and (ii) number of administrative appointments.

Italicised names appear in both lists.

Notes

1. R. Gorski, 'The Fourteenth-Century Sheriff: English Local Administration in the Late Middle Ages' (Unpublished University of Hull Ph.D., 2000). The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the British Academy during the first three years of research.
2. N. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), p. 167. See Gorski, 'Fourteenth-Century Sheriff', pp. 49–72 for a full discussion of the subject.
3. Charles Ross in his review of C. Richmond, *John Hopton: A Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge, 1981), *Times Literary Supplement*, May 1981. In a similar vein, see Richmond, 'The Sulyard papers: the rewards of a small family archive', *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. D. Williams (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 199–219; *idem.*, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase* (Cambridge, 1990). For the career of a comparable figure see A. J. Pollard, 'Richard Clervaux of Croft: a North Riding squire in the fifteenth century', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 50 (1978), pp. 151–69; and, for context, *idem.*, 'The Richmondshire Community of Gentry during the Wars of the Roses', *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. C. Ross (Gloucester, 1979), pp. 37–59.
4. *The Boarstall Cartulary*, ed. H. E. Salter, Oxford Historical Society, 88 (1930).
5. M. J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 30–6.
6. See especially Saul's seminal study of Gloucestershire, *Knights and Esquires*. Other significant contributions include: Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*; C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity. A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499* (Cambridge, 1992); and S. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991).
7. J. R. Maddicott, 'The county community and the making of public opinion in fourteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 28 (1978), pp. 27–43.
8. J. S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe (eds), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1386–1421* (Stroud, 1993), vol. 3, p. 486.
9. For a sketch of Robert's career see *ibid.*, pp. 486–8.
10. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 234 (no. 650).
11. Other documents are scattered amongst the ancient deeds, the close rolls, and the archives of Christ Church College, Oxford. A selection have been printed: *Cartulary of the Medieval Archives of Christ Church*, ed. N. Denholm-Young, Oxford Historical Society, 92 (1931), pp. 144, 145, 149, 154; and *A Collection of Charters relating to Goring, Streatly and the Neighbourhood, 1181–1546*, ed. T. R. Gambier-Parry, Oxfordshire Record Society, 14 (1932), vol. 2, p. 187.
12. *Boarstall Cartulary*, pp. 36–7 (nos. 111–113), p. 234 (nos. 648, 650–1). In 1362 James recovered a substantial amount of property around Wallingford

from William de Cornewaille in an action under the law merchant for a debt of £30, along with a messuage in the borough itself from Thomas Reynald by a writ of *quare cessavit per biennium*. These 'transactions' are the only uncertain indications of a possible legal background, or at least of a litigious character. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-8 (nos. 654-6), p. 235 (no. 652).

13. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 238 (no. 658), p. 239 (no. 660).
14. For further acquisitions up until the mid-1370s see *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 240 (nos. 666, 668), p. 241 (nos. 669, 673, 674), p. 242 (nos. 675-7).
15. *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, vol. 8, p. 9.
16. *Register of Edward the Black Prince*, ed. M. C. B. Dawes, 4 vols (London, 1930-33), vol. 4, p. 542.
17. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 259 (no. 759); *Calendar of Close Rolls 1369-74*, pp. 554, 559-61.
18. Although James was granted free warren in his demesne lands at Clapcot, Newenham Gifford, Fifhide, Adwell, Kingston, Thofeld and Sotwell in August 1394. CCR 1396-99, 17-18; *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, vol. 5, p. 349.
19. *VCH Berkshire*, vol. 3, pp. 532-4.
20. *Sixth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, HMSO, 1877), p. 581b.
21. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 259 (no. 759).
22. F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1970), p. 75.
23. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England*, p. 49.
24. *House of Commons, 1386-1421*, vol. 3, p. 516.
25. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 503-4; vol. 3, p. 259.
26. *The History of the King's Works*, ed. H. M. Colvin (London, HMSO, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 850-2.
27. *VCH Berkshire*, vol. 3, pp. 526-7.
28. *Calendar of Papal Registers: Petitions*, vol. 1, pp. 498-9.
29. *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom*, ed. G. E. Cokayne (London, 1910-1959), vol. 2, p. 46n. Sir John's father, Giles, made a profitable marriage to Katherine, daughter and heir of Sir John de Bures in 1324 which gave the family a temporary interest in the Berkshire manor of Hampstead Cyfrewast, and the Oxfordshire manor of Alvescot, along with considerable property in Somerset. *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, vol. 9, p. 401 (no. 578). For the family see *VCH Worcestershire*, vol. 4, p. 186.
30. CCR 1360-64, p. 227.
31. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 244 (no. 687).
32. *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, vol. 4, p. 42 (no. 62).
33. For background see A. Tuck, *Crown and Nobility 1272-1461: Political Conflict in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1985); and B. W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (London, 1979).
34. *Calendar of Papal Registers: Papal Letters*, vol. 4, p. 204.
35. Five years later her daughter Philippa married Robert de Vere, son of and heir of earl Thomas. £200 of the annual proceeds rendered by James and Tyrel were redirected to the new bride for her sustenance. CCR 1369-74, p. 272; *Calendar of Fine Rolls*, vol. 8, p. 151; *ibid.* vol. 9, p. 13; *Calendar of*

- Patent Rolls 1374-77, p. 368. Isabella's interests were further protected by Tyrel's employment to survey various Vere properties for which he received a small annual payment from the manor of Downham, Essex. In May 1377 James was given sole custody of several properties in Essex held by Margaret, widow of John de Huntercombe, until the majority of her heir for a farm of £200. CFR, vol. 10, p. 3; CPR 1370-74, p. 133; CIPM, vol. 13, p. 94 (no. 125). CFR, vol. 8, p. 403; *ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 16.
36. CCR 1349-54, p. 601.
 37. CPR 1350-54, p. 97; CPR 1354-58, p. 48. Tyrel was receiving robes as a bachelor of the household in the winter of 1366. P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice] E 101/395/10; C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England, 1360-1413* (Yale, 1986), p. 281.
 38. CPR 1361-64, p. 140; CCR 1360-64, 455, p. 316; CIPM, vol. 11, p. 472 (no. 615); *ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 113 (no. 141), p. 260 (no. 292); CPR 1364-67, pp. 72, 183, 447; CPR 1367-70, p. 271; CIPM, vol. 14, p. 289 (no. 298).
 39. CPR 1374-77, pp. 237, 368; *ibid.* 1377-81, p. 260. They were required to render £300 jointly at the exchequer for the earl's lands.
 40. His close attendance upon the princess is implied by his intervention on behalf of John Cauchon, a French parson who celebrated daily mass in her household, by a reference to him being 'of the counsel' of Isabella and her husband in November 1376, and by his appointment as one of Isabella's feoffees to manage the profits of Coucy's property after his return to France. CPR 1370-74, p. 252; CCR 1374-77, p. 467; CPR 1377-81, p. 174. PRO, SC1/40/187.
 41. CIPM, vol. 15, p. 46 (no. 119); CPR 1381-85, p. 105.
 42. For the terms of service for Vere and Beresford see *Private Indentures for Life Service in Peace and War 1278-1476*, ed. M. Jones and S. Walker, *Camden Miscellany xxxiii*, Camden Society, 5th series, 3 (1994), pp. 80-1.
 43. CPR 1381-85, 155. *Testamenta Vetusta: being illustrations from wills, of manners, customs, etc. as well as of the descents and possessions of many distinguished families. From the reign of Henry the Second to the accession of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. N. H. Nicolas (London, 1826), vol. 1, p. 15. Moreover, James' relationship with princess Joan can only have reinforced his connections with a number of the Black Prince's former retainers. Sir Gilbert Wace of Ewelme, Oxfordshire, was probably the closest and oldest of these acquaintances, and through him James became familiar with Sir Hugh Segrave and Sir Richard Abberbury the elder, both high ranking courtiers. Thomas Barentyn of Chalgrove, Oxfordshire, was another of James' close associates, their relationship being further strengthened by the marriage of Barentyn's son Reynald to James' daughter Joan, while a third was Richard Brouns of Harwell, Berkshire. See *House of Commons, 1386-1421*, vol. 4, pp. 722-4; vol. 2, pp. 120-2, 382-3.
 44. Many of his associates certainly were, including Thomas Standelve and Sir Hugh Berewik. *Black Prince's Register*, vol. 4, pp. 46, 95, 142, 292, 419, 424.
 45. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 232 citing British Library, Harleian MS 965, f. 296. In addition, in February 1369 Edward granted James the site of the Mote Hall in Clapcot on condition that he rebuilt the hall itself. *Ibid.*, p. 248 (no. 708).

46. M. Stephenson, *A List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles* (London, 1926), p. 25. The alabaster monument of William Wilcotes (d. 1411) at North Leigh, Oxfordshire provides another instructive comparison. He is depicted in armour wearing the Lancastrian SS collar. He served as an estate official and a lawyer – but not as a soldier. A. Wood and R. Rawlinson, *Parochial Collections. Volume 3*, Oxfordshire Record Society, 11 (1929), p. 231. Compare also the lost civilian brass of John Rede at Checkendon, Oxfordshire, 'quondam serviens domini regis ad legem'. Rede's son Edmund married Christine, the daughter and heir of Robert James of Wallingford. Idem, *Parochial Collections, Volume 1*, Oxfordshire Record Society, 2 (1920), p. 86.
47. *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 259 (no. 759).
48. *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*, in 3 parallel texts, together with Richard the Redeless, ed. W. W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886), vol. 1, p. 622.
49. These, the three 'major' offices, are most often examined. For examples, see: Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, chapter 8; Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England*, chapters 5–6; S. Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361–1399* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 236–47; S. M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Chesterfield, 1983), chapters 7–8. For more wide ranging discussions see Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, chapter 4, and E. Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century*, c. 1422–c. 1485 (Cambridge, 1992), chapter 5.
50. *List of Sheriffs for England and Wales*, PRO, Lists and Indexes, 9 (London, 1898); *List of Escheators for England and Wales*, PRO, Lists and Indexes, 72 (London, 1971); *Return of Every Member, Part 1, Parliaments of England, 1213–1702* (London, 1878).
51. For coroners and the problems of enrolment see R. F. Hunnisett, *The Medieval Coroner* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 150–7.
52. R. Gorski, 'A methodological Holy Grail: nominal record linkage in a medieval context', *Medieval Prosopography*, 16 (1996), pp. 145–79.
53. Distrainment of knighthood returns list some of those who were qualified but inactive, including John de Louches of Milton and John de St Amand. PRO, C 47/1/15, m. 11, 1/8, m. 20, 1/7, m. 26.
54. CPR 1385–89, p. 80; *ibid.* 1358–61, p. 345; CFR, vol. 9, p. 55.
55. Henry Ropere was one of the few Reading burgesses to take part in shire administration, as a tax collector. More curiously, Richard Mercer, a well-to-do Oxford draper, found himself named as a peace commissioner in 1381, and represented the city in 1380. CPR 1382–85, pp. 140, 247; *Oxford City Documents, 1268–1685*, ed. J. E. Thorold Rogers, Oxford Historical Society, 18 (1891), p. 43.
56. Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, p. 161.
57. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England*, p. 109.
58. Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, pp. 111–2. Compare with Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, p. 163; and K. S. Naughton, *The Gentry of Bedfordshire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Leicester, 1976), pp. 53–4.
59. Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 94.
60. *House of Commons, 1386–1421*, vol. 2, p. 382–3.
61. Examples include John Rede and Thomas Lacok.

62. Robert Tresilian, Chief Justice from 1381; Sir Robert Charleton, justice of King's Bench from 1389; David Hannemere, justice in King's Bench 1383–6. E. Foss, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Judges of England, 1066–1870* (London, 1870), pp. 670–2, 346–7, 325.
63. Foxle was knighted at the king's request and received annual grants in excess of £60 to support his new status. Talbot was connected with the royal household from 1362 onwards, when he received a £40 annuity, and was also a 'king's knight' under Richard II. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity*, pp. 208, 281; CCR 1377–81, p. 158; *House of Commons, 1386–1421*, vol. 4, pp. 561–3.
64. *House of Commons, 1386–1421*, vol. 4, pp. 31–2 (Kentwode); *Black Prince's Register*, vol. 4, pp. 435, 450 (Malyns); *ibid.* pp. 18, 377, 437 (Wighthull).
65. *House of Commons, 1386–1421*, vol. 4, pp. 863–866. S. Walker, 'Sir Richard Abberbury (c. 1330–1399) and his kinsmen: the rise and fall of a gentry family', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 34 (1990), pp. 113–40.
66. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 12–4.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 797–800.
68. Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp. 235–47. Compare with M. Cherry, 'The Courtenay Earls of Devon: the formation and disintegration of a late medieval aristocratic affinity', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), pp. 75–6.
69. CIPM, vol. 11, pp. 85–6 (no. 112); *ibid.*, vol. 15, pp. 38–40 (98–101).
70. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity*, *passim*.
71. Christopher Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, II. ii. li. 6ff.