

The Growth of Lay Element in the English Civil Service
of the Later Middle Ages

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As a subject of historical study the laicization of civil service in the later middle ages was first noted by Thomas Frederick Tout whose monumental work dealt with administrative history up to the end of the fourteenth century when the process had barely started. The administrative history of the fifteenth century has yet to receive the same degree of intensive treatment as that of the earlier periods and, although the question has been incidentally discussed and some new materials brought forward by John Lavan Kirby, J. C. Sainty, R. A. Griffiths and more recently by Chris Given-Wilson, the problem is still in need of fuller investigation. Perhaps I should quote the name of R. L. Storey at this point who has treated the question so far most intensively as well as extensively in his article on the rise of a class of gentlemen bureaucrats mainly in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. The present paper is a modest attempt at making a small contribution to the accumulated knowledge of the learned world with regard to this subject.

It was in the reign of Edward III that inroads of laymen into the civil service first became apparent. Earlier there had been indeed laymen who could read Latin and although occasional *milites literati* were reported, those laymen who could write and compose in Latin were extremely rare and laymen have been found in the civil service neither in any appreciable number nor with any degree of permanence. This is especially true of offices in higher rank.

In the political crises of 1340 and 1371 laymen were installed in the offices of both the chancellor and the treasurer for the first time. During the reign of Richard II a few lay chancellors and treasurers were in office, especially in the 1380's. Then in the reign of Henry IV it now became the rule for laymen to hold the

treasurership of England. The same was the case also with other higher financial offices of the king: for instance the treasurership of the Household became a lay office from this period. In contrast to these the office of the chancellor as a rule remained in the hands of clerks well into the reign of Henry VIII. The same was the case with the keepership of the privy seal.

Thus if we divide administrative offices of medieval England into financial and secretarial ones, the latter being engaged in drafting, recording and sealing of public documents, we see that in the former laymen made considerable headway already in the earlier part of the fifteenth century, while in the latter clerks still held their ground until the time of the Reformation. The reason why the secretarial offices did not become open for laymen until late may be explained by the fact that these offices were much involved in the diplomatic affairs of the time which required expertise in civil and canon laws and this was still an almost exclusive reserve for clerks educated in universities, even though we must take note of the cases reported by Storey of possible laymen in Chancery in the middle years of the fifteenth century. But what were the circumstances and possible causes which prompted this early laicization of financial offices and how far it was advanced lower down the administrative hierarchy in Westminster. We will discuss the latter question first.

Being the chief financial office of the government, the Exchequer had a comparatively big staff at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Names of many of them can be found in Issue Rolls of the Exchequer of Receipt where payments of their wages were recorded. It was not possible to identify everyone of them either as a clerk or as a layman. Many names, however, could be traced in calendars of chancery enrolments. These are often accompanied by additions and titles such as clerk, knight or esquire. These can be taken as indications of their status. Thus a man titled as knight

or esquire or king's serjeant or simply as serjeant-at-arms was taken to be a layman. Or a grant of lands or an office, such as that of justice of the peace, can identify him as a layman. Processing material in this way, first we find laymen or probable laymen in such offices as usher, marshal, summoner, courier which presumably had not much to do with the work of parchment and ink. This does not surprise us. Among other positions which had more to do with desk work, we find relatively many laymen in the offices created in the Exchequer reforms of 1323-26. These are the offices of five auditors, the foreign apposer and the clerk of the foreign estreats. It appears that the newly established offices were relatively open for laymen, while the older ones in the Upper Exchequer were still almost exclusively manned by clerks. There were also a considerable number of laymen in the Exchequer of Receipt. This is particularly noticeable in the offices of four tellers.

A few lay officials were common lawyers and many others seem to have been provincial landowners and gentlemen. Careers of the latter group give clear indication of their local roots. Men of this group were neither simple creatures of the crown entirely dependent upon the grace and favour of the king or their patron in the government nor independent though thoroughly provincial squires. They were both squires though not thoroughly provincial in their life, and civil servants though not without particular provincial interests. Their career was interwoven with service at offices of the central government in Westminster and labour as local officers in the shires where they had their vital interests. Merchants and burgesses could not be found in permanent financial offices, although their service was often enlisted by the king as assessor and collector of taxes in towns.

Among senior positions of the Exchequer which were held in the direct patronage of the king, the position of the chief baron had already been converted into a permanent lay

office by the end of the fourteenth century. The office of a puisne baron was still held by clerks as a rule except in 1407-10 when the office of the third baron was held by Henry Somer whose career shows a typical example of the new specie of lay civil servants in this period.

The Exchequer was not the only office of financial administration and there was another government office having to do with the royal finance and that was the King's Household. The Wardrobe of the Household and the King's Chamber were the especially notable ones where we see the offices of their chiefs and their deputies held by laymen from time to time in the reign of Henry IV. For instance, the controllership of the Household was already an exclusive reserve for laymen in this reign and four persons of the knightly rank succeeded to this office one after another. Two of them were presumably retainers of the Lancastrian House and another, a career civil servant since the previous reign, who later advanced to the treasurership of the Household. The latter office was held by five men during the same period and the first three of them were clerks and the rest laymen. Another important financial office in the Household was the receivership of the King's Chamber. This was held by five men in the same reign and the first three were clerks and the rest laymen. The latter's social status appears inferior to that of the officers of rank in the Exchequer and the Household and consequently there are less material to clarify their career. As a rule they started it as lesser officials of the Household and after some promotion ended up in the rank of the country gentry with substantial grants of lands from the crown.

At this point perhaps I should summarize my findings about the kind of lay people who occupied financial offices of the Household and junior positions in the Exchequer. There are certain types among them according to the significance which their service at Westminster had in their career. For instance as far as can be seen the service of

Mathew Coker as clerk of the estreats, 1409-11, was only transitory and it appears that he had quite an independent and established position in Somerset long before and after his service at Westminster, being active on local commissions of various kinds from the middle of the 1390's to the end of the 1410's. So was the case with John Foljaumbe, foreign apposer, 1406-07. The case of John Cokayn was slightly different. The Cokayns already had a well established position in Derbyshire long before John Cokayn, chief baron under Henry IV, embarked on legal career in Westminster. Although he continued to serve on local commissions, his career was made chiefly at Westminster. Nor was it surprising since he was a lawyer by profession, although he was at the same time a member of the Derbyshire gentry thanks to his family inheritance.

In contrast to these some of the lay civil servants started as obscure clerks in the King's Household or the Household of Henry before accession, went up stairs of the civil service step by step and only in the latter part of their official career did they appear as members of the gentry. The lives of Simon Flete, receiver of the Chamber, 1405-09, Thomas Ringwood, the last receiver of the Chamber of Henry IV, and William Loveney, keeper of the Great Wardrobe, 1399-1408, reveal such a quality. Thomas Fodringey of Bedfordshire, who served as teller of the Receipt for nearly thirty years, may also be counted among them. So are the Darelle brothers who landed at the Receipt in 1405 under the auspices of the newly appointed treasurer, Lord Furnival. Perhaps their prototype may be seen in the careers of Thomas Brownflete and Henry Somer.

References to the Darelles brings in its train the name of Thomas Appultrewyk. As the Darelles were retainers and probably agents of the Nevilles in the Receipt, so was Thomas Appultrewyk one for Edward, duke of York. It is significant that men who were expressly called retainers of certain magnates could only be found in the Receipt. Is

this the English equivalent of the well-known system of contemporary France in which princes of the blood vied with each other in maintaining their agents in departments of financial administration? But later on retainers of magnates could be found also in higher offices of the Exchequer of Account. The King's men also were particularly prominent in the treasurership, controllership and other financial offices of the Household.

We must now turn to the question of the circumstances and possible causes which prompted the transfer of higher financial offices to lay hands. A few fundamental facts must be borne in mind. As we saw at the beginning there were scattered periods before the accession of Henry IV when laymen occupied the office of the treasurer. After 1413, however, it was now the periods when the treasurership was in clerical hands that was exceptional and the lay treasurership was the rule. The same was the case with the treasurership of the Household and the contrast was more pronounced in this case between the years before 1399 and the years after 1413 than in the case of the treasurership of England. If we take a closer look at the lists of treasurers of England and treasurers of the Household in the reign of Henry IV it will be seen that the late years of the reign after 1408 saw both these two offices firmly in lay hands. The receivership of the Chamber was also in lay hands after December 1406. In this case the transfer roughly coincided with that of the treasurership of the Household.

Thus in the case of the two financial offices of the Household it seems pretty certain that the transfer was occasioned by criticism from the Commons in the Parliament of 1406 against the management of the Household finance. The point was fully discussed by Chris Given-Wilson in his work on the royal Household and it should be unnecessary to work it out here over again. He concentrated on the transfer of the treasurership of the Household to lay hands

and here it will suffice to add that it also went with that of the receivership of the Chamber.

The case of the treasurership of England seems slightly different. Spells of the lay treasurership already occurred in the 1370's and 1380's. In Henry IV's reign the treasurership settled in lay hands only from 1408. The king, however, had given this position to his own esquire at the beginning of his reign and the office tended to stay in lay hands thereafter. Particularly noteworthy is the treasurership of Thomas Neville, Lord Furnival. Not only was his tenure of office the longest of Henry's ten treasurers. Had it not been for his premature death in March 1407 he might have stayed longer in office. For he managed to survive severe criticism from the Commons in the Parliament of 1406 against the government's conduct of the king's financial affairs. His considerable contribution to Henry IV's government finance in the form of loans and his introduction of a number of his own men into the Exchequer could only consolidate his position as treasurer and it may be safe to say that the tradition of a lay treasurership really started from him.

But why did the transfer to lay hands of higher financial offices of the government turn out to be permanent and why did it occur precisely in Henry IV's reign? The growth and spread of lay literacy provided general social background. The economy of the church was losing impetus and the clergy could not provide appreciable financial support to the government in the form of loans. But these factors can not explain the timing and the permanence of the change. In this connection it is tempting to suggest that the undercurrent of anti-clericalism was much stronger at the time than hitherto has been supposed. It rose to the surface after the battle of Shrewsbury when the king's forces were impeded at Worcester in their movements by lack of funds. It again lifted up its head in the Lollard proposals in the Hilary Parliament of 1404 and the

Parliament of 1410 for sequestration of the church's income or lands. They were effectively countered on each occasion by Archbishop Arundel and those magnates both temporal and spiritual who rallied around the Archbishop. This, however, should not mislead us to underestimate anti-clerical forces at work in contemporary politics and administration. After all the anti-Lollard petition of temporal lords in the Parliament of 1406 expressed their misgivings that the Lollards would stir and move the people of the realm "pur ouster et tollir des ditz Seignurs Temporelx lour possessions et heritages". In other words they were anxious about their own possessions and suspicious of the subversive effect of the Lollard doctrine. It is doubtful, however, that they were opposed to anti-clericalism as such and clear of anti-clerical sentiments at heart. Given Wilson's recent work brought to light an anti-clerical trend of Henry IV's court circle, the King's predilection for laymen in his personnel administration and its political background. We must also take into account the fact that the treasurer of England and the treasurer of the Household represented the facade of the king's financial administration which was so often bitterly criticized by the Commons who were as often anti-clerical in those years. It should not surprise us then if the king had thought it would not help him in his efforts to obtain grants of taxation to maintain clerical ministers in financial offices who might be mistrusted by the Commons. This was perhaps the most potent single reason why the more or less permanent transfer of higher financial offices from clerical to lay hands occurred in this period. A severe and protracted financial crisis of 1404 and the Commons' intransigence in the Parliaments of 1404 and 1406 probably gave occasion to this transfer. After the laicization of two ministerial offices of financial administration in the reign of Henry IV, laymen came to be found gradually in increasing number in subordinate positions and they were now called with the

title of gentleman instead of clerks as they were in earlier years. The Chancery went somewhat behind in following the suit but by the time of the Reformation the process of laicization was complete even in this office of government where earlier celibacy was *sine qua non* for the king's servants skilled in drafting letters expressing his will. And that is the conclusion of my paper. Thank you for your patience in listening.

THE GROWTH OF LAY ELEMENT IN THE ENGLISH CIVIL SERVICE
(Synopsis)

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THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The First Lay Chancellorship and Treasurership, 1340 and 1371.

Some lay office-holders in higher rank in the 1380s.

The Treasurership of England and the Treasurership of the Household
became lay office in the reign of Henry IV. The laicization of
secretarial offices comes much later. The reasons.

THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Lay officials in subordinate positions of the Exchequer. Auditors, foreign apposer,
clerk of the foreign estreats, tellers of the Receipt.

Who were they? Lawyers, provincial squires and careerists.

The office of the chief baron was for common lawyers.

Lay officers in the King's Household. The controller of the Wardrobe of the
Household. The receiver of the Chamber.

Types of lay office-holders.

Magnates' retainers in the Exchequer of Receipt.

Circumstances and possible causes of laicization. The importance of anti-clerical
undercurrent in politics.

SOME LAY OFFICIALS IN HENRY IV'S EXCHEQUER AND HOUSEHOLD

TREASURERS

John Norbury, esquire	30 September, 1399 - 31 May, 1401
William, Lord Ros of Helmsley	9 September, 1403 - 13 December, 1404
Thomas Neville, Lord Furnival	13 December, 1404 - 14 March, 1407
John Tiptoft, knight	14 July, 1408 - 6 January, 1410
Henry, Lord Scrope of Masham	6 January, 1410 - 16 December, 1411
John Pelham, knight	20 December, 1411? - 21 March, 1413

THE EXCHEQUER OF PLEAS AND EXCHEQUER OF ACCOUNT

Chancellor

Henry Somer, esquire	20 June, 1410 - 20 March 1413
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Barons

Chief Barons

John Cassy, knight	30 September, 1399 - 15 November, 1400
John Cokayn, knight	15 November, 1400 - 20 March, 1413

Third Baron

Henry Somer, esquire	8 November, 1407 - 19 June, 1410
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Auditors

John Drax, serjeant-at-arms	1399 - 1413
John Thorlethorp	1405 - 1413

Foreign Apposers

John Fyndern, esquire	15 November, 1399 - 4 September, 1406 1410 - 1412
John F oljaumbe	4 September 1406 - 1407

Clerk of the Estreats

Mathew Coker, esquire	1409 - 23 January, 1411
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THE EXCHEQUER OF RECEIPT

Treasurer's Clerks

John Darelle, esquire	1405 - 1407
Henry Somer, esquire	1408 - 1410 1411 - 1413

Their Underclerks or Scribes

Henry Somer, esquire	1399 - 1405
William Darelle, esquire	1410 - 1413

Other Underclerk of the Exchequer of Receipt

William Darelle, esquire	1405 - 1410
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Tellers

Thomas Appultrewyk(Appletreewick) , esquire	1399 - 1403
Robert Chesterfield, king's sergeant	1399 - 1400
John Spaigne	1399 - 1409
Thomas Stockdale, esquire	1409 - 1411
Thomas Fodringey (Fotheringay)	1399 - 1412

TREASURERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

(KEEPERS OF THE WARDROBE OF THE HOUSEHOLD)

John Tiptoft, knight	7 December, 1406 - 17 July, 1408
Thomas Brownflete, knight	18 July, 1408 - 20 March, 1413

CONTROLLERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Robert Litton, knight	1 October, 1399 - 17 March, 1401
Thomas Brownflete, knight	17 March, 1401 - 30 September, 1403
Roger Leche, knight	30 September, 1403 - 6 January, 1405
John Strange, knight	7 January, 1405 - 20 March, 1413

KEEPERS OF THE GREAT WARDROBE

William Loveney	30 September, 1399 - 1 May 1408
Thomas Ringwood	1 April, 1412 - 20 March, 1413

KEEPERS OF THE PRIVY WARDROBE

John Norbury, esquire	5 November, 1399 - 13 February, 1405
Henry Somer, esquire	13 February, 1405 - 4 December, 1407
Simon Flete	4 December, 1407-?

RECEIVERS OF THE CHAMBER

Simon Flete	3 December, 1406-1 March. 1409
Thomas Ringwood	Acting on 23 December, 1412