By

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Proceedings. Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, LXXIII, 73, (1927), pp 57ff

THE second episode in the recent Bridgwater Pageant, those who witnessed it may remember, aimed at presenting some sort of picture of the riots which took place in and near the borough in the summer of 1381. The librettist, though he allowed scope for the play of imagination, based his conception for the most part on historical documents. He took up the position that we were here looking on no isolated event, but on one portion of the wide-spread drama, of the great peasant insurrection. Herein he was not in accord with some historians who declare emphatically that the Bridgwater affair was entirely local and had nothing whatever to do with Wat Tyler's rebellion.

The Bridgwater rising would appear to have been a perfectly isolated affair ¹ says Professor Oman; and again elsewhere, "In the extreme west and north the outbreak had come very late. There was no rising in the South West save at Bridgwater, where a priest and a Yeoman raised a riot against the Knights Templar for purely private reasons"²

Dr Powell, the local historian, while correcting the error as to the Knights Hospitallers into which Sir Charles Oman had fallen, otherwise agrees with him and writes—" A dissatisfied cleric made a fuss because a certain benefice was not given him. He was clever enough to take advantage of the unrest prevailing in other parts of England. That was all,³

The object of this historical note is to elucidate the facts and to present the librettist's side of the question. Was that all? Or do the facts as recorded, when brought together, suggest a conclusion opposed to that of Sir Charles Oman and Dr. Powell, and are there tokens of a general agreement in the causes of unrest with those in other parts of the kingdom? I think that at least there is something to be advanced in favour of the Pageant episode, and in this note I have sought to bring together all the documentary evidence I could find of what really happened.

The Hospital of St. John the Baptist of Bridgwater had been founded near the beginning of the thirteenth century by the important William Briwer. It stood at the East Gate of the borough, half within and half without, so that late-comers could find hospitality there after the town-gates had been closed for the night. It was a House of Augustinians,⁴ thirteen in number at this time, with a Master at their head, and

maintaining thirteen poor scholars skilled in teaching grammar. The Hospital cared for the sick and the wayfarer, and provided teaching for the children of the borough, even feeding some of the poorest among them.

We have to go back more than fifty years to find anything suggesting that all was not well between the Hospital and the burgesses. There had been rumours that the brethren were not fulfilling their duty toward wayfarers, and the Bishop ordered an enquiry to be made ⁵ But from that time, through the years of plague and the subsequent unrest we hear of no more complaints until the year before the great rising of the peasants.

All through the year 1380 and up to the time of the final outburst in the following summer, the Master and brethren appear to have lived in constant fear and apprehension of attacks on their buildings, their chattels and their persons from the burgesses. Three such are alleged to have been made, and such details as are on record are worth our close scrutiny.

The first of these outbreaks occurred while the aged Thomas of Cadicote [Catcott], who had held the office for more than thirty years, was yet Master. The Commission of over and terminer to enquire into the Master's complaint was issued on the 8th of February 1380.6 Thomas is described as Master of the Hospital and parson of the church of Bridgwater. It may here be said that normally the Master and brethren were the rectors of the parish church and presented their nominee to the Bishop. We shall find during these days of trouble, not only the rector described as parson, as here, but the vicar as rector. Certain persons, the Master alleged, had come armed to the Hospital, had broken doors and windows of his church, that is the chapel attached to the Hospital, had taken goods and £20 in money, had closed and still held closed the doors against ministers and parishioners, had assaulted his servants, and by threats had kept them from approaching the Hospital.

Such scenes of violence and coercion seem to have proved too much for the old Master. Either he died or he resigned his office⁷ and in the middle of April we find his successor, William Cammel, successfully appealing for protection for himself, the brethren, their servants, the Hospital itself, and all its possessions, on the ground that the difficulties that had arisen between his

By

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predecessor and the commonalty had not been satisfactorily met, and that the Hospital and its personnel were in constant jeopardy.⁸

Three months later two farther commissions were appointed in answer to complaints, showing that Cammel's apprehensions had been fully justified. In both these, persons are by name accused of having perpetrated much the same kind of excesses as those which Thomas had specified. But there is now an important addition. They had taken, not only the Master's goods, but certain papal bulls touching the appropriation, of the vicarage⁹.

The same accusation appears in the instructions to the third commission appointed also on July 14th¹⁰

The names of the persons accused differ in these two July commissions. There may have been two assaults quite distinct from one another, or two lists of names may have been sent up, one supplementing the other, but both referring to the same riot.

I print the three lists in such a way as to show clearly which names were common to all or to two of them.

Feb 6 1380	July 14 1380 (a)	July 14 1380 (b)
Wm. Blache, tanner.	Wm. Blache, tanner.	Wm. Blache.
Henry Sydenham.		
Richard Saltere.	Richard Saltere.	Richard Saltere.
John Stone, 'Webbe'.	John Stone, 'Webbe'	John Stone, 'Webbe'
John Canoun, 'Shethere'	John Canoun, 'Shethere'	
John Mogge of Hampine. [Hampne	John Mogge of Hampine.	
?= Hamp]		
John Thomas, carpenter.	John Thomas, carpenter.	
David Crowevyle.	David Crowevyle.	
John Bruwere.	John Bruwere.	
John Kelly, 'hosiere'.	John Kelly, 'hosiere'.	
John Hughes of Heigrove.	John Hughes of Heigrove.	
John Mustard of Huntworthy: the	John Mustard of Hounceworthy	
younger.	[Hounteworthy?] ¹ the younger.	
Thomas, son of Nicholas Dawe.		
Walter Wolf, 'helyare'.	Walter Wolf, 'helyare'.	
Walter Burgh.	Walter Burgh.	Walter Burgh.
John Sopham	John Sopham	John Sopham
Thomas Grene		
	Hugh Mareys	Hugh Mareys
	Walter Ruddok.	
	Thomas Parker.	Thomas Parker.
		Wm. Crich.
		Wm. Tomere.
		Thos. Asshull.
		John Sely.
		John Conk.
		Humphrey Plomer.
		Walter Taillour.
		John Henton.
		Wm. Tannere.
		John Someryng
		Thos. Engelby
		Adam Brugge.
		Walter Bakere

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By

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These lists have a real importance for us in our attempt to understand the problem. I have therefore set them forth clearly and in full. To anyone acquainted with the contemporary local documents it is at once obvious that these people were not the riff-raff of the town, who might he expected to run together at the least disturbance and enter wholeheartedly into a riot. Who then were they?

The first and second lists, containing each seventeen names, are identical in persons and order, except that in the second list there are three substitutes. Blacche, Saltere, Sopham and Mareys are all important burgesses. The third list differs considerably, and a group of most prominent burgesses appears in it, Criche, Plomer, Sely, Tomere and Tannere are among the foremost men of the town. Here for the first time appears the name of Thomas Ingleby {variously spelt Engelby, Engilby, Ingilby or Ingylby), who is to take so conspicuous a part, as well as that of his colleague, Adam Brugge.

That the Master and brethren were considerable landlords must not be forgotten, and in these days of general dissatisfaction among those who worked on the land, it is quite probable that their tenants and villains may have been on the verge of mutiny. Here we may be touching one of the causes of the Bridgwater riot. Ham or Hamp and Haygrove are neighbouring hamlets without the borough but within the parish. That Mogge and Hoghes were drawn into the quarrel by the prospect of a free warren seems just possible.

It is not only with the townsfolk that the Hospital appears to have been embroiled. The appointment of yet another commission of over and terminer, October 24, 1380,¹¹ points directly to a quarrel with one of the lords of the town, Maud Mortimer and Eve de Cantilupe, great-granddaughters of William Briwer had divided the fee-farm between them, a third going to Maud, and two-thirds to her sister. The smaller portion with the Castle was being handed down through succeeding generations to the house of York; the larger had now reached the family of La Zouche, It is William la Zouche who complains that certain persons have prevented his steward from holding his court of view of frank-pledge and levying the profits. He accuses them also of trespassing on the rights of his lordship in other ways. The defendants are William Cammel and three of his brethren, named Sir Baldwin

Malet of Enmore; John and Michael of Sydenham (meaning probably John Michael of Sydenham¹¹); John son of Simon, Michael of Purye [which should surety read " John, son of Simon Michael¹² of Purye" *i.e.* Perry]; Hugh Goldsmyth, John Gerveys chaplain, Wm. Hole, 'chaumberlayn' Wm. Webbe of Bruggewater, and others.

In the spring of the following year, 24th March 1381, some of the persons against whom Wm. la Zouche had lodged his complaint appear in another suit. John Blake, a clerk, whom we shall find later arraigned as a ringleader in the riots, had alleged threats on the part of the Master (here styled Gammel), Richard Chedeseye, one of the three brethren associated with him in Wm. la Zouche's charge, Roger Gelhampton, Wm. Chamberlain, whom we may identify with Wm, Hole,"chaumberleyn" Richard Fardell, John Palfreyman, Wm, Webbe, who was also in the Master's company, and Thomas Duffeld, clerk, who suffered the loss of his house in the riot. This suit was set aside by a writ of supersedas and the defendants were thus rid of the action.¹⁴

These two actions seem to show a certain setting of parties in Bridgwater, and though Wm. la Zouehe's part is not clear, I have thought it well to record them here. Possibly the lord of the town felt that the Master was getting out of hand, and, like the burgesses, concluded that he needed to be brought under control. We shall see later that Sir Wm. Cogan, the lord of Huntspill manor, was also accused of siding with the rebels in their attacks on the religious house, although he had been one of the commissioners¹⁵ appointed on October 24, 1380, to investigate the Master's complaint.

Nicholas Frompton, or .Frampton, the vicar of Bridgwater, now comes on to the scene. It has been suggested that he was a provisor to whom the Pope had given the vicarage¹⁶ and it has been denied on insufficient grounds that he ever was vicar!¹⁷ Apparently he had been outlawed, possibly for not answering to a summons, and the esehcator in Somerset, who had seized the spiritualities as well as the temporalities of the vicarage, was on April 10th directed to meddle no further with the spiritualities while keeping the temporalities in his hand until further order,¹⁸

Meanwhile the warden of Ilchester gaol, Hugh Lavenham, who will also figure in the story, had been indicted for divers felonies,

By

T. Bruce Dilks, B. A. F. R. HIST. S.

Proceedings. Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, LXXIII, 73, (1927), pp 57ff

and on the 28th of May a commission of over and terminer was appointed to hear his case. 19

To sum up the position of affairs in the borough at the end of May. We seem to have two parties, a clerical and an anticlerical. On the one side are ranged the Master and brethren of the Hospital, with their lawyers and servants, and some sympathisers among the burgesses. The Master is the most important ecclesiastic in the town, The Hospital is a considerable landowner within and without the borough. In its hands are the advowsons of the parish church, of Wembdon, and of other livings in Somerset and Cornwall The Brethren also serve the chapel in the Castle. Altogether they are in a position where it is easy to become unpopular, and especially in these days of upheaval in the agricultural world.

On the other side, a number of burgesses, including some of the most prominent in the borough, at the bottom of whose discontent may have been bonds held by the Master; the provisor vicar, who is regarded by the Hospital as a rank outsider and intruder; a lord of the town, whose rights have been infringed; the lord of a neighbouring manor, whose interest in the matter is outside our knowledge; and certain men living in hamlets without the borough, who may have been tenants of the Hospital.

Thus we reach June, the month which was to witness the terrible risings in Kent and Essex. The complex of unrest which had been underlying the life of the people since the grim days of the Black Death now broke out in sporadic rioting, east, north and west. The main story is well known and may be read elsewhere, but for us there are two occurrences to be borne in mind while we read the Bridgwater story. It was on Saturday the 15th of June that the culmination in London was reached and Wat Tyler slain at Smithfield. On the same day the revolt of the burgesses of St. Albans against the Abbot had been at its worst, but had died out on the Sunday.

On the following Wednesday, June the 19th, Bridgwater was the scene of an outbreak 20 very similar to that which had taken place in St. Albans. Once more the Hospital of S. John the Baptist was the objective of the insurgents. The names of those taking part in the attack are unknown to us with the exception of Thomas Ingleby, the leader of the mob, with whom is

associated Adam Brugge "with others". Nicholas Frompton's name is mentioned in such a way that we may suppose him to have been present, but not certainly, for an order for his arrest was given in London the very next day. ²¹ One other name, that of John Blake, "scryveyn" stands between those of Frompton and Ingleby in the mandate to the mayor and sheriffs of London for their arrest. ²² It will be remembered that both Ingleby and Brugge had been indicted eleven months before.

The chief open space within the .town walls was the Cornhill, on one side of which frowned the ramparts of the Castle, while fish and flesh-shambles lay on the W., and the E. stile of the church on the S. W. Here we may picture the crowd of burgesses grouped on that warm summer morning about the picturesque market-cross, from the steps of which Ingleby was haranguing them, adding fuel to the fire of their passions, and stirring them to further violence. Possibly the vicar was also there, using the language of the Hebrew prophets and the imprecatory psalms to drive his hearers to the deeds which followed.

Then the crowd .stirred and a movement began toward the East Gate of the town. With the rudely-coloured banner displaying the royal arms—vexillis nostris extenus ²³ spreading in the breeze before them, the mob passed excitedly down the street skirting the Castle moat, crossed the decaying bridge soon to be replaced by Sir John Trevet's structure, and noisily approached through Eastover the doors of the hated Hospital. Here their demands were located Their numbers and armed strength were such that it was impossible for William Cammel to do anything but yield to their threats of personal violence and arson. First, he handed over to Ingleby the bonds he held against the men of the town, binding them to certain conditions which have not come down to us. Next, he released to Nicholas Frompton all rights and profits as 'rector' of the church, except corn in sheaf and hay. This reservation of the great tithes suggests that it was only the small tithes that Nicholas now received, and these were of course due to him if he were the recognised vicar. Lastly, in order to maintain his personal freedom and to save his own life and the lives of the brethren, the Master paid. Thomas a fine of 200 marks. These acts of capitulation seem to have satisfied the insurgents and they turned their unpleasant

4

Ву

T. Bruce Dilks, B. A. F. R. HIST. S.

Proceedings. Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, LXXIII, 73, (1927), pp 57ff

attentions from the Hospital and its inmates to an individual burgess, who for some reason had incurred their anger, John Sydenham of Bridgwater.

Sydenham, the manor from which John took his name, and which is the original home of a now widespread and distinguished family, lies at a short distance from Bridgwater on the road to Glastonbury, It was in its pleasant grounds that the episode which, I am trying to recall was so recently summoned from the past by the pageant players. John had property here as well as in the borough where he lived, and was called of 'Bridgwater' to distinguish him from his contemporary, John Sydenham of Sydenham.²⁴ Later he hold the distinguished office of seneschal of the Gild Merchant, and at one time was verderer of North Petherton forest. 25 On him the mob now turned its fury. They wrecked his houses and stole goods and chattels to the value of £100, a very large sum for those days. It appears that at that time Sydenham had in his dwelling -house in safe custody, not only his own title-deeds but the court-rolls of Sir James de Audley and of John Cole, who was perhaps the chief burgess of this period. These parchments, declared the prosecution, Ingleby took and burned after tearing off and carrying away the seals.

Thomas Duffeld, the clerk, was a man of importance In the town. He held property in Penel Street 26 and without North Gate27; he acted in the courts spiritual on behalf of the chantry of St. Mary; he had been one of the four executors of the will of Robert Plumpton²⁸ the chief burgess during the latter part of Edward III's long reign. In fact he would seem to have been the leading lawyer in Bridgwater. We have already seen him associated with the Master and brethren in John Blach's charge. It was on Duffeld that the mob next turned, and in their fury wrecked a tenement of his and burnt it to the ground. So far no blood had been shed in this grim quarrel, but the day was not to pass unstained by foul murder. Thomas Ingleby now marched his followers down the W. side of the river to the vill of East Chilton, one of the divisions of the manor of Chilton Trinity, and there attacked the house of Walter Baron, which with goods and chattels including his corn the mob burned, and returned to the town carrying in triumph on a pike before them the head of their victim.

During Thursday the passion of the rioters smouldered, but the next day it broke

out again though its force was no longer directed against any of the people of Bridgwater, The old town of Ilchester lies at the heart of Somerset at a point where important Roman roads meet each other. It was, though; small, the central and perhaps chief borough of the county and the county gaol was there, then and for long afterwards. At that time one of the prisoners lodged behind its bars was Hugh Lavenham, who, it will he remembered, had quite recently been its warden, and, at the end of the previous month, had been indicted for certain felonies

What those felonies were we do not know, but for some reason Hugh was in the bad books of Ingleby. Toward Ilchester Thomas now turned his steps, calling at Long Sutton on the way, and hailing thence John Bursy to accompany him, willy-nilly, on his errand of vengeance. Arrived at the gaol, he succeeded in breaking it open, dragged forth the unhappy ex-warden, and careless of the sanctity of the royal ward wherein the prisoner lay, called on Bursy to slay him forthwith. This bidding, Bursy, under compulsion as he afterwards alleged, carried out. The dead man's head was stuck on a pike, carried by Bursy to Bridgwater and there placed beside that of Walter Baron, on the Great Bridge, for the terror of all beholders.

This, so far we know, was the end of the insurrection in Bridgwater and Somerset. Throughout the country authority was quickly restored, and while some at least of the insurgents suffered grievous punishment, the government exercised a wise clemency which bore good fruit. But how fared Bridgwater and the chief actors in these scenes!

On the following Sunday the borough was proclaimed³¹ in company with Hull, Beverley, Scarborough and Newcastle-on-Tyne, and when the policy of a general amnesty was declared, Parliament excepted *en bloc* the inhabitants of Canterbury, Cambridge, Bridgwater, Bury, Beverley and Scarborough.³² Later this system, of general punishment was renounced. Only against Bury the king continued to maintain it.

Frompton, who had been outlawed, was pardoned his outlawry on surrendering at the Marshalsea prison in London, l5th February 1382, 33 and the day after received a pardon for all crimes committed during the insurrection. 34 In this document he is described as vicar of the church of Bridgwater

By

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and he held that office at least up to July 1383, when his name appears as 'perpetual vicar' in a Bridgwater will.³⁵

In September 1381, Thomas Ingleby was still a fugitive, and following a judgment pronounced in July by Peter de Courtenay and his fellow-commissioners, land of an annual value of 40s. and farm, produce and stock to the value of 50s. belonging to the accused were confiscated.³⁶ Three years later Ingleby's forfeited lands were granted to Robert Kyngman, one of the yeomen of the pantry, to a value not exceeding 60s. He was to account at the Exchequer for any surplus.³⁷ Ingleby obtained his pardon in March 1383,³⁸ and four months later we find him in possession of the King's protection in order that he may go to Ireland on the royal service in the company of Philip de Courtenay.³⁹ Within a year he has returned and is not preparing to go again, but remains in Somerset on his own affairs, as certified by the Sheriff. 40 Once more we find mention of him now living in peace and quietness close to the church stile and fined a penny for allowing a waste-heap to accumulate opposite his burgage to the serious annoyance of the passers by !41

The Master of the Hospital, William Cammel, who had lived through these tempestuous times, did not long survive them. He seems to have died in 1385, for on May 8th of that year a licence was granted to choose his successor.⁴²

We have spoken briefly of Sir Wm. Cogan as an abettor of the riotous burgesses. It was in. Nov. 1381 that Richard of Clevedon caused a dramatic scene in Parliament by his open accusation that Sir William had been associated with the rebels in pillaging the Hospital. He offered to back his word in a trial by battle and refused the verdict of jurors, for said he, "Sir William is a rich man, and I am poor, and an enquiry could not prove unfavourable to the said William ". He placed his challenge not in the hands of his fellow countrymen, but in the hands of God! The lord of Huntspill, however, preferred a jury. 43

There are two records among the Bridgwater archives which may possibly have reference to the troubles of June 1381. On the 12th of January 1382 we find Nicholas Someryng, master of a "craer" called the *Marie*, finding sureties. He was under arrest for having attempted to kill John Sydenham of Bridgwater. 44 It seems not at all unlikely

that this is a sequel of the attack in June.

In March 1382, the escheator of Somerset and Dorset restored to John Bursy and William Thomer of Bridgwater a "crayher" called the "cog *Jon,*" and three lasts of herring, which, he had seized. ⁴⁵ Whether this Bursy is the unwilling murderer of Hugh Lavenham, and whether this seizure had been made on the outlawry of John and Thomas we do not know. It is possible that they had been fugitives and had now received pardons from the King.

Such then is the documentary evidence so far as I have been able to discover it, and such are the incidents as they are recorded. With these facts before us is it possible to come to any satisfactory conclusion on the question which I put forward at the beginning of this note? If anyone will read the account of the rising of the burgesses of St. Albans⁴⁶ .which was certainly linked up with the rebellion in London, he will find a strong resemblance to that of the burgesses of Bridgwater. In. both towns an attack was made on ecclesiastical landlords. In both, the royal banner was carried as a sign that the insurgents remained loyal to the crown, though in rebellion against the local authority. In both title-deeds and court-rolls were destroyed. In both, clerks' houses were burned. In both districts prisons were broken, captives released and summary justice executed on such as the rioters deemed deserving of punishment. And, not least important, Bridgwater was among the first of the towns to be proclaimed and among the last to be pardoned for their share in the Insurrection.

The agreement seems to me pronounced, and I think it has been made fairly clear that the rising at Bridgwater was truly a part of the wide general upheaval.

End notes

- 1) Oman, Great Revolt of 1381, p, 140,
- 2) Oman, *Political History of England*,. vol. iv, p, 60,
- 3) Powell, Ancient Borough of Bridgwater, p. 10
- 4) It is said to be of St Augustine in a charter of Henry VI's time (Dugd. Mon. vi. 662
- 5) *Som. Rec. Soc.* Vol. I, p.240 (Reg. Drok. : 1325
- 6) Cat Pat. Rolls,,1377-1381, p. 460,
- 7) Holmes says he resigned in the previous year, quoting *Pat. Rolls*, 1377-81, p, 816 (*Som, County Hist* ii, 1657).
- 8) Cal, Pat Rolls, 1377-8I, p, 458,

Ву

T. Bruce Dilks, B. A. F. R. HIST. S.

Proceedings. Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, LXXIII, 73, (1927), pp 57ff

9) Ibid, p. 587/

- 10) Ibid p.576
- 11) Cat, Pat. Rolls, 1377-81, p. 370.
- 12) Bridgwater Borough Archives, 54 et. al
- 13) Proc. Som. Arch. Soc. vol. lxiv, p. 59
- 14) Close Rolls, Ric II, vol. i, pp 504-5
- 15) Pat. Rolls, 1377-81, p 570
- 16) Petit-Dutallis, Intro. to Réville: Le

Soulèvemant des travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381, p. cix

- 17) Powell, Ancient Borough of Bridgwater, p, 100.
- 18) Close Rolls Ric. II, vol. i. p. 447.
- 19) Pal Rolls, 4 Ric. II, Pt, 3, p. 22
- 20) Cal Pat Rolls, 6 Ric, II, Pt. 3, p. 210; and more fully in the Latin Réville, pp. 283-4.
- 21) Ibid, 4 Ric. II, Pt. 3, p. 23.
- 22) Ibid, 4 Ric. II, Pt. 1, p. 74.
- 23) Réville, p. 283
- 24) B. B. A., 942, where the two names are together.
- 25) Ibid. 940
- 26) Close Rolls, Ric II, vol. ii, p[. 493
- 27) B.B.A., 340.
- 28) Ibid. 364.
- 29) Ibid. 24.
- 30) Ibid. 651/
- 31) Pat Rolls, 23 June 1381.
- 32) *Rot. Parl* iii 103, § 32; 118, § 96, in note 6 of *Petit-Dutalis*, p. cxxiii.
- 33) Pat Roll, 5 Ric. II, Pt, 2, pp. 96-97.
- 34) Ibid. 5 *Ric II*, Pt, 2, p. 95. In Latin more fully: *Réville*, pp. 202-3.
- 35) B.B.A. 738.
- 36) *Réville*, 'p. 283. Eschaetors' inquisition, Som. & Dors. 3-5 Ric. II. Will. Style esch.
- 37) Pat. Rolls, 8 Ric. II, Pt. 1, p. 466.
- 38) Ibid. 6 Ric. II, Pt. 3, p. 270
- 39) Ibid. 7 Ric. II, Pt. I, p. 290.
- 40) Ibid. 7 Ric. II, Pt. 2, p. 408.
- 41) B.B.A. 54.
- 42) Pat. Rolls, 8 Ric. II, Pt. I, p. 562.
- 43) Petit-Dutalis p. cxx, note 2 from Rot. Parl,
- iii, 105-106, §§ 43 and 44.
- 44) B.B.A. 916.
- 45) B.B.A. 413.
- 46) Réville, pp. 5-31.

Edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich, 07/10/2019.

7