

JUST ANOTHER DAY IN CHANCERY LANE: DISORDER AND THE LAW IN
LONDON'S LEGAL QUARTER IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Scarcely any turbulence, quarrels or disturbance ever occur there, but delinquents are punished with no other punishment than expulsion from communion with their society, which is a penalty they fear more than criminals elsewhere fear imprisonment and fetters. For a man once expelled from one of these societies is never received into the fellowship of any other of those societies. Hence the peace is unbroken and the conversation of all of them is as the friendship of united folk.¹

This was Sir John Fortescue's idealised account to the exiled prince of Wales, Edward of Lancaster, of the peace-loving nature of London's Inns of Court and Chancery in the mid-fifteenth century. Fortescue was not concerned with the reality, which, as he knew all too well, was different. He was concerned to impress upon his young pupil the perfection of the English law and of the education of its practitioners, rather than the imperfections that existed in a society that the Prince, as he explicitly told him, would never experience. Few who were familiar with the legal quarter that surrounded the Inns would have recognised the Arcadia Fortescue described. Far from being the peaceful and well-ordered district the former chief justice invoked, in the period when he wrote the area to the west of London's Temple Bar was a liminal space, populated by--among others--large numbers of young trainee lawyers, in which the kind of unruly behaviour otherwise also associated with the early universities, not least the western suburb's Paris counterpart, the quartier latin to the south of the river

Seine, was endemic.² Among the factors that made it so, the very existence of the established and to some extent tribal all-male societies of the Inns of Court and of Chancery, at close quarters with the royal law-courts and their heady mix of disputants and their hired legal counsellors in permanent competition with each other, was of the first importance.

Contemporaries were less than anxious to describe this state of affairs. In the day of London's earliest apologist, the twelfth-century cleric William FitzStephen, the western suburb had not yet become the home of the legal community, but even FitzStephen's fourteenth-century copyist, the London embroiderer Thomas Carleton, considered them insufficiently important to include them among his updates to the Description.³ The fifteenth-century satirical poem, the London Lickpenny, mercilessly mocked the venality of the men of law, and marked out Westminster Hall as a haunt of cutpurses, but otherwise had nothing to say about the district to the west of the city that housed the targets of the author's acerbic wit.⁴ Nor did outsiders who visited London in the medieval period take much notice of the district through which they presumably passed when making their way from one of the city's principal attractions, St. Paul's cathedral, to another popular destination, the royal abbey at Westminster.⁵ Even to the Elizabethan antiquary and surveyor of London, John Stow, the area was more notable for the fine aristocratic town houses in the Strand which formed the district's southern border than for the law-schools, or the unruliness of their members.⁶ Yet, in Stow's own day the area around St. Clement Danes enjoyed a distinctly poor reputation, suffering from "frequent Disturbances, by reason of the Unthrifths of the Inns of Chancery, who were so unruly a Nights, walking about to the Disturbance and Danger of such as passed along the Streets that the Inhabitants were fain to keep Watches."⁷ The modern historiography of the district has by and large

tended to follow a similar pattern. Where there have been some notable studies of the unruly character of the legal district in the early modern period, some of which have explicitly pointed to the inns of court and their over-zealous defence of their immunities as a contributing factor,⁸ there is to date no similar body of literature for the medieval period, some useful observations by scholars including Frank Rexroth and Barbara Hanawalt notwithstanding.⁹ Equally, while there is an extensive literature on the disorder generally associated with the mid-fifteenth century, the historiography focuses above all on the further-flung parts of the realm,¹⁰ while studies of the capital keep their gaze firmly on the activities of the ruling elite within the city walls.

Undeniably, the available evidence for disorder in London's legal district is problematic. The principal sources available in the absence of further narrative accounts or descriptions, the records of the law courts, do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis, as much on account of the bulk and formulaic nature of the records of the royal courts at Westminster, as for lack of more than isolated survivals of documentation from the courts of the multiple inferior jurisdictions which overlapped in the space concerned.¹¹ The historian is thus forced to rely on a qualitative approach, and anecdotal examples of disorder mirroring events from later centuries are readily found for the medieval period.¹² In the fourteenth century there were periodic riots caused by or involving "apprentices of the bench", in 1441-2 and 1459 there were large-scale clashes between lawyers and London citizens,¹³ and it is also worth noting that Sir John Oldcastle's rising against Henry V in 1413 centred on the north-western suburbs of Clerkenwell and Smithfield.¹⁴ At other times, there were more localized instances of street fighting, house breaking, and even murder.¹⁵ An exceptionally well-evidenced case study dating from the autumn of 1452 serves to demonstrate not only that in Fortescue's day London's legal district suffered from

disturbances similar to those recorded in later centuries, but also highlights some of the factors that brought about this state of affairs, and is thus suggestive of trends that would repay further examination by historians. Beyond its significance for the history of London's legal district and community, the case is of wider interest on account of its background in the political history of the mid-fifteenth century, and of what is known of the later fortunes of the protagonists, not least from the famous correspondence of the East Anglian Paston family. The records of the case are now preserved among those of the court of Chancery in the National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office), Kew. The events they describe represented an early episode in a protracted quarrel between a Lincoln's Inn lawyer of East Anglian origins, Thomas Denys, and several members of a Norwich merchant family, the Inghams. The dispute would rumble on throughout the troubled 1450s, and only be brought to a conclusion by Denys's brutal, but ironically unconnected, murder at the hands of a group of common criminals in the summer of 1461.¹⁶

I

The man at the heart of the story, Thomas Denys, otherwise also known as Spademan, was exceptional only in how unexceptional he was.¹⁷ His career provides a textbook example of the lives of the class of upwardly mobile men, in Colin Richmond's terms, "on the margins of gentility",¹⁸ who secured their advancement by virtue of some rudimentary legal training, and divided their time between the Westminster courts and their localities, serving as legal counsel to the regional gentry and nobility, and providing an important element of professional expertise to the lower echelons of the Crown's administration in the locality, as county coroners, undersheriffs and sub-

escheators, clerks of the peace and of the assizes. Such a man was Thomas Denys. Educated at Lincoln's Inn from 1421, he held office as a coroner in Norfolk, but was also active in the service of Sir John Fastolf, and, by 1441, of John de Vere, earl of Oxford. As a consequence of some of the events discussed in what follows, the earl subsequently withdrew his patronage, and after a series of dalliances with alternative patrons, including John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk, the notorious Lancastrian courtier Thomas Daniell and even the great Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, in whose army Denys fought both in the successful engagement at Northampton in 1460, and the less successful one at St. Albans eight months later, the lawyer found himself short of a patron in the troubled first summer of Edward IV's reign, when he met his violent death.¹⁹

At the root of the whole affair was a woman. The well-known Paston correspondence sheds some light on Thomas's matrimonial adventures. In a letter dated 17 May, probably in 1452, the earl of Oxford informed his client, John Paston, that he had "and long tyme haf had the seruice of Thomas Denyes", but that "the love and effeccion which he hath to a gentilwoman not ferre from yow ... causith hym alwey to desire to your cuntré rather than toward such ocupacion as is behovefull to vs".²⁰ The letter is in Denys's own hand, and Colin Richmond has suggested that he may have composed it himself, although the tone is perhaps more reminiscent of the dictation of an amused lord rather than that of a playful servant.²¹ The letter is undated and has been in the past assigned to 1450 on the basis of a supposed connexion with another, more securely datable letter relating to Denys's love life, but it seems clear that this concerns another lady.²² The letter of 17 May therefore more plausibly dates from 1452 and relates to Agnes, widow of Thomas Ingham junior; it is known that Oxford and Paston were involved in Denys's wooing of Agnes from another letter,

this time from John Paston to the earl of Oxford in 1454 in which he asked his master to

remembre sche was maried be you and be my meanes, be your comaundement and writyng, and draw therto full sore ageyn her entent in the begynnyge; and was worth 500 marc and better, and shuld have had a gentilman of this contre of a 100 marc of lond and wele born, ne had be your gode Lordshep and writyng to here and me.²³

This was clearly not a love match, at least on Agnes's part, but a reward arranged by Oxford through his associate Paston for an established servant. That the earl took the trouble was a result of Denys's usefulness as an agent, acting as de Vere's feodary in collecting feudal dues in 1441, in London on the earl's business in 1442-3 and at least occasionally as his secretary.²⁴

While ostensibly a good catch for an at best middling gentleman (Denys was variously described as yeoman alias gentleman alias esquire in a government document of 1454), Agnes was encumbered not only by her children by Thomas Ingham, but by a substantial debt.²⁵ Thomas Ingham the younger was the son of another Thomas (d.1457), a mercer, twice mayor and three times member of parliament for Norwich.²⁶ The younger Thomas had a little property settled on him and was also a mercer, but it seems likely that Thomas senior controlled most of the family wealth.²⁷ The father later alleged that he had extended a loan to his son, not all of which had been repaid by the time the younger Thomas predeceased his father at some date before 10 February 1452, the day on which probate of his will was granted. The will was dated 4 November 1451 and named his wife Agnes, Thomas senior,

Thomas Grene (Agnes's brother), a gentleman from Great Yarmouth, and Nicholas Ingham, the testator's own brother, as his executors.²⁸ While the will stipulated in general terms that his "detts [be] payed and odyr wronge compleyned satisfyed", it did not make specific mention of any debt to his father.²⁹

The subsequent debt case in the court of Chancery and the several violent episodes reported there, in the court of Common Pleas and before the Lords in Parliament all arose from this alleged paternal loan. About eight months elapsed between Thomas junior's death and the start of legal proceedings in Chancery. The elder Thomas Ingham's initial bill can be dated by the resulting writ of sub poena to October 1452. The records of the debt case comprise a series of bills, answers, replications and rejoinders, standard in form and procedure, both well-established in the court of Chancery by this date, but unusual in the survival of so many documents for one case.³⁰ In his petition to the Chancellor, Ingham stated that he had lent to his son 1000 marks (£666 13s. 4d.) in money and goods.³¹ Of this, he had forgiven Thomas junior 200 marks (£133 6s. 8d.) of the debt, and much of the rest had been repaid, leaving a total of £261 13s. 4d. owing. By making him an executor of his will, so Thomas senior claimed, his son had intended that he should content himself of the debt from his goods and chattels "without seute of any accyon". While this may indeed have been Thomas junior's intention, it was not made explicit in the will, which both sides in the dispute cited freely in evidence, even though it did not actually support either claim. However, so the elder Thomas continued, his son's widow Agnes "ymagynynge to defraud your seid besecher of his seid dette", had given all Thomas junior's goods and chattels to Thomas Denys (whom she had married in the interim) and other unnamed persons, thus leaving her erstwhile father-in-law no alternative but to seek redress in Chancery.

Agnes and her new husband Denys unsurprisingly told a different story. According to their version of events the two Thomas Inghams, father and son, had made a bargain and agreement that Thomas senior would lend £300 to Thomas junior for the term of six years, at the end of which the initial loan and a further £300 “for the lone and lendyng” should have been repaid, which was “vsure”.³² Thomas junior had repaid the initial £300 and £65 of the ruinous interest, but could not pay his father the rest; another bargain was struck, under which Thomas agreed to pay the remaining £235, as well as a further forty marks, over the next thirteen years, bringing the total debt to £261 13s. 4d. Thomas and Agnes further alleged that in his will Thomas junior showed “full grete repentance for þe seid vsure”; if this was so, the repentance was expressed verbally and perhaps *in extremis*: it was certainly not made explicit in Ingham’s written will, as no debt is specifically mentioned, “usury” does not appear in the will, and Thomas’s religious bequests were of a conventional nature and not linked to any specific act of which he repented. However, once Thomas junior was dead, his brother Nicholas had by their father’s command seized goods and chattels to the value of £260 from his estate and used them for the settlement of the outstanding debt to the father. All of this Thomas and Agnes were prepared to prove, and asked to be dismissed from the court with their reasonable costs and damages for their “wrongfull vexacion in this behalf”.

Thomas senior’s response was predictable. He denied the accusation of usury, and thus rejected a possible diversion of the case to the church courts, which alone could determine that charge. Repeating his claim that the £260 owed was parcel of the 1,000 marks that he had lent his son, Thomas senior stated that he had agreed with Agnes that if the debt had not been paid, he could take possession of his son’s Norwich house; furthermore, Agnes and her brother and co-executor Thomas Green

had offered to him a choice of the debts owing to the younger Thomas to the total value of £200, but as “nought [were] sufficient to content yowre said besecher he wold in no wyse a gree to stond to tham”.³³ It was the question of these two agreements--relating to the Norwich house and the choice of debts--that formed the basis of the articles over which Agnes was examined in the Rolls Chapel in the old Domus Conversorum in Chancery Lane before John Derby, one of the masters of Chancery, on 21 November 1452.³⁴ In spite of Thomas senior’s repeated insistence that he could show the documents in question to prove their existence, Agnes flatly denied both agreements.³⁵

Additionally, Denys and Agnes issued a rejoinder to Thomas senior’s replication, reiterating that Thomas junior had repaid his father £365 (£300 the repayment of the loan, and £65 in usurious interest) and asked for the case to proceed to judgement on that basis.³⁶ Denys also added that it had been perfectly lawful for Agnes to give all of her former husband’s goods to him before they were wed, and that, as Thomas senior had “ministred as executour” for a “long tyme before ony gyfft”, he could not have been defrauded, for if he had not “satisfyed hym selff, it must be demed his foly and no desceyte”. At some stage of the process, perhaps at the time of Agnes’s interrogation in November 1452, Denys, while personally present in Chancery, made a formal offer of a settlement, signed and written rather untidily in his own hand. He agreed that if Thomas Ingham senior came in person into court, accompanied by two aldermen of Norwich prepared to swear that he had lent more than £300 to Thomas junior, and if he himself could not prove that Thomas senior had received £260³⁷ of the goods of Thomas junior by the hands of Nicholas Ingham, he would repay the said £260.³⁸

The matter had now, by the process of bill, answer, replication, rejoinder and interrogatory, boiled down to the question of whether the £260 had been repaid or not. What has not survived to help analyse the conflicting claims and counter claims of the two parties are any witness depositions, any surviving evidence actually shown (and not just promised to be shown) to the court to support statements made, and any evidence of a judgement in the case.³⁹ Subsequent events, and perhaps also Denys's original offer, would suggest that if a judgement was made, it was probably in favour of Thomas senior or, if it was still pending, Denys did not think much of his chances. There is some suggestion that the dispute was ongoing in the autumn of 1453, when the younger Thomas Ingham's executors were joint defendants in another debt claim against the testator's estate: the Denyses defaulted, and left the other three executors to answer the case on their own.⁴⁰

What does seem probable, is that when Thomas Ingham junior died he did not have sufficient goods and chattels to cover the debt that he owed his father, which was a significant sum, even though little hint of this is given in his will. Dying fairly young, he had perhaps envisaged that he would have paid off his debts by the time any will was executed and did not foresee the financial difficulties that arose.⁴¹ Had the two sides negotiated instead of litigated, a reasonable agreement might have been reached, but the hostility evident between Denys and the Inghams descended into violence at an early stage of the case.

II

The first blow may have been struck by the Inghams, but the evidence for it is problematic. In Easter term 1457 the earl of Oxford brought a suit in the court of

Common Pleas against Walter Ingham (d.1465), one of Thomas senior's three sons, claiming that on 1 October 1452 Ingham had attacked Thomas Denys at Wivenhoe in Essex, beaten him and left him in fear of his life. For the consequent loss of Denys's services for the period of a year, the earl claimed damages of £1000, a vast sum, far in excess of the damages normally demanded for similar offences.⁴² Beyond this, the pleadings present further problems. The delay of five years in the suing of the writ is suspicious, but would be in keeping either with a minor incident which a magnate could otherwise have settled without recourse to the courts, and which was now being dredged up for vexatious purposes, or even a pure invention with the same intent. Certainly, the date at which the suit was brought corresponds roughly to that of Denys's reconciliation with de Vere after several years in the wilderness, when John de Vere may once more have been prepared to use his superior status to exact revenge on Ingham on his servant's behalf, or at least to frighten him into submission. Equally problematic are the pleaded events and their supposed location, one of the earl of Oxford's principal residences, which echo an attack by Denys on Ingham that demonstrably took place in 1454. One possible explanation for a confrontation between the two at the earlier date would have been the serving of the original writ of sub poena. Such writs were routinely delivered to the recipient by the party who had sued them out, not infrequently sparking bouts of violence, and Ingham, by his own account, had himself procured the writ against Denys. What renders this reading problematic, is the date of the writ, which was not issued until 17 October, more than two weeks after the supposed clash at Wivenhoe.⁴³ Even in these circumstances, an assault on Denys by Ingham, on his own, in the midst of the earl of Oxford's household, of which Denys was a member, at one of the earl's principal residences, seems implausible and highly risky. Finally, it is worth noting that when Denys

appeared in Chancery in late November, none of his associates mentioned either that he was in any way incapacitated, as the earl's suit suggested, or even that he had recently been attacked by Walter Ingham, a fact that would surely have had a bearing on the matter to which they bore witness. Either way, it is clear that the function of the suit was not to extract the impossibly high damages claimed from Walter Ingham. No evidence has come to light to suggest that the earl had any other reason of his own to put pressure on his servant's opponent, and even if he did, his action certainly furthered Denys's interests in pressurising or exacting revenge on Ingham.

The second incident, which occurred on 21 November 1452, and for which we have the statements of several (albeit hardly unbiased) witnesses, is rather better documented. In this instance, it was the examination of Agnes Denys before Master John Derby in the matter of her former husband's debt to his father, that provided the occasion for the confrontation. The Rolls Chapel off Chancery Lane, where the examination took place, was crowded. Among those present were not only John Paston, a servant of the earl of Oxford named Robson,⁴⁴ three important Lincoln's Inn lawyers, William and John Jenney from Norfolk, and William Menwynnek, a Cornishman, but also Walter Ingham and his brother John, and a number of other lawyers from two of the inns of Chancery, Staple Inn and Furnival's Inn. While Agnes's examination was in progress, an argument broke out between the Inghams on the one part, and Thomas Denys and his cousin John Gebon on the other. According to the witnesses' accounts, Walter and John Ingham had arrived with the principal and a following of other men from Staple Inn, and Walter first accosted John Gebon, who was in attendance upon Agnes Denys. When Denys approached to intervene, he was shouldered against the chapel wall by a man from Furnival's Inn called Warcope. The Jenneys intervened to prevent an open affray, and then Derby suspended the

examination until the following day, and commanded the disputants to keep the peace and return home. The Inghams and their associates should have returned north towards Holborn, but pleading an errand in Fleet Street walked south in company with the Jenneys, the Denyses and Gebon following some distance behind. When the Inghams reached Justices' Inn, they claimed to have changed their minds, took their leave of the Jenneys and turned back. They encountered Thomas, Agnes and Gebon near the gate of the Domus Conversorum, where a renewed argument broke out and daggers were drawn. Eventually, Paston, Robson, Menwynnek and the Jenneys, who, hearing the shouting, hurried back and succeeded in separating the parties.

The presence of the witnesses is as interesting as their identity. That John Paston was present is in some ways no surprise--he had a personal connexion with Denys dating from 1449 when the lawyer had advised him in relation to a violent dispute over the manor of Gresham. In 1451 Paston had acted as an arbiter on behalf of Denys, and the lawyer was later to use Paston as a feoffee.⁴⁵ Nor is it surprising that William and John Jenney, close associates of John Paston, and busy Westminster lawyers, were in attendance, and legal practice provides ample reason for Menwynnek's presence. There was, however, a further bond which connected, or would connect, Denys, Paston and the three lawyers: a common tie to a lord, in this case, John de Vere, earl of Oxford. Paston's and Denys's connexions with the earl are well known; William Jenney was a co-feoffee with the earl and a number of his retainers, including Denys, in a transaction of 10 May 1452, and four years later he was named a feoffee in a major settlement of the earl's estates.⁴⁶ If Menwynnek was not already linked with de Vere in the autumn of 1452, he would be within a short time: by 1454 the Cornishman served the earl, probably in a commercial capacity.⁴⁷ Furthermore, they were joined in the Chancery Lane incident by another member of

the earl's circle, the imprecisely named "Robson Squier". While it is thus possible that the three Lincoln's Inn men found themselves in the Rolls Chapel on account of routine business, the presence of Paston and Robson makes it probable that they were also part of a grouping of Oxford's men who had come in support of Denys.

III

In understanding the events of November 1452 the spatial dimension is an important one.⁴⁸ To the modern observer, the area of London around the Aldwych, High Holborn and Chancery Lane, home not only to the law schools of the Inns of Court and of Chancery, but also the royal Courts of Justice, seems to epitomise the concepts of the law and its enforcement. The same was not true for the later middle ages. Although the city walls of London constituted a nominal, rather than an impermeable boundary, the extramural parishes to the west of Ludgate, those of St. Bride, St. Dunstan in the West, St. Clement Danes and St. Andrew Holborn in the ward of Faringdon without, were part of a territory which extended down the Strand to the seat of the royal law courts at Westminster and which formed the preserve, above all, of the professional lawyers. Here men-of-law were concentrated in the same way as other trades or professions were concentrated within the walls. Here trainee lawyers mixed with more experienced men of law in the Inns of Court and of Chancery, Gray's Inn, Staple Inn, Furnival's Inn, Barnard's Inn and Thavie's Inn in Holborn, Lincoln's Inn, Serjeants' Inn and Clifford's Inn on Chancery Lane, the Temple to the south of Fleet Street, and Clement's Inn, New Inn and Lyon's Inn further west on Aldwych Lane, perhaps totalling around 1,100 men in the Inns at any one time.⁴⁹ Here

clients came to seek the services of attorneys and serjeants-at-law, to consult with them, and to hand over fees and other gratuities. Here, also, the officers of the various royal courts interacted with private practitioners away from the bustle of Westminster Hall or the Rolls Chapel. Private letters and accounts frequently refer to the luncheons and drinks to which clients treated their counsel in the local taverns and inns.⁵⁰

Early descriptions of the district outside Temple Bar are, as noted above, rare, and what exists stands in a hagiographical tradition, emphasizing the advantages, rather than the deficiencies of the area.⁵¹ FitzStephen wrote of the “populous suburb” that connected the city of London with the royal palace at Westminster, and the adjoining gardens.⁵² Stow’s late sixteenth-century survey of London likewise depicted a wealthy and pleasant area; Chancery lane was said to possess many “faire houses and large gardens”, whereas Lincoln’s Inn was “lately encreased with fayre buildinges and replenished with Gentlemen studious in the common lawes”.⁵³ There is, in the very failure of these and other accounts to offer a more detailed characterization of the extramural parishes, an indication of the degree to which they were marginal to the city. From this liminal space, the law schools enjoyed a further degree of separation. In his updated version of Stow’s survey, John Strype was at pains to emphasize the Inns’ administrative autonomy, citing Fortescue’s comments on their self-government:

“these Societies are no Corporations, nor have any Judicial Power over their Members; but have certain Orders amongst themselves, which by Consent have the Force of Laws. For slight Offences they are only excommuned, that is, put out of Commons; which is, not to eat with the rest in their Halls: And for greater, they

lose their Chambers, and are expelled the House. And being once expelled, they are not to be admitted by any of the other Three Societies.”⁵⁴

To further emphasize the separateness of the legal community, the Inns (albeit not the surrounding streets), were extraparochial, and even in death many men of law sought burial in one of other of London’s religious houses, rather than a parish church.⁵⁵ Yet, separateness and liminality brought their problems. As we have seen, far from being the paradise Fortescue described to Prince Edward, London’s legal district was the setting for thefts, stabbings and brawls.⁵⁶ This was a state of affairs recognized early by the London authorities, who split in two the large ward of Faringdon, and gave the part outside the city walls its own alderman, as well as one of the largest staffs of ward constables of any London ward. Yet, whereas within fifteenth-century London outbreaks of violence were particularly associated with the apprentices and “young men”, the unruliness of the legal district was not the preserve of the trainee lawyer, but also drew in more established members of the legal community concentrated in the Inns of Court and of Chancery located in Holborn, Chancery Lane, and western Fleet Street. While the inns of Chancery could function as feeders to their associated inn of Court, by and large each individual inn formed a separate association to which its members developed exclusive loyalty, and by which they were identified. There is evidence of this tribal culture in the events of November 1452. William Menwynnek was specific that the Inghams had been accompanied by “the pryncepall of Staple Inne and othre dyuers of his felaship”. Later, Thomas Denys informed him that one of his assailants was one Warcope, of Furnival’s Inn. Similarly, in breaking up the scuffle, William and John Jenney, both Lincoln’s Inn men, asked the Inghams’

supporters to “goo hom in to Holborn to there innes”, that is, they had identified them as belonging to one or other of the inns located there.⁵⁷

While the records of the late medieval lawcourts are not replete with anecdotal tales of the violent misbehaviour of the legal professionals (who, after all, had more cerebral means of browbeating an opponent at their disposal), such narratives are found with sufficient frequency to suggest that physical clashes were common to the culture of the all-male society of the west London law schools. The Chancery Lane scuffle of 1452 aside, disorder resulting from the tribalism of the different inns is visible in incidents in 1447, when the “fellowship” of Clement’s Inn seized and imprisoned on their own premises the assailants of one of their number, in 1462, when the men of Barnard’s Inn dragged off a Holborn resident who had quarrelled with their principal, in an affray in St. Paul’s churchyard at about the same date instigated by John Donne, steward of the Inner Temple, and in 1505, when seven men of Lincoln’s Inn were put out of commons for “watching with swords and clubs in the middle of the night, and having a strife and affray with the Society of Gray’s Inn”.⁵⁸ In the early years of Henry VIII’s reign, so David Woolley has noted, it was commonplace for members of the inns “to attack and insult each other and anyone who tried to remonstrate.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, there is an implicit recognition that there was wrongdoing even in Fortescue’s comments on the punishments meted out to miscreants, and the expectation that even officially sanctioned frivolity might cross the boundaries of the acceptable has recently found reflection in the inclusion by the editors of the Records of Early English Drama for the Inns of Court of a dedicated introductory section on ‘disorder’.⁶⁰ Outside the Inns, it is clear that the law courts themselves were particular hotspots for clashes. While the courts were at pains to take immediate action, disturbances like that of November 1452 in the Rolls Chapel were

at least a periodic occurrence in the crowded and noisy surroundings of Westminster Hall. Among the most dramatic tales of disturbances that came before the courts was that of the attorney Richard Levermore, who recounted how he had been accosted in Westminster Hall by Katharine, the wife of Henry Otway, who had begun to shout at him and had called him “Fals man of lawe, Fals attorney, fals extorcioner, fals embracer, fals maytenour of querels”, and had exclaimed “Y hope to god to se the a honge at Westm[ynstre] Halledore, for fals bribour y shall make a peyre of galous for the there to hong the apon”, before spitting in his face.⁶¹ At other times, parties to disputes and their legal representatives might come to words and even blows,⁶² while the friends and relatives of accused offenders frequently sought to free them by force, even in the presence of the king’s justices.⁶³

Tribal as the individual inns might be, they could act in concert if the legal community as a whole was threatened. Katherine Otway was not alone in her hatred of lawyers; periodically, particularly at times of wider political tension, the ‘men of court’ as a class came under attack. The well-known sacking of the Temple during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 aside,⁶⁴ in 1441-2 there was a night-time clash in Fleet Street between a group of lawyers and some Londoners, apparently stirred up by one Harebottel,⁶⁵ and in the heated political atmosphere of the spring of 1459, as the country stood on the brink of civil war, the lawyers fought a three-hour pitched battle across the western suburb with their Fleet Street neighbours, which claimed a number of lives, including those of two Inner Temple men and the queen’s attorney, as well as five of the men of Fleet Street, while numerous others were injured. Before it could be broken up by the intervention of the lords of the king’s council, Clifford’s Inn was ransacked and much damage done in the Temple.⁶⁶ If Fortescue’s gaze was fixed on the inns themselves, he was perhaps not too far from the truth: the evidence of the

Black Books of Lincoln's Inn suggests that although there were periodic violent clashes between individual members of the inn, the authorities were swift to react and--usually--to suspend the culprits from the community. Nevertheless, in direct contradiction of Fortescue's picture of expulsion from the society as an ultimate and permanent sanction, it was, in fact, both common and usually temporary in nature, and frequently the culprit was soon readmitted on payment of a fine.⁶⁷ By and large, the authorities of the inns restricted themselves to punishing their members for offences committed within the boundaries of the inns: where offenders were taken to task for misdemeanours committed outside, the sanction imposed was often less severe. Thus, a Lincoln's Inn ordinance of November 1489 laid down that any member of the inn found consorting with a woman in the inn should be fined 100s. for each proven instance, whereas anyone caught similarly in the garden or in Chancery Lane should be subject to the lesser fine of 20s.⁶⁸ In the same vein, in the spring of 1484 two men were suspended from Lincoln's Inn for their part in seizing a woman in Fleet Street and keeping her in one of their chambers all night, while in 1506 the lawyer who had broken down the door of the "White Hert" in Holborn by night and had beaten the house-wife, as well as frequenting a brothel in Holborn known as "Johne Hasylykke's Hous" was subject to no more than a fine of 3s. 4d.⁶⁹

The scene of the Chancery Lane incident of November 1452 was the old Domus Conversorum in Chancery Lane and its chapel, which had been assigned to the Keeper of the Rolls of Chancery in 1377.⁷⁰ In itself it represented a liminal space, an exclave of the royal law courts at Westminster: whereas the court of Chancery met in William Rufus's great hall within the bounds of the royal palace there, some of its functions were carried out in Chancery Lane. It was here that the Keeper of the Rolls preserved his records, and it was here, as we have seen, that the

examination of witnesses could be conducted. The scene on the occasion of Agnes Denys's questioning described by the witnesses is itself interesting.⁷¹ The interrogation took place in the Rolls Chapel, while evensong was being celebrated. There was, of course, nothing unusual in the use of sacred spaces for profane matters. Churches and chapels were the largest covered public spaces available in the cramped urban environments of the medieval West, and commonly repaired to for the conduct of various types of business.⁷² The cross at the north door of London's St. Paul's cathedral was a common location for the payment of debts, and elsewhere prominent images could provide useful gathering places, as the "Old Peter" did in Exeter cathedral.⁷³ Witness statements in formal proofs of the age of the heirs of tenants-in-chief (whatever the truth of the specific events they purported to describe) give an indication of the range of activities that could occur in a parish church at any given time.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the attitude of some of the bystanders in the Rolls chapel in November 1452 strikes the modern observer as excessively casual: while evensong (and the interrogation) were in progress, so Menwynnek described, Walter Ingham and his fellows were "walkyng vp and down", while John Paston was standing, leaning against an altar.

IV

Despite the witness statements, it is unclear whether anyone was punished for the scuffle in the street. The debt case between the Denyses and Inghams had not, as far as it is possible to tell, been settled, and presumably continued for an unspecified time beyond it. What certainly continued was the personal vendetta between Thomas

Denys and Walter Ingham. It was Denys who struck the next blow, albeit after a hiatus of over a year, which ongoing litigation in Chancery may perhaps account for. In the last days of 1453 or the first of 1454 Denys wrote a letter in the earl of Oxford's name, but without his consent, to Walter, commanding him to attend on him at the earl's residence at Wivenhoe. Walter did as he was bidden, only to be ambushed and savagely beaten by Denys and his men at Dunston, just south of Norwich, on 12 January 1454. Walter claimed that he was permanently crippled by the attack, though the severity of the beating is questionable.⁷⁵ There is, however, no doubt of the audacity of Denys's actions, nor that the incident occurred roughly as Walter suggested. John Paston, writing to John de Vere on 31 March 1454 in an attempt to quell the earl's justifiable anger, acknowledged that "I know wele that Watere Ingham was bete ... right fowle and shamefully; and also how the seid Thomas Denyes hath this last terme a-geyn your nobill estat, right vn-wysely demened hym to his shame and grettest rebuke ...; where-fore it is right wele do his person be ponysshed as it pleaseth you."⁷⁶ In his petition to parliament Walter claimed that the assault was motivated by the fact that he had "laboured for his fadir in a wrytte sub pena against þe seide Thomas Denys and Anneys his wyf for a notable somme of money þat þe seide Anneys shulde haue payede to þe fadir of your seide besechere".⁷⁷ Had Ingham merely acted for his father in suing out the writ of sub poena, Denys's actions would seem wildly excessive even by the standards of the age. However, the fact that there had already been a violent confrontation in Fleet Street, and perhaps some form of earlier confrontation at Wivenhoe, makes his brutal revenge on his opponent more intelligible.

In the mean time, Denys was arrested as a result of a complaint by Ingham's friends to Chancellor Kemp, and committed to the Fleet prison. While the Fleet prison

was London's principal debtors' prison, it was also used by the Chancellor to commit offenders to ward. The arrest did not go smoothly: when a royal serjeant at arms had first gone to Lincoln's Inn to take Denys, he had "vtterly disobeyed".⁷⁸ Walter Ingham then petitioned the Lords in parliament, rehearsing his story, and asking that Denys be kept in the Fleet, and not be bailed, until he had answered the charges of assault.⁷⁹ Further action was taken against the pregnant Agnes Denys whom the earl and Chancellor Kemp (decried by the indignant Denys as the "cursid Cardenale") threw into Newgate gaol. Denys wrote a plaintive letter about her to Paston from the Fleet on 20 March.⁸⁰ Denys also had further concerns; in a letter to Paston on 8 April, he complained (without a shred of irony) that one Ashcote could imitate his hand and "therfore I drede he wole stele by sum fals letters suyche as he myght gete".⁸¹ Paston was not his only correspondent, however, as he wrote to the duke of Norfolk, and presumably denied responsibility for the action against Ingham, and then accused the mayor of Norwich of acting illegally in entering and searching his house there. The duke, though he stated he was "credibly enformyd", in fact appears credulous when he repeated these accusations in a lordly letter to the aldermen of Norwich:

[endorsed] To oure right trusty and welbelouyed the aldermen and commonalte of the cite of Norwich

The duc of Norff.

Right trusty and welbelouyd we grete you hertly well and for as moche as we be credebile enformyd that nowe of late Walter Ingham of Norwich and his man felle ate debate ate Dunston in the countie of Norff with ii men unknowen and the on of hem bete the seid Walter as it is said for which betynge John Drolle meire of

Norwich toke upon hym to serche the house of Thomas Denyes a seruante of the kyng oure soveryn lorde and made assaute and affray upon his wife she being with child whiche serche so made bothe is a yeyne the lawe of the lande and contreray to your costomes and freedom of youre citie used and approved as it is seid wherof we gretly marveill that he shuld so do. We therfore tenderynge the lawe and youre customes and fredomes pray ye to meve the seid meir to understonde his seid defaute and to do nothinge within your self contrary to youre owne fredoms whereof the example might growe to make your citie of wers condicion that hit hath be herbeforn. And the trinite haue you in his keping. Yeven under oure signet ate London the Xth day of February [1454].

[signed] J Norff⁸²

Norfolk might have regretted this letter once the facts came to light, but it does indicate that Denys was a useful man--wealthier as a result of his marriage, literate and educated enough to act as the earl of Oxford's secretary--and therefore a man for whom Norfolk was initially prepared to act as a good lord with a view to the future possibility of luring him into his service.⁸³ Indeed, although Denys did not end up in Norfolk's service, he appears in that of Sir John Fastolf in June 1455.⁸⁴ Perhaps most surprising, given Oxford's understandable fury at Denys's actions, and his less understandable vindictiveness towards his wife, is that among the feoffees on whom the earl settled the bulk of his lands (as far as it is possible to tell) in 1456 was none other than Thomas Denys.⁸⁵ Moreover, in January 1457 Denys, together with another man, was the beneficiary of a grant by the earl of a cottage and garden at Wivenhoe.⁸⁶ We do not know how much Denys had had to beg for forgiveness, or whether others,

such as Paston, had interceded on his behalf with the earl, but if nothing else, this postscript does show how useful Denys was, and how lords could ill-afford to lose useful servants.

As so often with medieval disputes, their resolution is difficult to trace. It is not clear how or when Thomas was released from prison; we do know he was free by 25 October 1454 when he was in Westminster. This information comes from a revocation of legal protection granted on 21 October 1454 on account of his planned military service in Calais under Sir Gervase Clifton, the treasurer of Calais.⁸⁷ Frustratingly, the revocation notes the letter patent four days earlier granted legal protection against “all pleas and complaints except certain pleas specified in the said letter”; however, that letter patent was not enrolled on the Patent or French Rolls, and the only document found among the warrants for the Great Seal is a generic grant of formal protection, without further details.⁸⁸ The qualification may have arisen from the petition of Ingham who had anticipated his opponent’s tactics: he had asked that Denys be kept in prison, for if he were released “he wolde neuer answeere ... but delay by proteccions and oper weies”.⁸⁹ Clearly Denys had tried this tactic, but the swiftness of the revocation indicates that someone, perhaps Ingham himself, was keeping a close eye on him.

Walter Ingham’s bill received the assent of the Lords, but never passed the Commons, where in any case John Jenney represented Norwich. Within a few years, the events of 1452-54 seem to have been forgiven, if not forgotten. By 1456 Denys was back in the earl of Oxford’s favour, so much so, that the magnate was prepared to proceed against Ingham on his servant’s behalf. By 1461 his standing in Norfolk was such as to allow him to be chosen one of the county coroners. It is all the more ironic that he should have emerged out of his long-running and vicious quarrel with Walter

Ingham unscathed, only to fall victim to a seemingly minor dispute over a stolen horse.⁹⁰

V

The case of the Denys-Ingham quarrel illustrates a number of themes. In its changing settings from Norfolk and Essex to London and Westminster it demonstrates the interaction of lawlessness in the regions with lawlessness in the capital. As disputes were brought before the King's justices, so their appurtenant potential to erupt into physical violence was also transferred to the seat of the law courts. Here, the volatile relations between opponents forced into spatial proximity by the prosecution of actions in the courts combined with the rivalry of the men of law concentrated in the "societies" of the different inns of court and chancery to make London's legal quarter a hotbed for disagreements that could turn violent at the slightest provocation: the involvement of groups of lawyers from different inns of court in the clash between Thomas Denys's party with the Inghams not only hints at the tribalism of the different law schools of the Holborn district, it also suggests some of the ways in which the mere existence of the separate legal community on London's western boundary could act as a catalyst for disorder. The "fellowships" of the different inns were as much a source of trouble as the aristocratic affinities more generally blamed for the wider problems witnessed by mid-fifteenth-century England.⁹¹

Affinity to a law school or learned society aside, other attachments also came into play. While the lawyers assembled with the Denyses in the Rolls Chapel were, like Thomas himself, Lincoln's Inn men, their various connexions with the earl of

Oxford, and their service as learned counsel to one of his valued servants, tied them to varying degrees into his wider retinue, several other members of which were also present. Service to a great lord thus provided a further kind of cement for the factions that threatened the peace on London's western outskirts. "Good lordship" in its most destructive form could become an additional factor in fomenting disorder, and the establishments that most lords maintained in and around London--many, indeed, as we have noted, in the Strand, on the southern outskirts of the legal quarter--ensured that retainers were readily available to support any one of a magnate's clients, should the need arise.⁹² In these circumstances, as the aftermath of the incident in Chancery Lane demonstrates, a quarrel which had begun in the shires could escalate in the crucible of the capital and might then spill back out into the country, there to erupt afresh and more brutally. The legal entanglements of an individual servant could embroil other members of the affinity, and ultimately even the magnate himself. Such interlocking ties of affinity were one of the many difficulties facing a great lord in the period, and--more broadly--the Crown. What remains exceptional about the case of Thomas Denys was his singular audacity in forging his master's letter. If in the medium term the earl found him sufficiently useful a servant to forgive his misdemeanour and once more lend him his support against his enemies, just four years later this was not enough to provide him with protection even from the group of common criminals who--albeit inadvertently--finished the task that the Jenneys had prevented Walter Ingham from carrying out in Chancery Lane in 1452.

APPENDIX:

The witness statements printed below are today preserved among the records of the court of Chancery in the National Archives, Kew. They form part of the proceedings in a dispute over the will of Thomas Ingham the younger initiated by the testator's father, Thomas Ingham the elder, against his son's executors in October 1452. The dispute itself, which was concerned with a debt, is of secondary importance to the events with which this article is concerned, and only the witness statements have been printed below.⁹³ Also included is a related case brought in the court of Common Pleas some years later which has direct bearing on the events discussed here.

In the following, common abbreviations have been silently expanded, capitalization standardised, and a degree of punctuation introduced. The use of v and u and of i and j has been retained as in the originals. Interlinear insertions in the MSS have been indicated by angular brackets (< >), editorial interventions by square brackets ([]).

1. Witness statement of John Paston (C 4/26/3/1)

Md that John Paston <examyned be> ~~desired and required~~ To enforme the mayster of the Rolles of a ryotte mad be certeyn persones at the gate of the conwers in Chauncery Lane the xxj day of Nouembre seyth for trought that where tweyn of the sones of Thomas Ingham of Norwich and other that comyn with hem to the Nombre of vj persones <or more> had fallyn at travers and debate be langage and ~~debate~~ visagyng with oon Thomas Denyes and John Gebon with in the chapelle of the seid conwers For

which debate bothe parties were comaundyd be Mayster John Derby to kepe the peas and ~~that ihe partie~~ to departe vn ther wey After which comaundment the seid sones of the seid Ingham levyng the wey toward Holborn toke the same wey that the seid Denyes and Gebon went <toward> Fletestrete vn <to> that they come at the Justices Jnne and ther returned a geyn til thei met with the seid Denyes and Gebon and there the ~~more~~ <higher> man of the seid sones of the seid Thomas Ingham qwarellyng with the seid Denyes and Gebon drewe his dagere to have smet the seid Gebon where vp vn the seid Gebon drewe his dagere and with that ~~comyn~~ diuers of the seid persones that be fore were with the seid sones of the seid Ingham in the seid chapelle <come> with her dageres drawyn vp vn the seid ~~G~~ Denyes and Gebon. Of which seid persones oon in especyall in a syde gown of a derk colour ~~wil as he sid and as pd he sade~~ whos name the seid Paston knowyth not diuers tymes ~~presyth~~ presid and profered to have stiked the seid Thomas Denyes if he had not be letted. More ouer the seid Paston seth that the seid Thomas Denyes drewe nowther dagere ne knyffe <be> alle the seid tyme.

[Signed:] Jon Paston

[endorsed:] To the Master of the Rollys

2. Witness statement of William Menwynnek (C 4/26/3/2)

Md that William Menwynnek examyned in the Chauncery of affray made in Chaunceler Lane at Gate of the conuers ~~seith in this wise~~ the Tuesday be fore the feste

of seynt Clement the xxxj yeer of Kyng Herry the sext vpon the examinacion of Anneys the wif of Thomas Denyes comyng thedir by a writ sub pena as she said etc.

First the said William seith that he beyng in the chapell of the Rolles theer hapned to sey evynsong with John Paston Esquier lenyng agayn an auter and he seith that Wauter Ingham and John Ingham ~~cam~~ and the pryncepall of Staple Inne and othre dyuers of his felaship to nounbre by liklynesse of xij or xvj persones cam thedir and walkyng ~~to and~~ vp and doun theer the said Wauter Ingham langaged with John Guybon <cosyn to the said Thomas > which cam thedir with the said Anneys <and> quarelyd toward the said Guybon but I herd not the wordes of hem sauf that I saw and herd the said Wauter I make the first steryng and noise vpon the said Guybon. To which the said Thomas Denyes drow hym self ner and one in a blak goun shulderid hym a gayn the chapel wall and gaf hym langage boistous. The said Thomas Denyes said aftirward <his name> was Warcope of Furnyvales Inne and vpon this noise maister John Derby cam away from his examynacion to put the said partyes to silence and peas. Aftir whose comyng out I saw herd and was by whan John Ingham cam to the said Anneys with greet hastinesse and sweryng greet othes said he shuld make the said Anneys to be a wedow with ynne two dayes and ~~after that~~ <therwhiles> the said maister John Derby charged eithre parte to departe and kepe the peeas in peyn of an c li. and at goyng out of the gate the said John Ingham and Wauter Ingham went be fore a grete pace ~~make~~ toward the temple and as the said Thomas Denys and Anneys and John Guybon cam forth oute the same way the said John Ingham and Wauter turned agayn vpon thaym and the said John <Ingham> shulderid the said Guybon goyng with Denys and drowgh his dagger and with that all his said felaship drow their daggers sum of thaym <smet> to <ward> the said Guybon and sum of thaym to the said Denys

and with greet labour ~~thei were~~ of gentilmen comyng by thei wer apesid put of and partid. Subscribed by Willyam Menwynnek

~~By William Men~~²

3. Witness statement of William and John Jenney (C 4/26/3/4)

Md that we William Jenney and John Jenney present at the Rolles in Chaunceler Lane at affray don the Tuysday xxj daij off Nouembre the xxxj^{ti} yere off the Kyng that now is at the examinacion off Anneys wyff off Thomas Denyes examined there by master John Derby vppon certein articles put agein here vppon a writte sub pena depose and sey that in the chapell off the rollis be fore the affraij made in the strete we sawe Walter Ingham, John Ingham comyng in to the chapell off the Conuers walkyng vp and doun in the chapell and many other to the noubre of xij persones and as it semed to vs thei komen wyth the seid Walter and John and with in a lytell while as we stode to gedre comonnyng to geder off certein maters whe sawe and herd well that there was grete langage betwyx the seid Walter Ingham, John Ingham and the other persones on the on partie and the seid Thomas Denyes and on John Gebon on the other partie vppon wheche Thomas Denyes and John Gebon the forseid Ingham and Ingham and the other persones aforseid presed fast too makyng gret countenance and langage semyng at that tyme to vs that there had ben like to a ben agret affraij in the Chapell aforseid. Whereuppon we went to them intreting them to the pees. Whereuppon the seid master John Derby komyng too in tretim also to the pees and be thavyce off vs <the seid> William <Jenney> and John Jenney the seid master John

Derby charging bothe parties on the kynges be halffe vppon greet peinez to kepe the pees Comaunding the seid partiees that they shuld goo hom and that the seid Thomas Denyes and his wyff wyth ij off his lerned counsell and no moo and the seid Ingham and Ingham wyth ij off here lerned counsell and noo moo shuld kome theder a 3en on the next morne next ffolwing ~~aftr~~ at ij off the klokke aftir noone to procede ferthere in the examinacion off the womman forseid whereuppon as wel the seid <Denyes> ~~Denes~~ as we off hes counsell as the seid Ingham and other off his partie departed out at the 3ates and at the 3ates whe the seid William Jenney and John Jenney preyed the seid Ingham and Ingham and alle the other that kome wyth him that they wold goo hom in to Holborn to there innes and that we and the seid Denyes and his wyff shuld goo doun in to Flete strete and so forth to Powles whereuppon at that time the seid Ingham and Ingham and his felawshippe ~~takyng~~ <toke> ther leue of vs ~~and seid they wold goo hom~~ wheruppon John Ingham and a nother of his felashipp walked dounward into Fletstrete, we at that tyme preing hem that they wold goo homward and there ffelashipp to gedre in to Holborn ward that no moo occacions shuld falle be twyx the parties the seid John Ingham and his other ffelawe answerd and seide that they hadde an arden in to Fletstrete and so went dounward wyth vs from the rollis abowte <half a but> ~~aboute~~ lengthe the seid Thomas Denyes and his wyff and John Gebon folwyng vs whereuppon the seid Ingham and his ffelawe sodenly departing froo vs turnyng a 3enward seyng to vs they wold a goo hom toke vs by the handes and whe preyed they wold shewe none occasion in brekyng off the pees and a none forthwyth aftyr oure departing we hering the womman make a gret crie turned a 3en and there we sawe drawn vppon the seid Denyes and Gebon to the noumbre off xij daggers and summe of them presed vppon Denyes and summe vppon Gebon and than John Paston whe the seyde Jenneys Robson Squier and Menwenyk dede all oure deuer

with tretie and holdyng them when they presed to strike that blisshed be God there was noo body by hurt <and> ~~but~~ whils whe letted them the seid Denyes departed.

4. John de Vere (d.1462), earl of Oxford, vs. Walter Ingham (d.1465) of Norwich (CP 40/785, rot. 409d)

Essex, Midd' --Walterus Ingham nuper de Norwico Gentilman attachiatus fuit ad respondendum Johanni, comiti Oxon', de placito quare vi et armis in Thomam Denys, seruientem ipsius comitis apud Wyvenho insultum fecit et ipsum verberauit, vulnerauit et maletractauit et ei tales et tantas minas de vita sua et mutilacione membrorum suorum ibidem imposuit et ipsum tantis iniurijs et grauaminibus ibidem affecit quod idem Thomas circa negocia ipsius comitis ibidem facienda ob metum mortis et mutilacionis huiusmodi per magnum tempus palam intendere non audebat sicque negocia predicta per idem tempus infacta remanserunt ac idem comes seruicium seruientis sui predicti per tempus predictum amisit. Et alia enormia ei intulit ad graue dampnum ipsius comitis. Et contra pacem Regis etc. Et vnde idem comes per Willelmum Pryce, attornatum suum, queritur quod predictus Walterus primo die Octobris anno regni domini Regis nunc tricesimo primo vi et armis scilicet gladijs, arcubus et sagittis in Thomam Denys, seruientem ipsius comitis, apud Wyvenho insultum fecit et ipsum verberauit, vulnerauit et male tractauit et ei tales et tantas minas de vita sua et mutilacione membrorum suorum ibidem imposuit et ipsum tantis iniurijs et grauaminibus, videlicet insultibus et affraijs ibidem affecit quod idem Thomas circa negocia ipsius comitis ibidem facienda, videlicet ad superuidendum maneria ipsius comitis de Nowers et Sutton ac reparaciones eorundem maneriorum

ibidem, necnon boscos ipsius comitis eorundem maneriorum ibidem vendendum, ac gubernacionem hospicij eiusdem comitis ibidem supervidendum ob metum mortis et mutilacionis huiusmodi per magnum tempus, videlicet per vnum annum integrum tunc proximo sequentem palam intendere non audebat sicque negocia predicta per idem tempus intacta remanserunt ac idem comes seruicium seruientis sui predicti per tempus predictum amisit. Et alia enormia etc. Ad graue dampnum etc. et contra pacem Regis etc. Vnde dicit quod deterioratus est et dampnum habet ad valenciam mille librarum. Et inde producit sectam etc.

Et predictus Walterus in propria persona sua venit et defendit vim et iniuriam quando etc. Et petit licenciam inde interloquendi hic vsque in Octabis sancte Trinitatis et habet etc. Idem dies datus est prefato comiti hic etc.

¹ Sir John Fortescue, De Laudibus Legum Anglie, ed. Stanley B. Chrimes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 118-19.

² The importance of the Holborn area in this context is highlighted by Frank Rexroth, Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20-21. More recently, Jayne Archer has gone further, and characterised the early modern district as “a physical and conceptual space ... simultaneously central and marginal in early modern London and the nation more generally”: Jayne E. Archer, “Education, religion, politics, and the law at the early modern Inns of Court,” in The Intellectual and Cultural World of the Early Modern Inns of Court, ed. Jayne E. Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 27-31, at 27-28. On student disorder in the quartier latin see e.g. Bronislaw Geremek, The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 147-58. The most recent study of student-led disorder in medieval university towns and districts is Scot Jenkins, “Medieval Student Violence: Oxford and Bologna, c.1250-1400” (Swansea Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2014), which contains an extensive bibliography of the subject. The concept of the Inns of Court as London’s “university” was first spelled out by Sir George Buck in his treatise “The Third Vniuersitie of England” published in John Stow, The Annales, or Generall Chronicle of England (London, 1615).

³ Hannes Kleineke, “Carleton’s Book: William FitzStephen’s ‘Description of London’ in a late fourteenth-century common-place book,” Historical Research 74 (2001): 117-26, at 119-20 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2281.00120/full>.

⁴ London: A History in Verse, ed. Mark Ford (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2012), 49-53.

⁵ For such descriptions see e.g. Reisebeschreibung Niclas von Popplau, Ritters, bürtig von Breslau, ed. Piotr Radzikowski (Krakow, 1996); The travels of Leo of Rozmital through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, 1465-1467, ed. Malcolm Letts (Cambridge: Hakluyt Soc., 1967).

⁶ A Survey of London by John Stow, ed. Charles L. Kingsford (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), vol. 2, pp. 89, 90. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/survey-of-london-stow/1603/pp69-91>.

⁷ In 1582 the city recorder was said to have attempted to put a stop to this mischief. This observation is not found in the 1603 edition of Stow's Survey, but was evidently added by one of his later continuators and editors: John Strype, A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster (2 vols., London, 1720), vol. 2, bk. 4, p. 113.

⁸ Keith J. Lindley, "Riot prevention and control in early Stuart London," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 5th ser. 33 (1983): 109-26, esp. 113-14 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3678992>; Wilfrid Hooper, "The Tudor Sumptuary Laws," English Historical Review 30 (1915): 433-49, at 447 <http://ehr.oxfordjournals.org/content/XXX/CXIX/433.full.pdf+html>; Rodney M. Fisher, "Reform, Repression and Unrest at the Inns of Court, 1518-1558," The Historical Journal 20 (1977): 783-801. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2638408>.

⁹ Rexroth, Deviance and Power, 20-21; Barbara Hanawalt, "The Host, the Law and the Ambiguous Space of medieval London Taverns," in Medieval Crime and Social Control, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 212. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv1nm.13>.

Following in Fortescue's and Stow's footsteps, most modern students of the western suburb in the middle ages have concerned themselves with the internal workings of the legal profession, and of the law schools and courts, rather than their failings. See

e.g. Samuel E. Thorne, “The early history of the Inns of Court with Special Reference to Gray’s Inn,” in Samuel E. Thorne, Essays in English Legal History (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 137-54; John H. Baker, “The Inns of Court and Chancery as Voluntary Associations”, in John H. Baker, The Legal Profession and the Common Law (London: Hambledon, 1986), 45-74; John H. Baker, “The third university 1450-1550: law school or finishing school?,” in Intellectual and Cultural World of the Inns of Court, ed. Archer, Goldring and Knight, 8-24; John H. Baker, “The Inns of Court in 1388,” in Baker, Legal Profession and the Common Law, 3-6. Similarly, the aristocratic residences in the Strand have continued to fascinate scholars: Caroline M. Barron, “Centres of Conspicuous Consumption: The Aristocratic Town House in London 1200-1550,” The London Journal 20 (1995): 1-16 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/ldn.1995.20.1.1>; Patricia Croot, “A Place in Town in Medieval and Early Modern Westminster: The Origins and History of the Palaces in the Strand,” The London Journal 39 (2014): 85-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/0305803414Z.00000000042>.

¹⁰ The classic account, of regional disorder and politics, using the records of the King’s Bench, is Robin L. Storey, The End of the House of Lancaster (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966), chapters V-XIII. More recent examples include Philippa Maddern, Violence and Social Order (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Hannes Kleineke, “Why the West Was Wild: Law and Disorder in Fifteenth-Century Cornwall and Devon,” in The Fifteenth Century III: Authority and Subversion, ed. Linda Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 75-93; Peter Booth, “Men Behaving Badly? The West March Towards Scotland and the Percy-Neville Feud,” *ibid.* 95-116; Mathis Prange, “Das englisch-schottische Grenzgebiet im Spätmittelalter. Der ‘raid’ im Kontext königlicher Politik,” in Fehdehandlungen und Fehdegruppen im

spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Europa, ed. Mathis Prange and Christine Reinle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 39-59.

¹¹ Only occasionally did the activities of lesser courts and officials find reflection in the fuller records of the King's bench: see e.g. The National Archives (Public Record Office), Kew, England (hereafter TNA), KB 27/828, rex rot. 2d, and the evidence of inquiries into the character and wrongdoing of individuals arrested by various bailiffs, constables and other officers regularly found in the term indictment files of the King's Bench (TNA, KB 9).

¹² For fourteenth-century examples of riots in the western suburbs caused by or involving "apprentices of the bench", see Calendar of Coroners' Rolls of the City of London, A.D. 1300-1378, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: Richard Clay and Sons, 1913), 134-5, 225-6. A particularly lurid case is that of Roger Legett, a man killed by the rebels during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, at least partially because he had been wont to set up man-traps in Lincoln's Inn Fields: Rodney H. Hilton, Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381 (London: Temple Smith, 1973), 194.

¹³ Chronicles of London, ed. Charles L. Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 155, 169; John H. Baker, The Men of Court 1440-1550: A Prosopography of the Inns of Court and Chancery and the Courts of Law (2 vols., London: Selden Society Supplementary Series 18, 2012), vol. 1, pp. 818-19.

¹⁴ Edward Powell, Kingship, Law and Society (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 149, 158.

¹⁵ TNA, KB 27/695, rex rot. 4d; KB 27/746, rot. 115; KB 27/828, rex rot. 2d; KB 145/6/25 (no internal foliation).

¹⁶ For the final chapter of the story see Colin F. Richmond, “The Murder of Thomas Dennis,” Common Knowledge 2 (1993): 85-98.

¹⁷ Denys must be distinguished from a contemporary namesake, an Ipswich lawyer, whose career of officeholding was concentrated in that town, and who died in 1464: The History of Parliament: Biographies of the Members of the Commons House 1439-1509, ed. Josiah C. Wedgwood and Anne Holt (London: H.M.S.O., 1936), 269.

¹⁸ Richmond, “Murder of Thomas Dennis,” 89.

¹⁹ For Denys’s career, Richmond, “Murder of Thomas Dennis,” 88-95; Baker, Men of Court, vol. 1, pp. 587-88.

²⁰ Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, ed. Norman Davis, Richard Beadle and Colin Richmond (3 vols., Oxford: Early English Text Society, special series 20-22, 2004), vol. 2, no. 490.

²¹ Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 452.

²² Richmond, following Davis, assumed that the letter of 17 May dated from 1450, as did James Ross, on the basis of the similar subject matter of a letter dated 13 May, more securely datable to 1450: Richmond, “Murder of Thomas Dennis,” 87-88; James Ross, John de Vere, Thirteenth Earl of Oxford, 1442-1513 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 178-79. The letter of 13 May 1450 from Denys to John Paston I notes that he had “fully conquered my lady sith ye went, so that I haf hir promise to be my good lady”: Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 452. The close proximity of the dates would suggest both were 1450, but there are some problems. If Denys had “fully conquered” his lady by 13 May with the help of Paston, it seems unlikely the earl would be writing to Paston four days later, as if Paston were unaware of the match, and asking for his help in the matter, and, as James Gairdner has pointed out, it is unlikely (though not impossible) that the earl

was at East Winch in Norfolk on 13 May and Wivenhoe in Essex on 17 May, the places where the two letters were dated and which are eighty-four miles apart: The Paston Letters, ed. James Gairdner (6 vols., London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), vol. 2, p. 151. The lady was named in the letter of 13 May as “mastress Anne” while the “gentilwoman” of 17 May was probably Denys’s future wife Agnes Ingham *née* Grene. Davis pointed out that Agnes and Anne were not clearly distinguished as Christian names at this date (Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 490). However, the letter of 13 May 1450 cannot refer to Denys’s future wife, as her first husband Thomas Ingham the younger did not die until January or February 1452.

²³ Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 1, no. 49.

²⁴ British Library, London, England, Lansdowne Charter 56; Essex Record Office, Chelmsford (hereafter ERO), D/DPr 138 (receiver-general’s account of the earl of Oxford). Denys wrote at least four letters preserved among the Paston collection on behalf of the earl between 1450 and 1453 (Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, nos. 456, 490; vol. 3, nos. 999, 1000). One of these, showing Denys’s hand, is reproduced *ibid.*, vol. 3, plate XXVII. Other letters of the earl composed during the same period are in another unidentified hand, so Denys was not the earl’s only secretary. If it was the same Thomas Denys, he was also acquiring land in Essex on a small scale in the 1440s including a messuage in Harwich (1441) and a weir in Orwell (1449): Feet of Fines for Essex, ed. Richard E.G. Kirk et al. (4 vols., Colchester: Essex Archaeological Society, 1899-1964), vol. 4, pp. 29, 43.

²⁵ C[alendar] of P[atent] R[olls], 1452-61 (London: H.M.S.O., 1910), 197. Thomas Ingham’s will mentions three children, Emma, Thomas and Margery.

²⁶ For his career see Charles E. Moreton, “Ingham, Thomas,” unpublished article for the 1422-61 section of the History of Parliament Trust. The authors are grateful to the Trustees for permission to draw upon this article. Thomas Ingham senior was no stranger to litigation in Chancery, being party to at least four other chancery suits during his career: C 1/8/26, C 1/73/130, 131; C 1/9/237, C 1/73/91; C 1/16/385; C 1/10/9.

²⁷ A tax assessment based on property, annuities and fees saw Thomas Ingham senior and junior respectively assessed at £5 and £4; Thomas senior also held half a knight’s fee in Great Melton, Norfolk: Roger Virgoe, “A Norwich Taxation List of 1451,” Norfolk Archaeology 40 (1989): 145-54, at 150; Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids, 1284-1431 (6 vols., London: H.M.S.O., 1899-1920), vol. 3, p. 589. The extent of the two men’s trading activities or mercantile wealth remains obscure.

²⁸ Thomas Grene was associated with Sir John Fastolf, into whose service both Denys and John Paston later moved, and acted as a feoffee for him in 1449 and 1450: Paston Letters and Papers ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 900; vol. 3, no. 986; CPR, 1449-1452, 301, 315. He was possibly of the Grene family of Knapton in Norfolk, not far from Fastolf’s castle at Caister: Visitations of Norfolk, 1563, 1589 and 1613, ed. Walter Rye (London: Harleian Society 32, 1891), 133. He was styled a gentleman of Great Yarmouth in a common pleas suit of 1454: TNA, CP 40/771, rot. 658d.

²⁹ Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, Norwich Consistory Court, will register Aleyn, fos. 107-108.

³⁰ The bill has become separated from the other documents in the debt case among the Chancery records in the National Archives, and the latter are out of order. The correct

procedural order is as follows: Petition (C 1/22/130); writ sub poena, dated 17 October (C 253/34/445); answer (C 4/26/3/8); replication (C 4/26/3/6); rejoinder (C 4/26/3/5); interrogatory and depositions of Agnes Denys (C 4/26/3/7); proffer of Thomas Denys (C 4/26/3/3). C 4/26/3/1, 2 and 4 are the witnesses' statements about the confrontation in Chancery Lane, printed below.

³¹ TNA, C 1/22/130, on which this paragraph is based.

³² The following paragraph is based on C 4/26/3/8. On the evolution of the concept of usury and the laws governing it, see John H. Munro, "The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution: Usury, Rentes, and Negotiability," International History Review 25 (2003): 505-62, esp. 506-13 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07075332.2003.9641005>, and the literature cited there.

³³ TNA, C 4/26/3/6.

³⁴ Derby (d.1474), educated at Cambridge and rector of various churches in Lincolnshire and elsewhere, was granted the reversion of the office of prothonotary of Chancery in 1444 and had presumably succeeded to the post by 1452 when hearing this case: A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500, ed. A.B. Emden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 184; Janice G. Richter, "Education and Association: the Bureaucrat in the Reign of Henry VI," Journal of Medieval History 12 (1986): 81-96 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-4181\(86\)90014-X](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0304-4181(86)90014-X).

³⁵ TNA, C 4/26/3/7.

³⁶ TNA, C 4/26/3/5.

³⁷ The MS gives £280 (fourteen score), but this is clearly a scribal error for the intended £260.

³⁸ TNA, C 4/26/3/3. Denys demanded the aldermen make their statement by the feast of Candlemas next (2 Feb.). In his original draft, he had promised payment despite maintaining that Thomas Ingham had already been satisfied, but he subsequently amended his offer with the proviso that he would only pay if he failed to prove his case.

³⁹ The series of Decree rolls (C 78) and Entry Books of Decrees and Orders (C 33) in the National Archives only survive from the 1530s onwards.

⁴⁰ TNA, CP 40/771, rot. 658d.

⁴¹ Thomas junior's age, the date of Thomas senior's marriage and the identity of his wife remain obscure. The younger man was admitted to the freedom of Norwich as a mercer in 29 Henry VI (1450-1): John L'Estrange, Calendar of Freemen of Norwich, ed. Walter Rye (London: Elliot Stock, 1888), 78. His father was admitted to the freedom as early as 1401-2: Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, England, NCR 17c ("Old Free Book"), fo. 40.

⁴² TNA, CP 40/785, rot. 409d. The earl claimed that Denys was supervising his manors of "Nowers et Sutton" ("Nowers" is not otherwise known to be a de Vere manor, "Sutton" is likely to be the manor of Suttons in Walton, Essex), overseeing repairs and the sale of wood there, as well as overseeing the governance of the earl's household, a more senior post, for Denys's holding of which there is no other evidence: James Ross, "The de Vere Earls of Oxford, 1400-1513" (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 2003), chs. 3, 5. Taken together, the details of service are unconvincing.

⁴³ It is just possible that the date of 1 October was a generic one, given in the pleading as the plaintiff was able to remember the month, but not the precise date of the event

in question. The suit was postponed until the following Trinity term, but no continuation has been found on the plea roll of that term (TNA, CP 40/786).

⁴⁴ It is impossible to be certain of this man's identity, as there were several Robsons in the earl's service at this time: William Robson was a feoffee for de Vere in 1456 (TNA, C 140/10/23); John Robson (d.1468) was constable of his castle at Hedingham, Essex (Philip Morant, The History and Antiquities of Essex (2 vols., London, 1768), vol. 2, p. 296); and Henry Robson, esquire, acted as an attorney for the earl's son in 1465 (British Library, London, England, Additional Charter 28620; Ross, "De Vere Earls," 228, 239). One "Robson ... a squyer of my lordys" is mentioned in December 1450 by Sir John Fastolf, and "Robson, my lord of Oxford man" by William Wayte in January 1451: Paston Letters and Papers ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, p. 60; vol. 3, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 447; Richmond, "Murder of Thomas Dennis," 91-3; George A. Carthew, The Hundred of Launditch (3 vols., Norwich: Miller & Leavins, 1877), vol. 2, p. 554, for an abstract of an enfeoffment by Denys of his property in Brisley and other places in Norfolk to Paston and others, dated 29 September 1454. This evidence somewhat undermines Paston's claim to the earl of Oxford in March 1454 that "I had litill cause to do for Thomas Denyes, saving only for your gode lordship": Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 1, no. 49.

⁴⁶ TNA, C 140/10/23; ERO, D/DYf/6; Ross, "De Vere Earls," 227-8, 229.

⁴⁷ TNA, CP 40/779, rot. 407; CP 40/781, rot. 368d.

⁴⁸ The bearing of factors such as space and environment on many aspects of medieval life, has for some time been recognised by historians, and of late some of the institutions of government have also come to be studied in this way. See e.g. Chris R.

Kyle, "Parliament and the Palace of Westminster: An Exploration of Public Space in the Early Seventeenth Century," in Housing Parliament. Dublin, Edinburgh and Westminster, ed. Clyve Jones and Sean Kelsey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 85-98 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1750-0206.2002.tb00387.x/full>; Chris R. Kyle and Jason Peacey, "'Under cover of so much coming and going': Public Access to Parliament and the Political Process in Early Modern England," in Parliament at Work, ed. Chris R. Kyle and Jason Peacey (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 1-23.

⁴⁹ The literature on the early history of the Inns of Court and Chancery is extensive. A starting point is provided by Nigel L. Ramsay, "The English Legal Profession, c.1340-c.1450," (Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1985), app. 5, pp. xv-xlii, and also see Thorne, "The early history of the Inns of Court," 137-54; John H. Baker, "The Inns of Court and Chancery as Voluntary Associations", in Baker, Legal Profession and the Common Law, 45-74. In 1574, 1,100 were thought to possess chambers in the Inns, and Baker suggests similar numbers in the fifteenth century, although Fortescue's numbers would suggest closer to 1,800: John H. Baker, "The English Legal Profession, 1450-1550," in Baker, Legal Profession and the Common Law, 93-7.

⁵⁰ For occasional snapshots of such activity from the alehouses of the district see e.g. TNA, KB 146/6/32/1; E 159/235, recorda Easter rot. 35; E 207/18/4, no. 29.

⁵¹ Antonia Gransden, "Realistic Observation in Twelfth-Century England," Speculum 47 (1972): 29-51, at 30 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2851214>.

⁵² FitzStephen, Description of London, 49.

⁵³ Survey of London by John Stow, ed. Kingsford, vol. 2, pp. 89, 90.

⁵⁴ Strype, Survey, vol. 1, bk. 1, pp. 120-23 (quotation 121).

⁵⁵ Euan C. Roger, “Blakberd’s Treasure: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Administration at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, London,” in The Fifteenth Century XIII: Exploring the Evidence, ed. Linda Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014), 81-107, at 103.

⁵⁶ Cf. notes 12-15, above.

⁵⁷ Gray’s Inn, Staple Inn, Furnival’s Inn, Barnard’s Inn and Thavie’s Inn.

⁵⁸ TNA, KB 145/6/25; KB 27/746, rot. 115; C 1/27/446, 473; The Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln’s Inn: The Black Books, ed. W. Paley Baildon, J.

Douglas Walker, Ronald F. Roxburgh and Paul V. Baker (6 vols., London: Lincoln’s Inn, 1897-2001), vol. 1, pp. 135, 143.

⁵⁹ David Woolley, “The Inn as a Disciplinary Body,” in History of the Middle Temple, ed. R.O. Havery (Oxford and Portland: Hart Publishing, 2011), 337-72, at 339.

⁶⁰ Records of Early English Drama: Inns of Court, ed. Alan H. Nelson and John R. Elliott Jr (3 vols., Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), vol. 1, p. xxxvii.

⁶¹ TNA, C 4/49/14.

⁶² TNA, CP 40/782, rot. 323.

⁶³ TNA, KB 9/993, no. 10; KB 27/609, rex rot. 16, fines rot. 1d; KB 146/6/36/1, nos. 69-70.

⁶⁴ Nigel Saul, Richard II (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 64.

⁶⁵ Chronicles of London, ed. Kingsford, 155; Baker, Men of Court, vol. 1, pp. 818-19.

⁶⁶ Six Town Chronicles of England, ed. Ralph Flenley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 113, 146; Chronicles of London, ed. Kingsford, 169; Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles, ed. James Gairdner (London: Camden New Series 28, 1881), 71
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S2042170200002709>; “John Benet’s Chronicle for the years 1400 to 1462,” ed. Gerald L. Harriss and M.A. Harriss, in Camden Miscellany Vol.

XXIV (London: Camden Fourth Ser. 9, 1972), 222-3

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0068690500002877>; The Brut, or the Chronicles of England, ed. Friedrich W.D. Brie (London: Early English Text Society, 1906), 525.

⁶⁷ Black Books, ed. Baildon, Walker, Roxburgh and Baker, vol. 1, pp. 40, 43-4, 48, 63, 78, 81, 91, 97, 125-6, 127, 129, 136, 138, 152.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 89-90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 79, 139.

⁷⁰ A useful point of entry into the growing literature on the medieval court of Chancery is provided by Penny Tucker, "The Early History of the Court of Chancery: A Comparative Study," English Historical Review 115 (2000): 791-811
<http://ehr.oxfordjournals.org/content/115/463/791.full.pdf+html>.

⁷¹ The formal process of the Chancery, and the role of the keeper of the rolls and his staff in it has been discussed by Malcolm Richardson, but the Denys case provides a unique illustration of the working conditions at Chancery Lane: Malcolm Richardson, "Early Equity Judges: Keepers of the Rolls of Chancery, 1415-1447," American Journal of Legal History 36 (1992): 441-65, esp. 443-9
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/845554>.

⁷² Sheila Sweetinburgh, "Mayor-making and other ceremonies: shared uses of sacred space among the Kentish Cinque Ports," in The Use and Abuse of Sacred Places in Late Medieval Towns, ed. Paul Trio and Marjan de Smet (Leuven: Mediaevalia Lovaniensia, 1st ser. 38, 2006), 165-87.

⁷³ TNA, SP 46/183/83, 87, 101, 122; C 146/913, 1145, 1170; C 47/10/28/27; The Chancery Case Between Nicholas Radford and Thomas Tremayne: The Exeter Depositions of 1439, ed. Hannes Kleineke (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society 55, 2013), 44.

⁷⁴ Matthew L. Holford, “‘Testimony (to some extent fictitious)’: Proofs of Age in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century,” Historical Research 82 (2009): 635-54.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2008.00471.x>.

⁷⁵ A copy of Walter’s petition to the Lords in parliament (then sitting) is preserved among the Paston Letters: Paston Letters and Papers ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 491A. For the parliamentary context see Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, 1275-1504, ed. Chris Given-Wilson et al. (16 vols., Woodbridge, 2005), vol. 12, pp. 227, 322. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/march-1453>.

⁷⁶ Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 1, no. 49.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 491A.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Parliament was sitting at Westminster between 14 February and 17 April: Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, ed. Given-Wilson et al., vol. 12, pp. 210 and 227, 322 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/march-1453> for reference to Ingham’s petition.

⁸⁰ Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 491.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 492.

⁸² Bodleian Library, Oxford, Gough MS Norfolk 33, fo. 42, summarised in Richmond, “Murder of Thomas Dennis,” 89.

⁸³ While the duke and the earl of Oxford had acted together in local politics in 1450 and 1451 against the duke of Suffolk’s unpopular affinity, by early 1454 they were not particularly close; in 1453 Norfolk had been bound over to keep the peace towards the earl under pain of £2,000: TNA, KB 9/118/2, part 1, no. 21, and for the political

context see Ross, “De Vere Earls”, 126-8. Thus poaching a useful servant from the earl might have had its attractions for the duke.

⁸⁴ He was paid the (small) fee of one mark: Paston Letters and Papers, ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 551.

⁸⁵ C 140/10/23. Evidence of the enfeoffment survives only for the counties of Cornwall, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, the only counties for which the earl’s inquisition post mortem is extant, but the presence of several East Anglian landowners among the feoffees makes it likely that the enfeoffment also encompassed most of the earl’s estates elsewhere.

⁸⁶ ERO, D/P 227/25/1A.

⁸⁷ CPR, 1452-61, 197.

⁸⁸ TNA, C 66/479, m. 18. The standard grant of protection is TNA, C 81/1280, no. 68. Other sequences within the series C 81 do not appear to contain a further warrant or draft for the letters patent.

⁸⁹ Paston Letters and Papers ed. Davis, Beadle and Richmond, vol. 2, no. 491A.

⁹⁰ Denys’s murder is discussed in detail by Richmond, “Murder of Thomas Dennis,” and appears to be essentially unconnected with the Denys-Ingham dispute that came before. In brief, on 2 July 1461 Denys was taken from his house by the parson of Snoring, who, as Richmond surmised, was indeed the earl of Warwick’s appointee Richard Cheyne. Their quarrel was apparently, in the first instance, personal: Cheyne accused Denys of having “made bills” against him and John Twyer. Whether these bills were in the nature of law suits, or simply slanderous, is unclear. More clear cut was the second allegation, that Denys had “take sowdyours out of hys felashep whan he went to Seynt Albons”. Here the quarrel assumed a very definite political colour. Cheyne and Denys had both been part of the army that Warwick had raised by

commissions of array in Henry VI's name in the first days of February 1461 to counter the threat of the force that Queen Margaret of Anjou was bringing from the North. To draw men from the contingent Cheyne was bringing to the earl in his hour of need could seriously imperil relations between lord and servant. Cheyne was eventually arrested in Norwich at some point between Oct. 1461 and Sept. 1462 on suspicion of complicity in the murder: TNA, C 244/95/92. The murder itself took place two days after Cheyne seized Denys, on 4 July, when according to the indictment three labourers broke into his house, seized a horse and some cash, removed him to Egmere, a place eight miles distant from Denys's house at Gateley in Norfolk, and there killed him: TNA, KB 9/298, nos. 24-25.

⁹¹ Cf. the literature cited in n. 10, above.

⁹² Barron, "Centres of Conspicuous Consumption," 1-16

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/ldn.1995.20.1.1>; Croot, "A Place in Town," 85-101

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/0305803414Z.00000000042>. The earl of Oxford's inn was situated in the north-east of the city near Bishopsgate, rather than in the Strand:

Calendar of Inquisitions post Mortem XX, ed. J.L. Kirby (London: Public Record Office, 1995), no. 635 <http://www.history.ac.uk/cipm-20-part-vi>.

⁹³ For the related documents, see n. 30, above.