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Linguistic Diversity in the Fifteenth-Century Stonor Letters

Alison Truelove

In his 1954 lecture on the language of the Pastons, Norman Davis referred to Caxton's famous comments on the instability of fifteenth-century English. [1] As no other contemporary writer conveys the linguistic situation so vividly, those comments deserve to be outlined here, and serve as an apposite context in which to regard the letters with which this study is concerned. Writing in 1490, Caxton observed that English had changed considerably since he was born. He complained of the diversity in language that made it impossible for him to choose vocabulary that every reader would understand, and then recounted the story of a merchant who had difficulty in obtaining eggs because he used the Old Norse word, 'eggys', rather than the Old English equivalent, 'eyren'. As a translator, Caxton found it frustrating that he was unable to please all of his readers because language use varied considerably throughout the country.

The difficulties he encountered were understandable. By the second half of the fifteenth century, English had re-emerged as the official written language of England, but it was vastly different from the language that had been marginalized by the Normans in the eleventh century. Its years in the shadow of the more learned language of Latin and the more courtly language of French had led to extensive diversification, and fifteenth-century English betrays the variety of influences the vernacular had been subject to over a period of three hundred years. Some efforts had been made to standardise usage, including, from the early fifteenth century, the training of Chancery clerks to produce stylistically and

orthographically uniform documents in English. This led to the emergence of a regulated language, often referred to as 'Chancery Standard English',[2] in which the business of government was conducted, but this was a purely administrative language and must be distinguished from the varieties of colloquial spoken English current at the time. These spoken varieties continued to prove a strong influence on written prose compositions, and even at the end of the fifteenth century there was no consensus on standard forms. Surviving documents from that period reveal that many writers of English either felt no impetus towards standardisation, or if they did, had little idea of what that standard was or should be.[3]

This study takes as evidence some letters from the Stonor collection[4] that were written by people who either lived in London, or at least visited the capital regularly and were familiar with documents produced there.[5] The 43 letters were all written between 1469 and 1483, before the availability of printed books had had a noticeable impact on writing styles. In limiting the study to the correspondence of Londoners, the influence of geographic location may be minimised, and given the proximity of Westminster, the potential influence of the Chancery Standard can be assessed. The competing influences of colloquial usage and of the letter-writing tradition must also be considered when assessing the extent and types of diversity in the letters. Although less subject to convention than legal documents, and less stylistically ambitious than literature, letters could be highly formulaic, but at the same time reflect the spoken language of the period relatively well. In studying diversity, we must allow for the regularity that could result from the use of certain phrases and styles that were drawn from letter-manuals,[6] while understanding that however closely other parts of the text resemble colloquial speech, it remains the case that it is written English, differentiated from the spoken language that seems to have escaped standardisation until much later.

The letters of our London correspondents are all the more valuable for the study of written language because they are autograph. When dictated, letters tended to represent the spoken language more closely, and were less a reflection of written practices. We can also be relatively sure that in autograph letters, the vocabulary choices, spellings and overall style reflect the preferences and linguistic abilities of the writer, with no risk of scribal intervention by a secretary. This important fact allows us to assess the congruity between linguistic dexterity and factors such as education and occupation, which should be established before proceeding further.

William Stonor dominates the family's archives as the individual to whom most letters are written. He lived at the family home at Stonor, close to Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire, but also spent time at other estates in Devon and Kent, as well as in London. He held many positions in local government, was made MP for Oxfordshire in 1478, entered into a partnership with Thomas Betson in the wool export trade for a short period, and more generally maintained numerous associations with tradesmen and professionals in the capital. Five of his eight surviving letters are addressed to his father, Thomas Stonor, and display the rhetorical and deferential style appropriate to this relationship. The remaining three letters are written to his peers, and in contrast these are brief and perfunctory, although not completely devoid of the rhetoric demanded by the form.

Thomas Betson's letters, in contrast to those of William, are protracted and at times overly obsequious to the modern ear. Twelve survive in total, six addressed to William, five to Elizabeth, William's wife, and one to Thomas's future wife, Katherine, who was the daughter of Elizabeth by her first husband. Although they are by no means concise, the letters are well written, demonstrating an assured, confident style that might be seen as appropriate for a merchant whose income depended on an ability to negotiate. Betson

was a merchant of the Staple of Calais, so spent much of his time travelling between London and Calais arranging the sale of wool purchased in the Cotswolds. His will reveals him to have been successful enough to leave two houses to Katherine at his death, as well as generous charitable donations, and a legacy of forty shillings to his assistant, Thomas Henham.[7] Betson is often referred to as the most immediately likeable individual in the Stonor correspondence,[8] and his letters certainly convey a lively personality, but in fact we know very little about his life beyond that which is revealed in the Stonor material and his will. For the purposes of this study it is enough to know that Betson was a Londoner, who spent time on the continent in the course of his business, as well as travelling within England. We can also assume that given his location and profession, he had received some type of formal education, and the neat handwriting and general eloquence of his letters endorse this assumption. It seems that for him the writing of letters was not merely a chore, but rather an activity that allowed him to demonstrate his linguistic proficiency.

Examples of less assured writing by those involved in the wool trade are available in the letters of Thomas Henham and Goddard Oxbridge, the mercantile assistants of Thomas Betson. Both men sign their letters to William Stonor 'your prentes', suggesting that they may have been apprentices to Stonor and Betson, but the term may belie a less formal relationship. Henham and Oxbridge also worked for the Stonors in arranging on their behalf the purchase and transport of goods from London. Four letters survive from each of the two men, and display competent but idiosyncratic language use. Kingsford, the first editor of the Stonor Letters, identified Oxbridge as the 'worst writer and speller' of all the correspondents.[9] His writing is certainly not highly accomplished, but it is readable, and far better than that of some other fifteenth-century writers.

In order to compare the language of the gentry and merchants with that of professional individuals, the correspondence of two lawyers, Thomas Mull and Richard Page, will be observed. It is likely that both received a formal education followed by training at the Inns of Court in the arts of composition and pleading. With such a background we might expect their letters to be highly competent and strongly influenced by bureaucratic language. Mull was the legal adviser and friend of the second Thomas Stonor, who was his wife's step-brother. Although his letters contain a variety of non-standard forms, he was eloquent and assured in his writings. His letters seem to have been written from London, and we might assume that this was his place of business, if not permanent residence. Richard Page was a lawyer of the Temple, who held the office of solicitor-general to the King between 1470 and 1483. He was MP for Plymouth on four occasions, and his main residence was in Horton, Kent, where the Stonors also held land.[10] Nine of his letters to William Stonor survive, and all are well written and deferential in tone, but at the same time the subject matter indicates that his formal relationship with Stonor as his lawyer extended to friendship.

We have, then, the correspondence of six individuals, all of whom had some degree of familiarity with the business of London and Westminster, and all of whom used letters as a means of communicating with associates and friends. Closer examination of these letters will seek to reveal the relative influence their experience and lifestyles had on their linguistic usage. Initially, we can observe how standard the writers' language was by considering the spellings of common words. Those spellings favoured by the Chancery clerks in the first half of the fifteenth century tended to be those that dominated later on, and by observing the spellings used by the Stonor writers, we can assess how close their language was to the emerging standard. The case of the word 'not' illustrates the complexity of the situation. Although the lawyers, Page and Mull,

used only the now current spelling 'not', so did Henham, with Betson and Stonor using both 'not' and 'nat'. The spelling of 'which' is remarkably stable, with only Oxbridge using more than one variant ('which(e)' and 'whech(e)'), but there is considerably more diversity in the favoured choice of consonants at the start of words such as 'shall'. Betson, Page and Mull, writers who seem to have received the most formal educations, all favoured the modern spelling ('sh-') throughout their letters, while the remaining three writers used more than one variant ('sh-', 'sc-' and 'sch-'). Overall, the spellings of Page and Mull are the most stable and the closest to the emerging standard, but no clear pattern is evident, indicating that usage was not uniform or determined solely by profession or status.[11]

It still remains the case, however, that the orthography of these London writers is more regular than the pattern that emerges if the whole of the Stonor correspondence is considered. Moreover, preliminary research comparing the spellings in Chancery documents[12] with those of the Stonor correspondents indicates that the spelling of the six London writers not only exhibits less variation, but also is closer to the emerging standard. For example, while these London writers had, like the Chancery scribes, primarily adopted the modern spelling for 'such' (with only occasional use of 'seche' and 'soche'), the Stonor correspondence as a whole has a wider range of spellings, with the modern 'such' used in less than half of all instances. This supports the contention that compared with regional usage, London orthography was relatively standard, and that the preferred spellings there went on to become the standard spellings in modern English, but it remains the case that even common words continued to be spelt in various ways at this date.

Table 1 is detailed illustration of how even the smallest words could invite a number of different spellings. Most of the diversity in pronouns results from the lack of differentiation between pairs of

letters such as i and y, u and v, or u and w, given that in each pair both letters often represent the same sound. More significant are those spellings that indicate either an alternative pronunciation of that word, or a non-standard attribution of phonetic value to certain vowels. Beyond orthographical differences, morphological developments can also be observed in two of the cases. The first is the developing use of 'you' rather than 'ye' as a second person subject pronoun.[13] This change was not complete until the end of the sixteenth century, and has been attributed to phonological confusion in the spoken language, so we might expect to find its use more prevalent in the letters of those who modelled their linguistic usage on spoken rather than written language. As can be seen, neither of the lawyers, nor William Stonor, use the newer form, which is used exclusively in the letters of Oxbridge and Betson, although the latter only uses 'you' in 5% of his uses of the subject pronoun. This evidence supports the contention that the development was adopted more quickly in colloquial language than elsewhere,[14] and raises the issue of whether conservatism, which may have led to standardisation, also served to slow down some morphological developments in the language.

Morphological development is evident also in the third person plural accusative case, for which all of the writers use various spellings of 'them'. Thomas Betson and his two assistants, however, along with using this Scandinavian-influenced form, also use 'hem', a reflex of the Old English form which was used less often by this time, and had virtually died out by the start of the sixteenth century.[15] It is not used by either of the lawyers, or by William Stonor, and this indicates the survival of the older form for longer in the colloquial language of London than in more formal circumstances. Apart from these examples, however, only orthographical variation occurs in the declension of pronouns, showing that although the modern pronoun paradigm had established itself firmly by this time in the language of the London

correspondents, there was still a noticeable absence of a standard spelling scheme.

Table 1

Personal pronouns and pronoun-determiners

TB - Thomas Betson
GO - Goddard Oxbridge
TM - Thomas Mull
TH - Thomas Henham
RP - Richard Page
WS - William Stonor

	TB	TH	GO	RP	TM	WS
1st person singular						
subject	I y	I	I	I y	I	I
object	me	me	me	me	me	me
poss. det.	my myn	my myn	my myn	my myn(e	mi my myn	my
poss. pron.	myne	myne	-	-	-	-
1st person plural						
subject	we	-	-	we	we	-
object	vs	-	-	-	vs	-
poss. det.	our(e owr(e	-	owre	oure	our	-
poss. pron.	-	-	-	-	-	-
2nd person singular						
subject	ye you	ye	yo you	ye	ye	ye
object	you	you	you yow	you yow	you	yov yow
poss. det.	your(e	your	youer	your(r yowr	your	your yowre yowur
poss. pron.	youres	-	-	youres	youres yours	yowrs

3rd person sing. (masc)						
subject	he	he	he	he	he	he
object	him hym	-	heme	hym	-	hym
poss. det.	his	his hys	hese his hys(e	his hys	his	hys
poss. pron.	-	-	-	-	-	-
3rd person sing. (fem)						
subject	-	sche	sche	-	-	-
object	hir	-	-	hir	her	her
poss. det.	hir	-	-	hir	her	her
poss. pron.	hirs	-	-	hirres	-	-
3rd person sing. (neut)						
subject	it	hyt	hit hyt it	hit	it yt	hyt yt ytt
object	it	-	-	hit	it yt	hyt yt
poss. det.	-	-	-	-	-	-
poss. pron.	-	-	-	-	-	-
3rd person plural						
subject	they			thay they	they	they
object	them hem	them hem	þem heme theme	thaym them	them	-
poss. det.	-	-	-	thair	-	-
poss. pron.	-	-	-	-	-	-

If we look beyond function words and turn to less frequently used vocabulary, it is even more apparent that standardisation was far from a reality. For example, Goddard Oxbridge used spellings such as 'kowelige' (knowledge), 'aspesyalle' (especial), and 'onerabulle' (honourable), Thomas Mull used 'mocyon' (motion) and 'trowbelyd' (troubled), and Thomas Henham used 'sostenawse'

(sustenance). It is likely that such spellings were formed according to the writer's pronunciation of a word, and although this is poor evidence of fifteenth-century phonology, given that individual letters could represent a number of different sounds, it does indicate that there was no stigma attached to improvised spellings, as even the letters of the most accomplished writers contain examples of the practice.[16]

The writers' relative lack of concern for maintaining *consistent* spellings is also apparent. As has been seen in the use of pronouns, individual writers habitually spelt the same word in different ways throughout their letters. Much of the variation occurs through the doubling of consonants, through the substitution of similarly sounding consonant clusters for each other (such as 'sh' for 'sch'), or of one vowel for another. The words 'worshipful' and 'mastership' were subject to each of these variations and were rarely spelt consistently either within or between letters, and the names of individuals were especially vulnerable to multiple spellings. For example, in one of his letters Goddard Oxbridge found eight different ways of spelling the name David, or Davy (*SLP* no. 213).

Despite all of this variation, there is evidence that some writers attempted to conform to what they regarded as correct or standard orthography. Throughout the Stonor correspondence, words are crossed through and replaced with others, and sometimes it can be observed that one spelling has been rejected in favour of another. In one of Oxbridge's letters, he began to write 'customers' with an initial 'co', but crossed this out and changed the vowel to a 'u' (*SLP* no. 164), and elsewhere he wrote the pronoun 'hem' before replacing it with the more standard 'theme' (*SLP* no. 165). In one of Page's letters, the word 'service' is spelt with an initial 'c' and then crossed out in favour of the 's' spelling (*SLP* no. 309). But even if there was a desire to conform, all of the letters display uncertainty over spelling, and also show that word boundaries were not always uniformly recognised.[17] **Table 2** lists instances in which writers have elided or divided words unusually.

Table 2

Unusual word elision and division

Betson	Henham	Oxbridge
adossen	a cordyng	asfor
agood	allettes	assone
aletter	be seke	enforme masyon
amery	be twene	in queryd
anend	con tinue	kowenat
asmych	cone vay	nonodir
assone	fforder more	
atoken	lady schype	
awoman	mayster schipe	
my nyne	more houer	
myn nown	vnder stonde	
shalbe		
wilbe		
Page	**Mull**	**Stonor**
a genst	a yeen	a cordyng
a yen	alhalowyn	a fore
a yenst	be half	a pon
aswell	howe be yt	a tachytt
by sydes	shalbe	a wantage
by twene	ther for	a yen
no thyng		a yenste
shalbe		alle myty
shallnow		benot
thabbey		comaund ment
theffecte		hom ward
thentent		kannott
to morow		knowyt
weldon		no thyng
welnot		odyrs wyse
woldbe		payyt
wollnot		wolldo

Elision seems to occur most frequently when an article, usually 'a' or 'the', is written as part of the subsequent word ('aletter', 'thabbey'), or when an auxilliary verb is involved ('shalbe', 'wilbe', 'woldbe', 'shallnow'), and sometimes it occurs in the forming of a negative statement ('wollnot', 'kowenat'). It is intriguing that 'cannot', as used by William Stonor, has survived into Modern English while other elisions have not. The opposite phenomenon of word *division* often occurs when part of a word might be mistaken for an article, particularly 'a' ('a yenst', 'a tachytt'), and is thus detached. Sometimes suffixes are detached from the head word, and sometimes compound words are separated into their constituent morphemes ('fforder more'). The grammatically incorrect (at least by modern protocol) separation or elision of words does not seem to be related to status or experience: it is a trait that can be observed in the letters of Richard Page, the eminent lawyer, as much as in those of Goddard Oxbridge, a mercantile assistant, and the practice continues well into the modern period.[18]

As indicated in the pronoun paradigm, however, diversity in the correspondents' writings extends further than spellings. There are many grammatical features that were undergoing change at this time, and one of these was in third person singular verb endings, where the older '*-th*' ending was being replaced with the now current '*-s*' ending. The '*-s*' ending is present in Chaucer's works as a northern stereotype, and only began to be current in southern regions in the fifteenth century.[19] Even at the end of the century it is entirely absent in some documents. Among the Stonor writers, it is used rarely, although among our six London correspondents three use '*-s*' endings, Betson in 10 per cent of his third person present singular verbs, Henham in 78 per cent, and Page in 68 per cent.

Table 3 details the instances, and illustrates that Betson used the '*-s*' ending as well as the '*-th*' ending for the verbs 'to come' and 'to recommend', with Henham using both 'hathe' and 'hase'. This shows that although the stigma of the '*-s*' ending had gone, it was still not used exclusively by those who knew of it. That Henham

only used the '-*th*' ending for the verbs 'to do' and 'to have' reflects the fact that this older inflection survived the longest in common verbs.

If fifteenth-century writers were aware of a trend towards standardisation, we should consider the reasons for any desire to conform. Undoubtedly the initial concern in composing a letter was clarity, in order to avoid ambiguity, and to ensure that the news or requests it conveyed were understood and acted on appropriately. By avoiding the use of localised varieties of English, the writer could enhance the probability that the recipient would respond as required. An important feature of medieval correspondence is its rhetorical nature. In accordance with the tradition of the form, letters were often written to persuade and cajole others into obeying the will of the writer, and this accounts in part for the formulaic phrases that occur throughout. This, in its own way, brought about conformity, through the reproduction of traditional salutations, recommendations, promises to reciprocate favours, blessings and valedictions. A number of linguistic features that died out in the course of the fifteenth century survive in these phrases, indicating the conservatism of writers in the prescribed parts of their correspondence. The ability to compose an appropriately worded letter inevitably helped in the popular medieval pursuit of social advancement, and if an individual could combine a command of rhetoric with a lucid style of writing, he was clearly at an advantage. Along with orthographical and morphological features, prose style is an important indictor of linguistic dexterity. It cannot be treated at length here, but it should be observed that, as might be expected, the most complex syntactic constructions occur in the writings of the most educated individuals.

-s endings

Betson	Henham	Oxbridge	Page	Mull	Stonor	Total
comes recomaunds recommaunds semes strykes	comys (x2) hase lokys says takys be scekys		makys rides semys (x9) spekys thenkys			
5	7	0	13	0	0	25

-th endings

Betson	Henham	Oxbridge	Page	Mull	Stonor	Total
appereth comethe (x2) desyreth dothe / doyth hath(e (x7) knowith(e (x8) liketh/longeth lyketh(e (x3) owith prayeth(e (x3) prayseth recomaundith reqwyereth saith / sayth seeth/ sendith shewith / soth stykkythe tellith (x2) waxhith	dothe hathe	hathe (x3) knowyth owythe pleasthe plesith saythe	hath (x5) purposeth	abydeth beth (x2) breketh callyth cumeth desyreth (x2) hath (x9) letyth/longeth lykith makyth promysith remembreth requyryth restyth spekyth standeth taketh thynkyth yevyth	desyryth dravyth hath(e (x9) knovyth (x2) lykyth (x4) plesyth prayyth seyth (x3) vyllyth	
43	2	8	6	30	23	112

% -s endings

Betson	Henham	Oxbridge	Page	Mull	Stonor	Total
10%	**78%**	**0**	**68%**	**0**	**0**	**18%**

Table 3. Third person singular verb endings

Among the London writers, Betson, Page and Mull have the most sophisticated prose styles, and stand in marked contrast to the rambling, repetitive syntax in letters by Goddard Oxbridge, for example. Unlike spelling, syntax is evidently a linguistic feature that can be enhanced by diversity.

The additional impetus towards the use of the increasingly standardised London variety of English was its prestige value. Nothing promotes the spread of a new development in language more effectively than an association with power and social distinction, and there is ample evidence that London English was regarded as the favoured variety. Even in the fourteenth century, Chaucer was able to exploit such attitudes, using the northern dialect for comic effect in the Reeve's Tale. Given that the writers of the letters considered in this study all lived in or were familiar with London, it is understandable that their language was influenced by that which was current there, and the prestige of the variety clearly promoted the elimination of regional variants. It is noticeable that, in general, the non-standard forms that occur in the letters of Betson, Henham, Oxbridge, Mull, Page and Stonor are rarely regionally identifiable, but rather occur as a result of orthographical confusion or linguistic naivety. William Stonor's habitual use of a *y*-prefix in his past participles may betray his connection with Devon, but he only uses it in the closing formulae of letters, in the form 'I-wrytyn', and his other past participles do not take the prefix. Richard Page's letters are remarkably free from Kentish features given that he lived in Kent, and this is probably as much due to deliberate avoidance as to legal training.

All of the writers were under some pressure to conform to what they regarded as standard usage, simply in order to ensure comprehensibility, but both orthographical and morphological inconsistency exists in all of the letters under consideration. The presence or absence of certain linguistic developments does not necessarily denote conformity to a written standard, but rather is an

indication of the linguistic influences to which the writer was subject. Page and Mull's familiarity with legal documentation, their formal educations, and constant practice in composition must account for their style of writing. Page's letters are characterised by their eloquence, and Mull's by their legalistic phrasing and word order.

The less assured and repetitive styles of the mercantile assistants can be attributed to lack of practice, and seem to be influenced more by spoken language than by written compositions, displaying linguistic features that occurred in speech before the written language. Features new to fifteenth-century English, such as the use of 'you' as a subject pronoun, or the use of the relative pronoun 'who', are found less often in the letters of writers such as Page and Mull, whose linguistic usage is more conservative. It is interesting to note that while Mull's spelling is close to the emerging standard, his grammar, and particularly his syntax, could be relatively archaic. He never inflected his third person singular verbs with an '*-s*', for instance, and he used 'and' in the sense of 'if', as in the phrase 'yet and it wer found'. Yet a reminder that even the more conservative writers incorporated some developing features into their language exists in one of his letters, where he used periphrastic 'do' in a negative phrase, 'ye do not remembre me' (*SLP* no. 69), a construction that occurs only rarely in Middle English, and is not used by any of the other Stonor correspondents.[20]

Conservatism, then, does not preclude either orthographic variation or the occasional inclusion of contemporary language developments, and what emerges is that linguistic diversity is visible in many aspects of late fifteenth-century written English. It is easy to distinguish those letters written by trained professionals from those that rely heavily on phonetic spellings, but it remains the case that few features are exclusive to either group at this date. Uniformity in orthography, morphology or syntax is not attained in any of the letters, and inconsistency is ubiquitous in the letters of the London correspondents as it is in the Stonor Letters as a whole. A standardised variety of English had established itself to some

extent in Chancery documents by this time, but elsewhere writers were still to assimilate the numerous influences that eventually determined the characteristics of modern standard English.

NOTES

[1] Norman Davis, 'The Language of the Pastons', *Proceedings of the British Academy* xl (1955): 119-44. Prologue to Eneydos [1490], in *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, W. J. B. Crotch ed. (London, EETS, OS 176, 1928), p. 108. Caxton wrote: '...my lord abbot of Westmynster ded do shewe to me late, certayn euydences wryton in Olde Englysshe, for to reduce it into our Englysshe now vsed, and, certaynly, it was wreton in suche wyse that it was more lyke to Dutche than Englysshe; I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be vnderstonden, and, for we Englysshe men ben borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone, whiche is neuer stedfaste but euer wauerynge, wexynge one season, and waneth and dyscreaseth another season, and that comyn Englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother.'

[2] The term was first used by M. L. Samuels in his essay, 'Some applications of Middle English dialectology' in *English Studies* 44 (1963): 81-94.

[3] For a collection of influential essays on the subject, see J. H. Fisher, *The Emergence of Standard English* (Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 1996). See also M. Benskin, 'Some new perspectives on the origins of standard written English', in J. A. van Leuvensteijn and J. B. Berns ed., *Dialect and Standard Language in the English, Dutch, German and Norwegian Language Areas* (Amsterdam, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1992), pp. 71-105. I am grateful to Dr. Richard Beadle for bringing this publication to my attention. Particularly important is Benskin's suggestion that 'a decidedly neutral, non-local usage had developed a decade or two before government English had had any opportunity to influence the written language ... prepar[ing] the way for acceptance of a single national standard.' (p. 82).

[4] The Stonor family lived in Oxfordshire, although the letters were written from many different locations. Their letters and papers (dating mainly from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) are in the National Archives (NA) at Kew, and many were published in *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, C. L. Kingsford ed., Camden Society, 3rd Series, 29, 30, 34,

1919-1924. These volumes have been reissued as a single volume, with a new introduction by Christine Carpenter, as *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), hereafter *SLP*. Kingsford's transcriptions are not accurate, however, and quotations within this study are taken from my own transcriptions (Alison Truelove, 'The Fifteenth-Century English Stonor Letters: A revised text with notes, a glossary, and a collation of those letters edited by C. L. Kingsford in 1919 and 1924', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2001; forthcoming as an Early English Text Society volume). References to Stonor documents are to their number in Kingsford's edition.

[5] 12 letters by Thomas Betson (*SLP* nos. 161, 162, 166, 185, 205, 207, 211, 212, 216, 217, 218 and 224), 4 letters by Thomas Henham (*SLP* nos. 163, 222, 225 and 251), 4 letters by Goddard Oxbridge (*SLP* nos. 164, 165, 167 and 213), 9 letters by Richard Page (*SLP* nos. 220, 221, 247, 276, 309, 310, 321, 322 and 327), 6 letters by Thomas Mull (*SLP* nos. 69, 100, 111, 121, 123 and 124) and 8 letters by William Stonor (*SLP* nos. 118, 122, 127, 128, 136, 193, 296 and 315).

[6] See Norman Davis, 'The Litera Troili and English Letters', *Review of English Studies* NS 16 (1965): 234-244, and entries on 'Rhetoric' and 'Dictamen' in J.R. Strayer ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984). Also see James J. Murphy ed., *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1971) for a translation of Anonymous of Bologna's 'The Principles of Letter-Writing (Rationes dictandi)'.

[7] National Archives, PCC 24 Logge.

[8] See, for example, Eileen Power, *Medieval People* (London, Methuen, 1924), pp. 111-145.

[9] *SLP*, p. xlvii.

[10] J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Biographies of the members of the Commons House, 1439-1509* (London, H.M.S.O., 1936), p. 656; E. W. Ives, *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England - Thomas Kebell: A Case Study* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 486-92 and 506-07.

[11] Research on variant spellings in the Stonor letters is ongoing, and space does not permit the discussion of more detailed evidence here.

[12] Information on Chancery spellings is drawn from a concordance at the end of J. H. Fisher, M. Richardson and J. L. Fisher, *An Anthology of*

Chancery English (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

[13] T. F. Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax. Part I: Parts of Speech* (Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki, 23, Helsinki, Société Néophilologique, 1960), p. 125.

[14] See Terttu Nevalainen, 'Social Stratification', and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, 'Apparent Time' in Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg ed., *Sociolinguistics and Language History* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1996), pp. 65 ff. and 97 ff.

[15] Roger Lass, 'Phonology and Morphology', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume II 1066-1476*, Norman Blake ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 120-1.

[16] On Middle English phonology, see Roger Lass, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-90.

[17] On uncertainty over word boundaries, see David Burnley, 'Lexis and Semantics', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume II 1066-1476*, Norman Blake ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 409-10.

[18] See *Everyday English 1500-1700: A Reader*, Bridget Cusack ed. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998) for diplomatic transcriptions of numerous non-literary documents that reveal writing habits throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are some remarkable similarities in orthography between fifteenth and seventeenth century documents.

[19] See Roger Lass, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-9.

[20] Edward Langford (*SLP,* no. 119) uses 'do not', but 'do' is used as an active verb, and is not periphrastic.