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Dom John Broadhook alias John Lydgate, 1424

Sebastian Sobeki

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Dom John Broadhook alias  
John Lydgate, 1424

SEBASTIAN SOBECKI

**ABSTRACT:** In a note published in this journal in 2019, Sebastian Sobeci drew attention to a new life-record for John Lydgate. The document, which dates to late January or early February 1425, is of significance because it offers the earliest surviving record of Lydgate's tenure as prior of Hatfield Regis. However, the record only refers to him as "John, prior of Hatfield Regis." Here the author would like to present three new life-records from 1424, all of which mention Lydgate by name and identify him as prior of Hatfield Regis, therefore pushing back the evidence for his time as prior by a calendar year.

**KEYWORDS:** biography, Common Pleas, Hatfield Regis, John Lydgate, life-records

In a note published in this journal in 2019, I drew attention to a new life-record for John Lydgate.<sup>1</sup> The document, which dates to late January or early February 1425, is of significance because it offers the earliest surviving record of Lydgate's tenure as prior of Hatfield Regis. However, the record only refers to him as "John, prior of Hatfield Regis."<sup>2</sup> Here I would like to present three new life-records from 1424, all of which mention Lydgate by name and identify him as prior of Hatfield Regis, therefore pushing back the evidence for his time as prior by a calendar year.<sup>3</sup>

1. Sebastian Sobeci, "The Earliest Record of John Lydgate at Hatfield Regis," *Chaucer Review* 54 (2019): 216–20.

2. Sobeci, "The Earliest Record," 219–20.

3. I would like to thank Vance Mead for drawing my attention to these records in a personal communication.

The three new records from the Court of Common Pleas, all of which I have transcribed and translated in their entirety below, are connected to a plea of debt brought against Lydgate by the London mercer Henry Moos. The first two records date from Easter term 1424 (May 10 to June 5), and present attempts by Moos to recover his money. The first record, National Archives, CP 40/653, m. 143f., is a writ for debt, introduced with the plea formula *quod reddat ei* (“that [Lydgate] render to him”) a sum of 113 shillings and 4 pence (“centum et tresdecimi solidos et quatuor denarios”) that the prior “owes to him and unjustly withholds” (“quos ei debet et iniuste detinet”). The rest of the entry follows the conventional abbreviated formula for debt pleas, noting that the defendant was summoned by the sheriff and did not appear, but the phrase “the judgment is attached” (“Iudicium attachietur”) indicates that this is not the first time that Moos brought this plea. The only unusual feature in this plea entry is the reference to Hatfield Regis as “Broodhook” instead of Broad Oak. Clearly, the clerk must have misunderstood Moos in the noise of the hall in Westminster where multiple pleas were being entered at the same time.

It is not possible exactly to pinpoint the date of this entry in Easter term 1424, but membrane 143f. out of 440 written both front and dorse suggests that his plea was entered early in the term, probably before the middle of May. The *terminus ante quem* is May 28: the entry requires Lydgate to appear on a specific return day referred to as “five weeks from Easter” (“A die Pasche in quinque septimanas”), that is, five weeks and a day from Easter Sunday, so on May 29 (Easter fell on April 23 in 1424).

Very little is known about Henry Moos. In 1422, a Henry Moos appears as an apprentice and a new freeman in the Mercers’ Company, and a year earlier, in 1420–21, he was listed as an apprentice of Thomas Halle.<sup>4</sup> If this Henry Moos was not the son of the plaintiff but the very man in question, then he must have only recently left his apprenticeship. If so, a debt of 113 shillings and 4 pence, or £5 13s 4d, was a considerable sum for a new mercer: according to the National Archives, the purchasing power of £5 in 1420 amounted to the value of five horses!<sup>5</sup>

Since Lydgate did not appear on time, a second plea was entered in the same law term. This record, National Archives, CP 40/653, m. 269d., starts out by repeating the content of the earlier record, but with a glaring howler: because the clerk of the earlier plea record had misheard “Broad Oak” as “Broodhook”—in itself remarkable proof that “oa” in “oak” and “oo” in

4. See <https://www.londonroll.org>; and Lisa Jefferson, *The Medieval Account Books of the Mercers of London: An Edition and Translation* (Farnham, U.K., 2009), i, 322–23.

5. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter>.

“hook” were pronounced in a similar if not identical way in Middle English—the clerk of the second record must have thought that “Broadhook” was a surname and understood it to be Lydgate’s alias: “Iohannem Lydgate Priorem de Hatfeld Regis alias dominum Iohannem Broodhook in Comitatu Essexis” (John Lydgate, Prior of Hatfield Regis, also known as Dom John Broadhook, in the county of Essex). I have quoted the passage with the contraction and suspension marks to explain how the clerk was “aided” in his confusion. The suspension mark following *dom* in the original record denotes *domus*, “religious house,” in the phrase “Hatfeld Regis alias *domus* Broodhook.” But the second clerk took *dom* to mean *dominus*, “lord,” the customary honorific for Benedictine and certain other monks—as in Dom Pérignon.

Unlike the first record, in the second plea the sheriff is asked to seize Lydgate (“attachiet eum”). As is customary in such cases for those who are absent or have the means, pledges are submitted. These can be either persons or land, but not moveable goods.<sup>6</sup> But the pledges returned for Lydgate are bizarrely odd: “attachiatus est per Iohannem Cripplegate et Ricardum Withoute” (he is attached by the pledges of John Cripplegate and Richard Without). Clearly, these are fictional pledges referring to the London ward of Without Cripplegate (rather than the parish of St. Giles-without-Cripplegate). Fictional pledges were certainly allowed, according to *Black’s Law Dictionary*,<sup>7</sup> but they were usually called “John Doe and Richard Roe”—giving rise to the various legal uses of “John Doe.”<sup>8</sup> Occasionally, a clerk might feel creative and replace “John Doe” and “Richard Doe” with other names, such as “John Lok” and “Richard Cok,” who were used in a 1466 plea.<sup>9</sup> Even though the first names John and Richard are used by the clerk of the second Moos plea, the surnames do not rhyme. There are no obvious connections between Hatfield Regis, an alien priory, and the ward of Cripplegate Without, nor is Lydgate known to have had any links there. In the absence of any explanation, it is likely that John Cripplegate and Richard Without are fictional pledges that sprang from the pen of a bored clerk.

At the end of the record, Lydgate is required to attend by the return day of the quindene of Trinity, that is, July 3, 1424 (“Ita distringatur quod sit hic

6. George Booth, *The Nature and Practice of Real Actions, in Their Writs and Process, Both Original and Judicial* (London, 1811), 10.

7. Bryan A. Garner and Henry Campbell Black, *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 9th ed. (St. Paul, Minn., 2009), 1272.

8. Robert Wyness Millar, *Civil Procedure of the Trial Court in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1952), 77; and Kent Sinclair, “Service of Process: Rethinking the Theory and Procedure of Serving Process under Federal Rule 4(c),” *Virginia Law Review* 73.7 (Oct. 1987): 1183–1295, at 1191, n. 26.d

9. “The Stonor Letters and Papers,” *Camden Third Series* 29 (July 1919): 1:76.

a die sancte Trinitatis in xv. dies”). That year, Trinity term ran from June 28 to July 19.

The third and final record, National Archives, CP 40/654, m. 190d., dates from Trinity term and is not a plea entry. Instead, Lydgate is in mercy for multiple defaults (“in misericordia pro pluribus defaultis”), while Moos is given the day, that is, the judgment is in his favor.<sup>10</sup> The matter is adjourned until the octave of Michaelmas, October 6–12. In this record, Lydgate is represented by his attorney (“per attornatum suum”).

This string of documents, especially Lydgate’s use of an attorney and, as in the 1425 record I discussed previously, his reliance on pledges, strengthens the theory that Lydgate was traveling abroad at the time. In my earlier article I argued that he was already in France in 1425.<sup>11</sup> I would now like to suggest that he was there as early as 1424 if not earlier.

### I.

Transcription and translation of National Archives, CP 40/653, m. 143f. (Fig. 1), Easter Term 1424: plea of debt brought by Henry Moos, mercer of London, against John Lydgate.

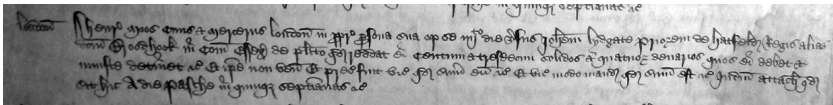


FIG. 1 National Archives, CP 40/653, m. 143f. ©The National Archives. This record is licensed under the Open Government Licence 3.0. Image from <http://aalt.law.uh.edu>.

### TRANSCRIPTION:

[margin: Londonium] Henricus Moos ciuis et mercerus Londonie in propria persona sua optulit de iijto die versus Iohannem Lydgate Priorem de Hatfeld Regis alias domus Broodhook in Comitatu Essexis de placito quod reddat ei centum et tresdecimi solidos et quatuor denarios quos ei debet et iniuste detinet etc. Et ipse non venit Et preceptum fuit vicecomes quod summoniat eum etc. Et vicecomes modo mandat quod summonitus est etc. Iudicium attachietur quod sit hic A die<sup>12</sup> Pasche in quinque septimanas etc.

10. When a judgment went against the defendant and a fine was levied, the defendant was said to be “in mercy” of the king. The legal term for such a fine was called *amercement*.

11. Sobeki, “The Earliest Record,” 218.

12. The return day specified here is May 29, 1424.

[margin London] Henry Moos, citizen and mercer of London, in his own person, offered himself on the fourth day against John Lydgate, Prior of Hatfield Regis, also known as House Broadhook, in the county of Essex, in a plea that he render to him 113 shillings and 4 pence, which he owes to him and unjustly withholds etc. And he did not come. And the sheriff was ordered to summon him etc. And the sheriff reports that he was summoned etc. The judgement is attached so that he be here five weeks from Easter etc.

## II.

Transcription and translation of National Archives, CP 40/653, m. 269d (Fig. 2), Easter Term 1424: plea of debt brought by Henry Moos, mercer of London, against John Lydgate.

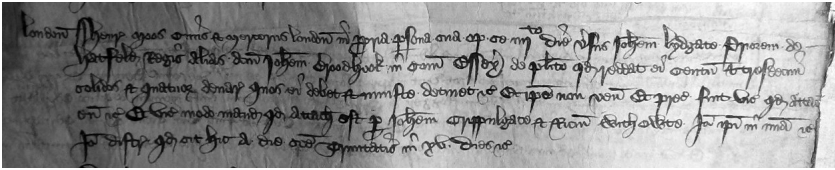


FIG. 2 National Archives, CP 40/653, m. 269d. ©The National Archives. This record is licensed under the Open Government Licence 3.0. Image from <http://aalt.law.uh.edu>.

### TRANSCRIPTION:

[margin: Londonium] Henricus Moos ciuis et mercerus Londonie in propria persona sua optulit de iiiijo die versus Iohannem Lydgate Priorem de Hatfeld Regis alias dominum Iohannem Broodhook in Comitatu Essexis de placito quod reddat ei centum et tresdecimi solidos et quatuor denarios quos ei debet et iniuste detinet etc. Et ipse non venit Et preceptum fuit vicecomes quod attachiet eum etc. Et Vicecomes modo mandat quod attachiatus est per Iohannem Crippulgate et Ricardum Withoute Ideo ipsi in manu etc. Ita distringatur quod sit hic a die sancte Trinitatis in xv. dies etc.

[margin London] Henry Moos, citizen and mercer of London, in his own person, offered himself on the fourth day against John Lydgate, Prior of Hatfield Regis, also known as Dom John Broadhook, in the county of Essex, in a plea that he render to him 113 shillings and 4 pence, which he owes to him and unjustly withholds etc. And he did not come. And the sheriff was ordered to seize him etc. And the sheriff reports that he is attached by the pledges of John Cripplegate and Richard Without. So that he is in the hand [of the king]. So[that he is] distrained that he be here by the quindene<sup>13</sup> of Trinity etc.

13. July 3, 1424.

## III.

Transcription and translation of National Archives, CP 40/654, m. 190d. (Fig. 3), Trinity Term 1424: John Lydgate in mercy for several defaults. Day given to Henry Moos.

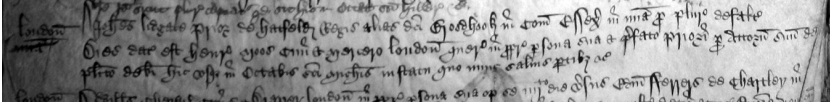


FIG. 3 National Archives, CP 40/654, m. 190d. ©The National Archives. This record is licensed under the Open Government Licence 3.0. Image from <http://aalt.law.uh.edu>.

## TRANSCRIPTION:

[margin: Londonium] Iohannes Lidgate Prior de Hatfeld Regis alias dicti Broodhook in Comitatu Essexie in misericordia pro pluribus defaltis Dies datus est Henrici Moos ciui et mercero Londonie querens in propria persona sua et prefato priore per attornatum suum de placito debiti hic vsque in Octabis<sup>14</sup> sancti Michaelis in statu quo nunc [a] saluis partibus etc.

[margin: London] John Lydgate, prior of Hatfield Regis (also called Broadhook) in the county of Essex, in mercy for several defaults. The day is given to Henry Moos, citizen and mercer of London, plaintiff, in his own person and the aforementioned prior through his attorney in a plea of debt, in the former state saving to the parties [their arguments and allegations] etc. here until the octave of Michaelmas

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14. October 6–12, 1424.