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Sir Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica*

A Medieval Chronicle and its Historical and Literary Context

Andy King, MA Thesis, Department of History, University of Durham, 1998

ABSTRACT

Sir Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica* is almost unique amongst medieval English chronicles in having been written by a knight, and it is therefore surprising that so little work has been done on it; this thesis attempts to remedy that omission. Gray's life is very well documented, as is that of his father (who was the source of much of the *Scalacronica*'s narrative of the reign of Edward II - and also its main subject). Thus, unusually with a medieval chronicle, it is possible to examine the work in the context of its author's career, providing a valuable insight into the attitudes and learning of a member of the gentry classes in fourteenth-century England.

The *Scalacronica* starts with a well known literary dream sequence in which Gray names some of his written sources. An analysis of this passage reveals much about Gray's learning and his methods as a historian - and about his literary pretensions. He also relied on stories gleaned from his father; the manner in which he integrated them with his written sources is equally revealing about his interests and priorities. As the elder Gray was close to the court of Edward II, his son's political commentary is particularly interesting, providing an alternative to the more usual pro-Lancastrian bias of medieval chroniclers. Furthermore, both the father and son were prominent in the administration of the Marches, so the *Scalacronica* has an obvious - but hitherto unrecognised - relevance to current historiographical debates on the rôle of the gentry.

Finally, the *Scalacronica* has been widely regarded as a 'chivalric' chronicle, embodying the values of medieval romance. However, a close analysis of Gray's text reveals that while he admired and respected acts of martial heroism, his attitude to the trappings of fourteenth-century chivalric culture was highly disdainful, and even cynical.

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Andy King



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Note

Although reference has been made to Maxwell's translation (*Scalacronica. The Reigns of Edward I, Edward II and Edward III* (Glasgow, 1907)), all translations of the text of the *Scalacronica* are my own, including the errors ...

Abbreviations

- AE*: *Archæologia Æliana*.
- Barbour*: *Barbour's Bruce*, ed. M.P. McDiarmid & J.A.C. Stevenson, 3 vols, Scottish Text Society, 4th ser., xii, xiii, xv (1980-5).
- Bridlington*: 'Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvon Auctore Canonico Bridlingtoniensi', and 'Gesta Edwardi Tertii Auctore Canonico Bridlingtoniensi', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I & Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS 76 (London, 1883), vol. ii.
- Brut*: *The Brut*, ed. F.W.D. Brie, vol. i, Early English Text Society 131 (London, 1906).
- Bower*: *Bower's Scotichronicon*, ed. D.E.R. Watt, 9 vols (Aberdeen and Edinburgh, 1987-98).
- CCR*: *Calendar of Close Rolls*.
- CFR*: *Calendar of Fine Rolls*.
- CPR*: *Calendar of Patent Rolls*.
- CDS*: *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland*, ed. J. Bain, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1881-8), corrected with reference to *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland*, vol. v: Supplementary, ed. G.G. Simpson & J.B. Galbraith (Edinburgh, 1988).
- EHR*: *English Historical Review*.
- Fædera*: *Fædera, Conventiones, Litteræ, et Public Acta, etc.*, ed. T. Rymer (Record Commission, 1816).
- Fordun*: *Johannis de Fordun. Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. William F. Skene, Edinburgh (1871).
- Gransden, i*: Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c.1307* (London, 1974).
- Gransden, ii*: Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.1307 to the Early 16thc.* (London, 1982).
- Knighton*: *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337-96*, ed. G.H. Martin (Oxford, 1995).
- Lanercost*: *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson, Bannatyne Club lxxv (Edinburgh, 1839).
- NCH*: *Northumberland County History*, 14 vols (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1893-1940).
- RPD*: *Registrum Palatinum Dunelmense*, ed. T.D. Hardy, RS 62, 4 vols (1873-8).
- RS*: Rolls Series: *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Scriptores*.
- Rot. Scot.*: *Rotuli Scotiæ*, ed. D. Macpherson, 2 vols (Record Commission, 1814-19).
- Scala.*: *Scalacronica*, by Sir Thomas Gray of Heton, Knight, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1836).
- Scala. (Lel.)*: Leland's abstract of the *Scalacronica*, printed in *ibid.*, pp. 259-315.
- SS*: Publications of the Surtees Society.
- Wyntoun*: *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, ed. F.J. Amours, 6 vols, Scottish Text Society (1903-14).

Introduction

The *Scalacronica* of Sir Thomas Gray is unusual amongst medieval chronicles in that it can be firmly attributed to an author whose career and family background can be traced in considerable detail.¹ As Gray was, even more unusually, a layman, this renders his work all the more interesting, for the *Scalacronica* is the only surviving historical work by a member of the fourteenth-century English knightly classes. As such, it provides a unique insight into how English history was perceived by a politically and militarily active member of the gentry, at a time when such men were wielding increasing influence in the conduct of royal government. Despite this, the chronicle has never been printed in full. A partial edition, from 1066 onwards, was published in 1836, and a translation of an even smaller part, from the reign of Edward I onwards, was published in 1907.² An (admittedly somewhat cursory) comparison of Stevenson's edition with the manuscript reveals that it is a very accurate transcription, although his paragraphing bears absolutely no relation to the clearly marked divisions of the original; his commentary, however, simply peters out when the narrative of the chronicle gets past the reign of King Richard. Nor did he bother to collate his text with Nicholas Wotton's transcripts, although he was well aware of their existence.³ Maxwell's translation is eminently readable, and manages to convey the broad sense of the French, but a significant part is paraphrased rather than accurately translated. Secondary studies are even thinner on the ground: only one study has been devoted entirely to the *Scalacronica*, an article by J.C. Thiolier. The work has also been

¹ Adam Murimuth's chronicle is another example (his career is described in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS (1882), i, pp. lx-lxvii). Much more typical are two of the works used as sources by Gray: the *Polychronicon*, about whose author, Ranulph Higden, very little is known, despite his reputation in his own lifetime (John Taylor, *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1987), p. 95; Gransden, ii, 43-4, 55-6); and the *Historia Aurea*, about whose author we know even less - even his name is a matter of debate (below, p. 33).

² *Scalacronica*, by Sir Thomas Gray of Heton, Knight, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1836); *Scalacronica. The Reigns of Edward I, Edward II and Edward III*, tr. Herbert Maxwell (Glasgow, 1907). Extracts from the *Scalacronica*'s account of King Arthur have also been published in M.L. Meneghetti, *I Fatti de Bretagna. Cronache Genealogiche Anglo-Normanne dal XII al XIV secolo* (Padova, 1979), pp. 44-51, 67-71, with editorial comment [a publication which I have not been able to examine]. Gray's account of the descent of the Kings of Scotland was excerpted in *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots and other Early Memorials of Scottish History*, ed. William F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1867), pp. 194-208.

³ *Scala.*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi; and see below, p. 4.

discussed, at no very great length, by Dominica Legge, Antonia Gransden, John Taylor and Diana Tyson; and Gray's prologue has been briefly examined by Beryl Smalley.⁴

In examining the *Scalacronica*, I have concentrated on its narrative from *circa* 1296 onwards, which covers events during the adult lives of its author and his father.⁵ Much of this part of the work is based on Thomas Gray's personal experience, or is derived from stories told to him by his father. It is thus a primary source and of greater historical value than the earlier parts, which were compiled from existing works. Consequently, it is the only part of the work to have been used by modern historians. Nevertheless, no detailed examination of the background of Gray and his chronicle has been made since Stevenson's edition.⁶ The intention of this thesis is to make such an examination, taking into account some of the advances that have been made in historiography since the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, and to set Gray's account of fourteenth-century English history in the context of his own career and that of his father. I will also examine the sources he used, and the literary *milieu* within which he worked. Finally, as Gray has been labelled as a 'chivalric historian', and is chiefly remembered as such today,⁷ I have examined the *Scalacronica*'s treatment of chivalric values at some length, to determine whether Gray actually deserves such an appellation.

⁴ J.C. Thiolier, 'La *Scalacronica*: Première Approche (MS 133)', *Les manuscrits français de la bibliothèque Parker. Actes du Colloque 24-27 mars 1993* (Cambridge, 1993), ed. Nigel Wilkins; M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 283-6; Gransden, ii, 93-6, 459-60; Taylor, *Historical Literature*, pp. 171-4; Diana B. Tyson, 'Les manuscrits du *Brut* en prose française (MSS 50, 53, 98, 133, 469)', *Manuscrits français de la bibliothèque Parker*, Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 13-15. The title of Thiolier's article is a telling indication of the level of academic interest in the subject ...

⁵ Obviously, this concentration on the latter part of the *Scalacronica* precludes any discussion of many fascinating topics, such as the *Scalacronica*'s pretensions to be a universal chronicle, Gray's attitude to the distant past, and his treatment of Arthurian material. Even within my chosen period, limitations of space have also prevented examination of such important matters as Gray's piety (or lack thereof) and his attitudes to books of prophecy, which he pointedly excludes from his remit.

⁶ Maxwell's introduction simply refers the reader back to Stevenson. The entry in the *National Biography* adds little to Stevenson's account, apart from updating his references. Stevenson's biographical notes are full, and include an impressive appendix of documents, but are essentially antiquarian in genre; Gray's career, and that of his father, is presented as a series of isolated incidents, with little in the way of historical context.

⁷ Both Gransden and Taylor explicitly class him thus.

I. The Authorship and Date of the *Scalacronica*

The Manuscript

The *Scalacronica* is to be found in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 133.⁸ It takes up all but the first three folios, which contain the ‘Algorismus’, a treatise on mathematics mostly in French verse.⁹ The first page of the chronicle itself is richly decorated, and the initial letter is illuminated, using gold leaf on a red and blue background. The script is a very neat fourteenth-century formal book hand, written in carefully ruled out double columns of forty-four lines each, with wide margins, and comparatively moderate use of abbreviation. Other illuminated initials are to be found at intervals throughout the work, while the text is further divided into sections by the use of blue initials, decorated with red linework. These sections vary in length from half a column to several folios, but tend to get longer towards the end of the book.¹⁰ Although the illumination is not of the highest order, being somewhat heavy handed, the overall effect is striking and it is certainly a very handsome volume. It is obviously the work of a practised scribe, and appears to have been copied in one stint; it cannot therefore be Gray’s autograph, as he wrote his work over several years.¹¹

There has been some confusion concerning other possible manuscripts of the *Scalacronica*. In his catalogue, M.R. James described Corpus Christi MS 133 as ‘the best copy’, implying that others were to be found. Sure enough, he catalogues the first item in Jesus College, Cambridge, MS 58 as ‘the *Scala Chronica* of Sir Thomas Gray ... in French prose, imperfect at the beginning’, which goes down as far as the death of Henry III.¹² However, this chronicle takes up only the first seventy folios of MS 58, whereas the *Scalacronica* takes up 190 folios of MS 133 to reach the death of Henry

⁸ It should be noted that the title *Scalacronica* is the author’s own, given in the text of the prologue (*Scala.*, p. 4; and see below, p. 31).

⁹ The three folios of the ‘Algorismus’ make up a separate quire, and the hand, whilst contemporary with that of the *Scalacronica*, is an entirely different cursive script, using a different colour of ink. Clearly, it was originally a separate item. The MS is described by M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1905), pp. 305-6

¹⁰ These initials are noted by neither Stevenson nor Maxwell.

¹¹ See below, pp. 7-8.

¹² James, *Library of Corpus Christi College*, p. 306; *idem*, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Jesus College, Cambridge* (London, 1895), pp. 92-3.

III, so at best, MS 58 must be severely abridged.¹³ In fact, it would appear that the chronicle in MS 58 is a version of the *Brut*. The verbal similarities to the *Scalacronica* can be accounted for by the suggestion that Gray lifted his account of Henry III's reign from a similar source.¹⁴ Extracts from the *Scalacronica* were copied down in the sixteenth century, by the antiquarian Nicholas Wotton, as Stevenson notes in his introduction; but as Wotton's surviving notebook contains only one folio devoted to 'excerpta e Scalæ Chronico de temporibus Regum Angliæ Stephani et Henrici II', Stevenson's reference to 'numerous extracts' seems somewhat exaggerated.¹⁵ This leaves Corpus Christi MS 133 as the only significant manuscript of the *Scalacronica*; it is therefore particularly unfortunate to note that it is missing several folios. Even more unfortunately, the missing part covers the period 1341 to 1355, which is most of its author's active life. Fortunately, however, the sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland made an English abstract of the work from a complete copy, and this goes some way to filling the gap. A comparison of this abstract with the surviving part of the *Scalacronica* reveals that it is usually accurate in so far as it goes, though there are a few major errors: for instance, Gray's account of the defeat of Edward de Balliol by Archibald Douglas, in the Vale of Annan, 1332, is actually recorded by Leland as a victory for the English.¹⁶ Furthermore, parts of his abstract are far more condensed than others. For instance, Sir William Marmion's famous chivalric escapade at Norham in 1319 is retold almost in full, including a paraphrase of the elder Gray's speech. By contrast, the *Scalacronica*'s lengthy account of the battle of Dupplin Moor in 1332 is reduced by Leland to a brief summary, entirely losing the vividness of the original; Henry de Beaumont's pep-talk to the disheartened 'disinherited' is rendered as 'The Lord Beaumont, seyng the ennemyes at hand, encoragid al the company', which hardly captures the spirit of his words.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Leland gives no indication of such variations in the extent of his summarising, and were the original is lacking, it is impossible to tell just how much detail has been left out at any given point. In other

¹³ It should also be noted that, as James's catalogues attest, the folios of MS 133 are bigger than those of MS 58, allowing more text on each page.

¹⁴ Thiolier, 'La *Scalacronica*: Première Approche', pp. 122-3.

¹⁵ *Scala.*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi; *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1808), p. 470.

¹⁶ *Scala.*, p. 161; cf. *Scala.* (Lel), p. 295.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 290-1, 294; cf. *Scala.*, pp. 145-6, 159-60.

places, Leland's abbreviation actually distorts the meaning of Gray's text; for example, the very last sentence of the *Scalacronica* is rendered 'Davy Bruis, king of Scottes, toke to wyfe, by force of love, one Margaret de Logy'. This completely fails to convey Gray's studied, and almost certainly derisory, allusion to the literary conventions of *fin amour*.¹⁸ In summary, Leland's abstract can, with due caution, be used as a guide to the factual content of the missing portions of the *Scalacronica*; it will not, however, bear detailed textual analysis; nor can it be taken as a wholly reliable guide to what the missing portions of Gray's work did not contain.

A Literary Prisoner

At the beginning of the *Scalacronica*, its author writes (in the third person) that he does not wish to reveal his name plainly, but he does tell us that he was a prisoner of war when he started to write the work. He then appends some lines of verse, which apparently describe his heraldic arms, though his description has baffled scholars;¹⁹ fortunately, he goes on to spell out his name in the form of an acrostic:

Soit viij. [H] ioynt apres xix^{me} [T],
 Si mettez xij. [M] apres xiiij^{me} [O],
 Vn [A] et xvij. [S] encountrez,
 Soun propre noun ensauerez,
 Vij. [G] a xvij [R] y mettez,
 Le primer vouel [A] au tierce [I] aioignez,
 Soun droit surnoun entrouerez
 Solunc l'alphabet.²⁰

This spells out 'Thomas Grai'; and the author adds that his father had the same name. He continues by describing how he came to write the book, again mentioning his imprisonment, this time adding that he was held in Edinburgh castle. Later, he adds that he started to write in 1355.²¹ The author of the *Scalacronica* was therefore a man named Thomas Gray, the son of another Thomas Gray, who was captive in Edinburgh

¹⁸ *Scala*. (Lel), p. 315; cf. *Scala*., p. 203 (discussed below, p. 79).

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. xxxv n.; Gransden, ii, 94.

²⁰ *Scala*., pp. 1-2; James, *Library of Corpus Christi College*, p. 305. Note that the modern letters 'I' and 'J' were not distinguished by medieval grammarians, being counted as a single letter; thus 'T' was the 19th letter of the medieval alphabet.

²¹ *Scala*., p. 4.

in 1355, and who was alive in 1362, when the book ends. These criteria are all filled by Sir Thomas Gray, the constable of Norham castle who was captured by the Scots in 1355.²² Furthermore, his father was the constable of Norham of that name whose exploits dominate the *Scalacronica's* account of the reign of Edward II. Given these correlations, and the close match between Gray's known career and the interests of the chronicle's author, there are few medieval works whose authorship can be more securely established.²³ The acrostic was doubtless inspired by the example of Ralph Higden (whom Gray alludes to as one of his sources), who altered the initial capital letters of the sixty chapters of Book I of his *Polychronicon* to produce an acrostic which read: 'Presentem cronicam compilavit Frater Ranulphus Cestrensis monachus'.²⁴ In an age when texts were often copied as continuations of other books, it was easy for an author's name to be detached from his work; incorporating that name into the body of the text as an acrostic was one means of preventing this from happening.

The idea of the literary prisoner was well known long before the career of Sir Thomas Malory; the obvious example would have been Boethius, who wrote his vastly influential *Consolation of Philosophy* while awaiting execution in 524. There were rather more contemporary examples, such as *Le Mireur a Justices* ('The Mirror of Justices'), a curious and mendacious legal tract written *circa* 1290. Its author claimed to be a 'prosecutor of false judges', by whom he had been maliciously imprisoned. He further claimed that whilst imprisoned, he had searched treasury records and charters to discover the laws of England.²⁵ Apart from the unlikelihood of a prisoner being

²² The toponym 'de Heton', often used by modern historians to describe the chronicler, was not actually used by him. It was first adopted by his son, another Thomas, to distinguish him from Thomas Gray de Horton, who (unlike his eponymous forebears) was active in Northumbrian affairs, during the reign of Richard II. See, e.g., *Rot. Scot.*, ii, 84 (1386). It should also be noted that where the *Scalacronica* refers to the author's father, it consistently uses the spelling 'Gray', more often than not with the prefix 'de'; documentary references to the author and his father use the spellings 'Gray' and 'Grey' indifferently, with or without the 'de'.

²³ It is, for instance, interesting to note that there is actually no hard evidence to link Geoffrey Chaucer the poet with Geoffrey Chaucer the courtier and servant of Richard II's government, though the identification is obvious and universally accepted.

²⁴ Gransden, ii, 44, 47, & plate II (a); Taylor, *Historical Literature*, p. 101. Henry Knighton also copied Higden, employing an acrostic to identify himself as the author of his chronicle (Knighton, p. xvii). By a strange coincidence, Gray's own grandson (the Sir Thomas Gray who was involved in the Southampton plot of 1415) was to be alluded to by an acrostic in Thomas Elmham's metrical *Life of Henry V*. This fifteenth-century work included many cryptograms, one of which spelled out Gray's name backwards (Gransden, ii, pp. 207-8).

²⁵ *The Mirror of Justices*, ed. W.J. Whitaker & F.W. Maitland, Selden Society vii (1893), pp. 2,

allowed access to royal records, the whole work is of a highly inventive nature, and we may assume that, in the case of *Le Mireur a Justices*, the claim of its author to being a prisoner was merely a literary device. The author of the *Scalacronica* was certainly not incapable of using similar literary artifice, as his opening vision of the Sibyl demonstrates. However, as Thomas Gray actually was a prisoner, there is no good reason to doubt his own account that he started to write his book while he was captive in Edinburgh castle, particularly as he made use of Scottish sources unknown to other English chroniclers. Gray was captured in mid-October 1355, which provides a starting date for his literary endeavours.²⁶ Obviously, he cannot have completed it before 1362, where the narrative ends. However, he was back in England by the end of November 1356 at the latest, and could have spent little more than a year in captivity. Furthermore, he made extensive use of the *Historia Aurea* of John of Tynemouth, a work which he probably borrowed from the library at Durham cathedral (and which he could therefore only have used after his release). The fact that this work is alluded to in his prologue, and is used in conjunction with Scottish sources without any obvious trace of interpolation, suggests that the material he wrote in captivity was subsequently rewritten after his release. On the other hand, Gray's claim that he was totally ignorant of history, until his imprisonment gave him the chance to improve his knowledge, is merely a false-modesty *topos*, typical of medieval authors. He specifically states that he started to write in 1355, but he was not captured until the October of that year; it is hardly credible that he was able to acquire, from scratch, enough knowledge to start writing a universal history from the Creation, in a bare two months.

Towards the end of his book, after recounting the risings in Paris and the activities of the king of Navarre in 1358, Gray pauses in his narrative, before going on to describe the French expedition of 1359, an expedition on which he was present himself.²⁷ He writes that he has not been able to record all of the feats of arms performed by the English, because they had established themselves in many places

xxii- xxiv. The attribution of the *Fleta* to a prisoner in the Fleet gaol was an invention of the seventeenth-century lawyer and polemicist Sir Edward Coke; there is no such claim in the work itself (*Fleta*, vol. iv, ed. G.O. Sayles, Selden Society xcix (1983), pp. xxiv-xxv).

²⁶ The date and length of Gray's captivity are discussed below, p. 28. It should be noticed that Gray states only that he started his work while a prisoner, not that he finished it ('... mais prisoner estoit pris de guer al hour qil comensa cest tretice', *Scala.*, p. 1).

²⁷ *Fæderæ*, III, i, 443.

throughout France, and many young men from different parts of England did/^{not} know each other, so that their expeditions went unrecorded.²⁸ He goes on to add that since many notable deeds were forgotten when the book was being written, some of them will be added now. There follows a series of vivid accounts of *mêlées* and skirmishes, allegedly dating back as far back as 1333. Despite Gray's allusions to his poor memory, the most likely explanation of these interpolations is that Gray heard these tales from his colleagues, while on campaign in France. Indeed, it is almost as though Gray put aside his work in mid paragraph, to answer his king's summons to war. All of which indicates that the main body of the *Scalacronica*, dealing with events up to 1358, was written between Gray's release in or before November 1356 and his departure on the royal expedition to France of 1359, which sailed at the end of that October.

²⁸ *Scala.*, p. 180.

II. The Careers of Sir Thomas Gray & his father

Thomas Gray *le piere*

In 1295, a certain Thomas Hugtoun had a vision. In this vision, his long dead father appeared to him in the habit of a Franciscan friar, to warn his son that his neighbours at Berwick had been neglecting the charitable donations which he had begun in honour of St. Francis; if they did not amend their ways, they would swiftly experience the loss of their worldly goods and the dishonour of their bodies. Needless to say, this timely warning went unheeded, and the *revelationem* was proved true when the town was sacked with the utmost ferocity by Edward I.²⁹ However, whilst the onset of war may have been the ruin of the good citizens of Berwick, some of the apparition's worldly descendants made their fortune out of it, for Hugtoun's father was Sir John Gray, probably the great-grandfather of Sir Thomas Gray, author of the *Scalacronica*. A John Gray was mayor of Berwick in 1253, but he also seems to have had a rather more belligerent side to his career, for the Northern Franciscan chronicle comments that he was 'as much a knight as a burgess' (*tam miles quam burgensis*) and the surviving portion of the Hundred Rolls for Northumberland records that a John Gray had forfeited lands there after the battle of Evesham.³⁰ Presumably, like other disinherited northern Montfortians such as John de Vesci, John Gray was able to make his peace with the crown, for his manor of Heton (near the Tweed, in Northumberland) was inherited by Sir Robert Gray, according to English law ('*qi le tient par la ley d'Engleterre de heritage Johan Grey*'); however, on Robert's death, it was seized by Anthony Bek as a forfeiture of war, for he had died in Scotland as an opponent of the king, and his son remained in rebellion.³¹ While John had been active in politics in both Scotland and England and, in a more forgiving age, had been able to recover from backing the wrong side, Robert was forced to choose his allegiance, and as a result, he lost his inheritance. By October 1312, Sir Thomas Gray, father of the chronicler, held Heton of the bishops of Durham. His precise relationship to Robert is not specified;

²⁹ *Lanercost*, pp. 185-6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186; *Scala*, p. xiii; John Scott, *Berwick-upon-Tweed. The History of the Town and Guild* (London, 1888), p. 478; *Rotuli Hundredorum*, 2 vols (Record Commission, 1812-18), ii, 27.

³¹ *RPD*, i, 77-8; *CPR 1307-13*, p. 337; C.H. Knowles, 'The Resettlement of England after the Baron's War, 1264-7', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. xxxii (1982).

however, a Thomas Gray of Heton is mentioned in the Hundred Rolls for Northumberland and he should perhaps be identified with Thomas Hugtoun, identified by the Lanercost Chronicle as the younger son of John Gray.³² The chronicler's father was perhaps Heton's son, and the obvious implication is that the Robert Gray who forfeited Heton was his uncle, and that he thus benefited from a war that split many families down the middle, across a border line which, until 1296, had had very little practical significance.³³

Thomas Gray made his way through military service in Scotland. However, his career was nearly finished before it began, for in May 1297, he had the misfortune to be in the company of William de Heselrig, sheriff of Lanark, when the latter was killed by William Wallace, along with most of his companions. Gray himself was stripped and left for dead, surviving only because he happened to be left between two burning buildings. It was the warmth of these fires which kept him alive until the arrival of help in the morning. He recovered quickly enough, for in June, he was serving (along with another Northumbrian, Robert de Reymes) in the *comitiva* of John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, who had just been given the custody of Scotland.³⁴ In 1300, he was fighting in Selkirk forest with Patrick of Dunbar, Earl of March, and Hugh d'Audley. He was still with the earl in September 1302. The *Scalacronica* has a detailed account of the night time battle at Roslin in February 1303, where John de Segrave was defeated by John Comyn, and Ralph Manton, the king's cofferer, was killed. This account mentions the presence of March, so Gray was probably there himself. If so, he managed to escape, but was not so lucky in the spring, when he accompanied Edward's Scottish expedition, in Hugh d'Audley's company of 60 men-at-arms. While comfortably - and rashly - quartered at Melrose Abbey, in advance of the main army, Hugh and his men

³² *Rotuli Hundredorum*, ii, 23; *Scala*, p. xiii-xiv; *RPD*, ii, 1170-1 (It is interesting to note that one of the witnesses to this deed was one Thomas de Graystones, presumably a relation of the Durham chronicler, Robert de Graystones).

³³ The Grays faced the same problems as those experienced by families such as the Comyns, Bruces and Umfravilles, albeit on a much more local scale (J.A. Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society in the Fourteenth Century', *Northern History* vi (1971), pp. 24-6; *idem*, 'The Emergence of a Northern Nobility, 1250-1400', *Northern History* xxii (1986), pp. 6-7).

³⁴ *Scala*, pp. 123-4; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 47. Warenne himself was probably the source of the *Scalacronica*'s famous quotation of Edward I's, expressing his low opinion of Scottish affairs (see below, p. 46).

suffered another surprise night attack, and all were killed or captured; Gray was forced to surrender when the house he was defending burnt down over his head.³⁵

Despite this setback, Edward was able to push his forces right into the north of Scotland, for in the aftermath of Courtrai, the Scots could expect no further support from France, and most of them came to terms early in 1304. These terms evidently included provision for the release of prisoners and the remission of any outstanding ransoms; thus Gray was free to serve at the siege of Stirling castle, held by Sir William Oliphant, who refused to submit to Edward, claiming, according to the *Scalacronica*, that he held the castle of the Lion ('se clamoit a tenir du Lioun' - a reference to Scotland's heraldic symbol).³⁶ Here, Gray was in the retinue of Henry de Beaumont. Beaumont had entered Edward's service in 1297, becoming a knight of the royal household, at about the same^{time} as Thomas Gray began his career in arms. Beaumont's sister Isabella was the widow of John de Vesci, Lord of Alnwick, and in November 1304, she was appointed custodian of Bamburgh castle, suggesting that the Beaumonts had ambitions to extend their influence in Northumberland; it is therefore hardly surprising that Henry should have employed a Northumbrian knight such as Gray.³⁷ The *Scalacronica* has a dramatic account of how Gray rescued his lord, who had been caught by a hook thrown from a siege engine; but as he dragged Beaumont to safety, Gray was hit in the head by a bolt from a springald. Not surprisingly, it was assumed that he had been killed, and he had the unusual experience of attending his own funeral, for he revived just as he was about to be buried. It is easy to overlook the purely personal factors that could influence a knight's career in the service of his lord; an example is Sir Robert Holland, whose rapid advancement in the service of Earl Thomas of Lancaster seems to have been mainly due to the simple fact that the earl liked and trusted him.³⁸ Similarly, Gray now seems to have enjoyed Henry de

³⁵ CDS, ii, no. 1230; CDS, v, no. 272; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 52; *Scala*, pp. 126-7.

³⁶ *Scala.*, p. 127; *Documents and Records Illustrating the History of Scotland, Preserved in the Treasury*, ed. F. Palgrave (Record Commission, 1837), i, 285; Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), pp. 497-500; Ranald Nicholson, *Scotland. The Later Middle Ages* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 66-7. The *Scalacronica* makes no connection between Edward's campaign and the battle of Courtrai, for Gray misdates the French defeat to after the fall of Stirling Castle (pp. 127-8).

³⁷ Michael Prestwich, 'Isabella de Vescy and the Custody of Bamburgh Castle', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* xlv (1971), pp. 148-9.

³⁸ J.R. Maddicott, 'Thomas of Lancaster and Sir Robert Holland: A Study in Noble Patronage', *EHR* lxxxvi (1971).

Beaumont's confidence, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this stemmed at least partly from gratitude for Gray's prompt action at Stirling. A mark of this confidence was his appointment as an attorney, along with Henry himself, for Isabella de Vesci, in an inquiry taken at Perth in May 1305, concerning her rights in the barony of Crail, in Scotland.³⁹ Furthermore, just as Holland's links with an influential patron brought him advancement in royal service, so Gray's association with Beaumont opened up an avenue to royal patronage; thus, in 1306, in the aftermath of the collapse of Edward's settlement of Scotland, he was able to petition the king for various lands of one 'Wauter de Bykerton de Kyngkragg' and of 'Alexander Fraser, qui fu le fitz Andrew Fraser'. Nevertheless, even if these petitions were granted, the deteriorating situation in Scotland would probably have prevented their implementation.⁴⁰

The rebellion of Robert Bruce ensured continuing employment for Gray, and he received a protection for service in Berwick in 1306 (he was paid £21 6s. for himself and four esquires from February to May), after which he rejoined Henry de Beaumont's company. In October, he was employed to take some money to the royal household at Lanercost, where Edward was lying 'grantement demore maladiz'; it may have been on this occasion that the king promised him land at *Ughthrotherestrother*.⁴¹ Edward's death did not interrupt Gray's burgeoning military career; in October 1307, he was amongst a group of earls, barons and knights, who received letters ordering them to go to Scotland, 'cum equis et armis ac toto posse vestro', for the defence of the realm, and of his own possessions; and in the following October, he received a protection for service in Scotland until Easter next.⁴² The accession of Edward II also brought Gray into closer contact with the court, for Beaumont was a favourite of the new king. In October 1307, Gray was able to obtain a grant of free warren for Henry de Ilderton of Northumberland, and in December, he stood as mainpernor for

³⁹ CDS, ii, no. 1670.

⁴⁰ Maddicott, 'Lancaster and Robert Holland', pp. 465-6; *Documents and Records*, ed. Palgrave, i, 303-4, 313; Michael Prestwich, 'Colonial Scotland: The English in Scotland under Edward I', *Scotland and England 1286-1815*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ *Scala.*, p. 133; CDS, v, nos 415, 2621, 492 (vi), 510; *Documents and Records*, ed. Palgrave, i, 313. It should be noted that despite the elder Gray's service in the borders, the *Scalacronica* still manages erroneously to record Edward as present in Dunfermline in 1306 (p. 132).

⁴² *Fædera*, II, i, 9 (others so ordered included Henry de Beaumont, and the prominent northern landowners Henry de Percy, Robert de Clifford and John fitz Marmaduke); also printed in *Rot. Scot.*, i, 58.

Christiana de Seton, who had been detained in Sixhills convent, Lincolnshire, by reason of her husband's adherence to the Scots. Furthermore, the *Scalacronica* records incidently that he attended the coronation of Edward II, in 1308, presumably in Beaumont's retinue.⁴³ Clearly, Gray's social standing was now on the ascendant. A mark of this was his appointment as constable of the castle of Cupar, Fife, probably after it had been recaptured from the Scots by Aymer de Valence, shortly before the battle of Methven. The *Scalacronica* describes how, when he was on his way back from the coronation with a company of just twenty-six men-at-arms, he fought off an ambush of 400 Scotsmen (led by none other than Walter de Bickerton, whose lands Gray had recently petitioned for). This notable feat was achieved by the trick of equipping his grooms with a standard, fooling the Scots into believing that reinforcements had come to his rescue. As a result, he captured 180 horses after their owners had fled on foot through a peat bog. On another occasion, he had to fight his way back to the castle through the town of Cupar, after Alexander Fraser (another Scot whose estates Gray coveted) had set an ambush for him there, on a market day. Nevertheless, the castle had fallen to the Scots by the middle of 1308.⁴⁴

Gray continued to serve in Scotland over the following years, with his own retinue and with Henry de Beaumont. He also began to play a rôle in the affairs of the bishopric of Durham, witnessing a grant by Bishop Antony Bek, of the manor of *Cralyng* in Scotland, to Sir William Dacre in August 1310.⁴⁵ He was fighting in Scotland when the crisis over Piers Gaveston reached its height. However, the Ord incés^{an} of 1311 demanded Beaumont's removal from the court, so Gray was aligned with the king, if only by default.⁴⁶ This worked to his advantage in October 1312, when he recovered his family's manor of Heton in Northamptonshire. It had been forfeited to Bek when Thomas' uncle, Robert Grey, had gone over to the Scots. In 1311, during the vacancy after Bek's death, it had been granted by Edward II to

⁴³ *CChR 1300-26*, p. 107; *CCR 1307-13*, p. 14; *CDS*, iii, no. 27; *Scala.*, p. 138.

⁴⁴ *Scala.*, pp. 138-9; Colm McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces. Scotland, England and Ireland 1306-28* (East Linton, 1997), p. 31; G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (3rd edn, Edinburgh, 1988), p. 190.

⁴⁵ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 58; *CCR 1307-13*, p. 166; *CDS* v, nos 2744, 2756, 2909, 2921, 2921; *CPR 1334-8*, p. 78.

⁴⁶ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 6 vols (London, 1767-77), i, 284. Gray received a protection for service in Scotland on 31 March 1312, lasting until Michaelmas (*CDS*, v, no. 2932).

Walter de Wodeham, only to be seized back into the king's hands after Wodeham's death, as part of the resumption of royal grants demanded by the Ordainers. Naturally, the newly installed Bishop Kellaw objected strenuously to this seizure and his objections were presumably answered, for it was shortly after this that the manor was granted to Thomas Gray.⁴⁷ Although Gray's acquisition of Heton may have been occasioned by political circumstances - for Bishop Kellaw was primarily concerned to re-establish his bishopric's rights over the manor, while Edward II would have been happy to circumvent the Ordainers - it was his continued loyal service in the Scottish wars that ensured that he was able to take advantage of these political circumstances to recover his family's lands, for this service made him acceptable to Edward. Nevertheless, this grant may well have landed him, and subsequently his son, in a long running dispute with Wodeham's heirs, for as late as 1354, Reynold son of Simon de Wodeham (presumably the grandson of Walter) quitclaimed all rights in the manor of Heton, which deed was enrolled in the chancery; this suggests that Gray's acquisition of the manor remained a contentious issue.⁴⁸

At Bannockburn, Gray was in the company of Henry de Beaumont. However, during the skirmishing on the day before the main battle, he fell out with Beaumont over tactics, and was captured when his horse was killed under him by Scottish spearmen.⁴⁹ By way of comparison, another Northumbrian captured at Bannockburn was Robert de Clifford, lord of Ellingham, who had to pay a ransom of £100, and lost horses and harness which he claimed to be worth 100 marks; and there is no reason to doubt that Gray's losses were just as heavy. Nonetheless, his capture does not seem to have impeded his career, and he must have been free by April 1315, when he was appointed to a commission of oyer and terminer concerning the killing of some Scots near Norham, allegedly travelling under a safe-conduct.⁵⁰ He remained in royal service with his own company (*meignee*) of men, and must have repaired his relationship with Beaumont, for in March 1317, he accompanied Beaumont and the Earl of Arundel on

⁴⁷ *RPD*, i, 77-8, ii, 1170-1; *CPR 1307-13*, p. 337; *CFR 1307-19*, p. 243.

⁴⁸ *CCR 1354-60*, p. 97.

⁴⁹ *Scala.*, p. 141. Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 216-21. The *Scalacronica*'s account of Gray's capture is discussed below, p. 83.

⁵⁰ *Northumberland Petitions. Ancient Petitions Relating to Northumberland*, ed. C.M. Fraser, SS clxxvi (1966), pp. 161-2; *CPR 1313-17*, p. 250.

a raid into Jedwood forest, taking advantage of Robert Bruce's absence in Ireland. However, they were ambushed by James Douglas at Lintalee, and retreated without having achieved anything; Gray lost a horse, for which he received compensation of 20 marks.⁵¹ He also served in the garrison of Berwick with fourteen esquires, and may have been there when the town fell to the Scots in April 1318.⁵² His closeness to the court at this time is demonstrated by the fact that he was on Edward's Christmas present list, being one of the twenty-five knights recorded as receiving a gift of plate from the king at Westminster on 26 December 1317.⁵³ This is also the earliest securely datable reference to Gray as a knight, another indication of his growing status. Another rather more material reward followed on Gilbert de Middleton's notorious robbery of the Cardinals in September 1317. Gray petitioned for, and received, a hereditary grant of lands in Howick, near Alnwick, forfeited by John Mautalent, an adherent of Walter de Selby, one of Middleton's most prominent allies.⁵⁴ The intended target of Middleton's ambush had been the newly elected bishop of Durham, Louis de Beaumont, and his brother Henry (Gray's patron); and in 1319, after Louis' belated consecration, Gray was appointed as sheriff of Norham and Islandshire (i.e. Holy Island) and constable of Norham castle.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of Middleton's rising, Louis de Beaumont was badly in need of reliable supporters amongst the local gentry, and one of his brother's followers would have been an obvious starting point.

⁵¹ *CCW 1244-1326*, p. 438; *Scala.*, p. 143 (which omits to mention the presence of either Gray or Beaumont); Thomas Stapleton, 'A Brief Summary of the Wardrobe Accounts of the tenth, eleventh and fourteenth years of King Edward II', *Archaeologia* xxvi, pp. 324-5; V.H. Galbraith, 'Extracts from the *Historia Aurea* and a French *Brut*', *EHR* xliii (1928), p. 208; Barbour, iii, 135-141; McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, p. 151.

⁵² *CCR 1318-23*, p. 43 (he was still owed £179 11s. 4d. in arrears of wages and compensation for lost horses in December, *ibid.*). The *Scalacronica* describes a couple of skirmishes involving the garrison of Berwick, and adds the detail that the castle's constable, Roger de Horsley, lost an eye to an arrow when the town fell to the Scots (*Scala.*, pp. 143-4).

⁵³ Stapleton, 'Wardrobe Accounts of King Edward II', p. 344. Gray is listed between two Northern knights, William Ridel and John Fenwick, and Ridel had been associated with Gray as a witness to various deeds of Bishop Kellaw (*RPD*, ii, 1170-1, 1178, 1179-80), suggesting that this is indeed our Gray, and not one of his namesakes.

⁵⁴ *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous 1307-49*, nos 366, 375; *CDS*, iii, nos 610, 635; *CPR 1317-21*, p. 333-4; A.E. Middleton, *Sir Gilbert de Middleton* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1918), p. 93. The grant was made in May 1319, with the assent of the parliament at York; the lands were valued at £7 10s. in time of peace, with the reversion of a further £6 worth of land, held by Mautalent's mother in dower.

⁵⁵ James Raine, *The History and Antiquities of North Durham* (London, 1852), p. 45.

Norham castle overlooks a crossing of the Tweed, and the office of constable was therefore no sinecure; but it marked the degree of Gray's social advancement for he retained a garrison that, in September 1322, numbered 20 men-at-arms and 50 hobelars, paid for by the crown, plus 'some men of the bishop of Durham'.⁵⁶ After Middleton's rising, the castle seems to have come under a more or less permanent state of siege. This gave rise to the best known incident of Gray's career, when Sir William Marmion arrived at the castle, determined to make famous the gold-crested helm presented to him by his beloved.⁵⁷ When Sir Alexander de Mowbray arrived outside the gates with more than 160 men-at-arms, Marmion was sent out to charge them singlehandedly. Not surprisingly, he was pulled off his horse and wounded in the face - but in the nick of time, Gray and his men came to the rescue. They drove off the Scots, pursuing them to Berwick nunnery (an unlikely sounding refuge), captured fifty valuable horses and killed the Flemish pirate Cryn.⁵⁸ The Scots seem to have made every effort to take the castle: at one point, they managed to break into the outer ward due to the treachery of one of Gray's men, while he was absent in the south. However, the garrison held out in the inner ward, and the Scots fled after three days, on his return.⁵⁹ The *Scalacronica* portrays Gray and his garrison as standing virtually alone, so dispirited were the English. Of course, this picture is exaggerated, but perhaps not by much; certainly, when Norham was besieged in 1322 (in the aftermath of the disastrous battle at Old Byland, Yorkshire), the king wrote to the constables of Bamburgh, Dunstanburgh, Warkworth and Alnwick castles to berate them for their failure to go to Gray's assistance.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ At a cost to the treasury of £113 for 6 months (*CDS* iii, no. 772; *CCR 1330-3*, p. 367).

⁵⁷ *Scala.*, pp. 145-6; Marmion was probably already acquainted with Gray, having served in Scotland with Henry Beaumont in 1309-10 (*CDS*, v, nos 2709, 2737, 2774). The *Scalacronica*'s treatment of this incident is discussed below, pp. 73-5.

⁵⁸ Cryn, described as 'vn Flemyng, vn amyrail de la mere, vn robbour, qi grant meistre estoit od Robert de Bruys' (a Fleming, a sea captain, and a robber who was an important adherent of Robert de Bruce, *Scala*, p. 146), should probably be identified with Crabbekyn, the nephew and partisan of the infamous John Crabb. He was in his uncle's company in 1315, when they plundered a ship belonging to Alice countess Marshal, but was not mentioned in November 1319, when the count of Flanders promised to break Crabb on the wheel for his crimes (*CDS*, iii, nos 417, 673).

⁵⁹ *Scala.*, p. 147. It should be noted that the Scots did not usually bother to besiege English castles in the years after Bannockburn (Carlisle, besieged in 1315, being the other obvious example). Presumably, Norham's strategic position at a border crossing induced them to make an exception.

⁶⁰ *CDS*, iii, nos 783, 787; McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, p. 99. Gray himself received letters from the king commending him for his continued resistance (*ibid.*, nos 777, 787).

The failure of the royal expedition to Scotland in 1322, followed by the rebellion of Andrew de Harcla, forced Edward to reach a truce with Robert Bruce; for it had become abundantly clear that he was unable to impose a military solution. Indeed, the *Scalacronica* compares the English, cowed by the Scots, to hares before greyhounds.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Bruce had his own problems - in the shape of the Soules conspiracy - and a thirteen year truce was duly sealed. However, the outbreak of peace was not universally welcomed in northern England, for Thomas Gray was not the only northerner to have made a successful career from the war. His patron, Henry de Beaumont, was the Earl of Buchan, by right of his wife; as the truce abrogated English claims to Scottish lands, he stood to lose a great deal. A meeting of the royal council was held on 30 May 1323, to ratify the treaty. Asked for his opinion, he was unable to conceal his discontent:

And when the king enjoined each of those present ... to give their advice, the said Henry, with an excessive motion and irreverent mind, answered the king frequently that he would not counsel him in this behalf. The king, being moved by such an answer, ordered him to leave his council, and Henry in leaving the council said as he had said before, and that it would please him more to be absent from the council than to be present.⁶²

As a result of this outspokenness, Beaumont was threatened with imprisonment, and Gray stood as mainpernor for him, along with prominent northern 'hawks' such as Henry Percy and Ralph de Neville, and William Ridel (a Northumbrian knight who is associated with Gray in surviving documents).⁶³

Gray's interests and associations clearly aligned him with the northern faction which favoured the resumption of war with Scotland; in September 1323, he witnessed Gilbert Aton's confirmation of Antony Bek's grant of Alnwick to Henry de Percy, in the company of such prominent disinherited lords as Robert de Umfraville and, of course, Percy himself.⁶⁴ However, Henry Beaumont, Gray's chief patron, was now in what amounted to internal exile; nor was his brother Louis in much higher favour, having been sent a heavily sarcastic letter from the king, lambasting him for his

⁶¹ 'Mais les Escocoz si encharnyz et si enparuauntz lez chieftains et les Engles si rebukez, qe y ny avoit entre eux mais com du lever devaunt levereres', *Scala.*, pp. 149-50.

⁶² *CCR 1318-23*, p. 717.

⁶³ McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, pp. 236-7; Natalie Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II 1321-6* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 159. For Ridel's association with Gray, see above, p. 15, n. 53. The *Scalacronica* makes no reference to Beaumont's fall from favour, despite the elder Gray's personal involvement as a mainpernor for him.

⁶⁴ *The Percy Chartulary*, ed. M.T. Martin, Surtees Society cxvii (1909), p. 232.

‘default, negligence and laziness’ in defending his bishopric.⁶⁵ His patrons were no longer in a position to further his interests; and the Despensers had secured a stranglehold on royal patronage after the battle of Boroughbridge: so it is hardly surprising that by June 1325, Gray had become a lifetime retainer of the younger Hugh (particularly as he was granted a fee of 200 marks, paid from the royal Chamber).⁶⁶

For those whose estates lay entirely in the Marches, continued prosperity depended on royal favour.⁶⁷ This is well demonstrated by the fate of William de Beanley. He had served in the garrison of Berwick, and after its fall, he had petitioned the king for relief from the rent of twelve marks owed to Patrick Earl of March, now owed to the king following Patrick’s forfeiture; he had also lost his horse and had been despoiled of all his goods and chattels by the Scots. Evidently, the petition fell on deaf ears, and by 1320, he was reduced to selling off land, to John de Lilburn. After this, he adhered to the Scots; and in March 1326, his forfeited lands in Howick were granted to Gray for life.⁶⁸ On the same day (in answer to a petition), the latter also received the custody of the lands of the late John de Eure during the minority of his son and heir - along with the heir’s marriage, for the king had promised to help marry off one of Gray’s daughters. Gray seems to have taken advantage of this promise to try to obtain further lands, by marrying his daughters to minors in royal wardship. His other daughter was married to the heir of Gerard Salvayn. On the strength of this, Gray requested the lease of Duffield, Yorkshire, which had been leased to William de Airmyn during the heir’s minority (presumably he was hoping to take advantage of Airmyn’s fall from grace). In the previous July, he had been appointed to receive back into the king’s peace those in Northumberland who joined the Scots ‘through poverty or other urgent necessity’; and in August 1326, he was appointed, along with Ralph Neville, John de Fenwick and

⁶⁵ *CCR 1318-23*, p. 697.

⁶⁶ Society of Antiquaries MS 122 (Chamber account, from 5 June 1323) (reference supplied by Professor Michael Prestwich); Nigel Saul, ‘The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II’, *EHR* xcix (1984), p. 7.

⁶⁷ Tuck, ‘Northumbrian Society’, p. 33. Gray had been granted a pension, in February 1320, of 6*d* a day to be paid by the sheriff of York (*CCR 1323-7*, p. 202). This was not actually especially generous, amounting to £9 2*s* 6*d* *per annum*, and equivalent to the daily rate of pay for a hobelar - a knight, on active service, could normally expect 2*s* a day (Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages. The English Experience* (London, 1996), p. 84). He also experienced considerable difficulty in getting the sheriff to pay up (cf. *CCR 1318-23*, p. 452; *CCR 1323-7*, pp. 202, 480).

⁶⁸ *CPR 1324-27*, p. 254; *CDS*, iii, no. 881; *Northumberland Petitions*, ed. Fraser, pp. 165-6; ‘Woodman Charters’, tr. H.H.E. Craster, *AAE*, 3rd ser., v (1909), p. 48.

John de Lilburn, to commandeer shipping from the ports of Northumberland and North Yorkshire for the fleet of John de Sturmy.⁶⁹

In the wake of the rebellions of Gilbert de Middleton and Andrew de Harcla, and with the persistent disaffection of the disinherited, loyal subjects of the king were in short supply in the Marches. As the constable of an important castle, Gray would have been a particularly desirable recruit for the Despensers, who were anxious to ensure that such castles were held by their own supporters.⁷⁰ But for Gray, his attachment to the Despensers appears to have been simply a marriage of convenience, and he maintained his links with the disinherited, witnessing a licence from Henry Percy for Alnwick Abbey to receive some land from Robert Soppeth, in October 1325. Certainly, if the disparaging comments of the *Scalacronica* reflect the elder Gray's opinions, he had no high regard for his new patrons.⁷¹ This contrasts with another Northumbrian retainer of the Despensers, Sir John Felton (the son of William Felton who was involved in the capture of Gilbert de Middleton). John Felton was an active supporter of his patrons, defending Caerphilly castle in their interest after Edward's regime had already collapsed.⁷² On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that Gray did anything whatsoever to prevent their fall from power. Nevertheless, it would appear that he was not regarded as entirely trustworthy by the Mortimer regime, for the Franciscan Chronicle recounts how, on the very day of Edward III's coronation (2 February, 1327), Robert de Manners beat off an attempt by the Scots to take Norham castle by stealth; significantly, Manners is described as 'custos castri'.⁷³ Evidently, Gray

⁶⁹ *Northumberland Petitions*, pp. 2, 10-11; *CPR 1324-27*, pp. 147, 311. Ironically, William de Beanley was one of those who had joined the Scots 'through poverty or other urgent necessity'.

⁷⁰ Saul, 'The Despensers and Edward II', pp. 28-9. The Chamber account refers to Gray specifically as the constable of Norham and states that Despenser was anxious to acquire Gray as a retainer above all else (interestingly, Gray is referred to as the king's constable, and not the bishop's; it would appear that Edward had tired of Louis de Beaumont's 'negligence', and taken Norham into royal control).

⁷¹ *Scala.*, p. 150; George Tate, *The History of the Borough, Castle and Barony of Alnwick* (Alnwick, 1868-9), ii, Appendix, p. xviii. Saul's description of Gray as an 'important Despenser accomplice' ('The Despensers and Edward II', p. 29) may thus be rather overstating the case.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 29-30; *Scala*, p. 145; *NCH*, vii, 113; Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II*, pp. 184-5, 191. The *Scalacronica* makes no mention of Felton's defence of Caerphilly, claiming that although Despenser hoped to find help and support in Wales, 'touz ly faillerent' ('they all failed him', *Scala*, p. 151).

⁷³ *Lanercost*, pp. 258-9. This is confirmed by a deed of November 1328 (concerning the manor of Murton near Norham) witnessed by Robert Manners, 'tunc constabulario castri de Norham' (*NCH*, ii, 238n.).

had been replaced, undoubtedly due to his association with the Despencers. At the same time, however, Mortimer seems to have been anxious to buy his support. On 14 December 1326, the sheriff of York was ordered to pay the arrears of Gray's pension of 6d. a day, and whilst Edward II was still nominally king at this point, Mortimer's authority was already well established, for parliament had been summoned to meet on the same day - though in the event, it was postponed until after Christmas.⁷⁴ In the following February, within a month of the deposition, Gray's pension was confirmed by the new king and three weeks later, it was converted to an annuity of £20, which more than doubled its value.⁷⁵ These measures seem to have been successful in mollifying Gray, who does not seem to have resented his dismissal. Indeed, the *Scalacronica* singles out Manners for praise, for his successful defence of Norham in 1328.⁷⁶

Gray's Despenser connections seem not to have resulted in any lasting harm to his prospects. He established new links with David of Strathbogie, disinherited Earl of Atholl, witnessing a quit-claim in favour of the earl's steward in June 1333, and receiving from him a five year grant of the castle of Mitford.⁷⁷ Similarly, in 1323, he witnessed Gilbert Aton's confirmation of Antony Bek's grant of Alnwick to Henry de Percy, Percy's grant of the manor of Newburn to Ralph Neville in 1332; and he served as Percy's deputy when the latter was appointed warden of Berwick, after the town was recaptured from the Scots in 1333.⁷⁸ His continuation in royal service is also suggested by the grant, in hereditary, of a *messuage* in Berwick on Tweed, in June 1334. Another hereditary grant followed in January 1335, of a moiety of a carucate of land in Nesbit, Northumberland, which had escheated to Edward II by the rebellion of John de Trollope.⁷⁹ These were presumably rewards for service in Scotland; certainly, the elder

⁷⁴ *CCR 1323-7*, p. 627; Fryde, p. 195.

⁷⁵ *CPR 1327-30*, pp. 15, 30.

⁷⁶ *Scala.*, p. 155. Gray was himself another of the witnesses to the deed concerning Murton, along with Manners.

⁷⁷ *CPR 1338-40*, p. 213; *CIPM VII*, no. 677. The grant of Mitford was not as generous as may appear, for the castle had been burned to the ground after being captured by the Scots.

⁷⁸ *The Percy Chartulary*, p. 232; *CPR 1330-4*, p. 261 (Bek's grant to the Percies is discussed below, p. 57); *Lanercost*, p. 275; *The Anonimale Chronicle 1333-81*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927), p. 1 (derived from the same source as *Lanercost*); *Rot. Scot.*, i, 256.

⁷⁹ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 270; *CPR 1334-8*, p. 62; *NCH*, xiv, 138-40. The *messuage* in Berwick had been forfeited by one Ralph de More, for unspecified reasons.

Gray served as a commissioner of array for Northumberland in March 1333, and, in September 1336, received a protection for service with Henry Percy. However, the *Scalacronica*'s account of events in Scotland at this time makes no reference to any exploits by its author's father.

Miles Nobilis: Thomas Gray le fitz

The younger Sir Thomas Gray, author of the *Scalacronica*, first appears in the records in October 1331.⁸⁰ He was accused of being party to the poaching of deer in Gilbert de Umfraville's park at Birtley, where one of Umfraville's servants was assaulted. The ringleaders were William Felton and Robert de Ogle, both of whom appear in the pages of the *Scalacronica*.⁸¹ Not long after, at some time before October 1332, one John de Raynton, a burgess of Berwick (and therefore, at this time, a Scot), was abducted near Holburn in Northumberland, contrary to the provisions of the recent peace. It was subsequently discovered that he had been imprisoned by Thomas Gray the younger and his men, and had been made to hand over his two sons as hostages for a ransom of 1000 marks. However, it appears that Gray was not acting alone, for it was Robert Manners, constable of Norham castle, who was ordered to release the sons (by a writ dated 28 July 1333, by which time 360 marks had already been extracted from their father).⁸² While Gray's involvement in poaching might be put down to youthful delinquency, his rôle in the abduction of Raynton demonstrates that he was now considered old enough - and responsible enough - to be put in charge of his own men; it can thus be reasonably assumed that from *circa* 1330, his chronicle was, at least partly, derived from personal experience. This also provides an indication of his age. In the Court of Chivalry, during the Scrope v. Grosvenor case of 1386, Sir John Bromwich claimed to have taken up arms at the tender age of eleven, in 1342. Much

⁸⁰ The nationwide survey of knights ordered by the king in May 1324 records for Northumberland (in addition to Thomas Gray, *miles*, obviously the father of the chronicler), a *homo ad arma* called Thomas Gray (*Parliamentary Writs*, ed. F. Palgrave, 2 vols in 4 parts (London, 1827-34), II, ii, 649-50). Though it has been suggested that this was the chronicler himself (C.H. Hunter Blair, 'Knights of Northumberland 1278 and 1324', *AAE*, 4th ser., xxvii (1949), p. 170), this is more likely to be Thomas Gray of Horton, who died *c.* 1347, and was a knight by *c.* 1341 (*NCH*, xiv, 178-80).

⁸¹ *CPR 1330-4*, p. 202 (undoubtedly Gray of Heton, for he is described as the 'son of Thomas Grey, knight'); and see below, pp. 60-1.

⁸² *CPR 1330-34*, p. 387; *CDS*, iii, no. 1083. It has been suggested that the affair was a heavy handed exercise in debt collection (*NCH*, xiv, 136).

more typical were the marchers Sir Richard Tempest, armed at the age of fifteen, in 1371; Sir Matthew Redman, armed at the age of seventeen, in 1347; William Hesilrigg, armed at the age of twenty, in 1336; and John Thirlwell, armed before the age of twenty-two, in *circa* 1354.⁸³ By comparison, we may therefore reasonably infer that if the younger Thomas Gray was bearing arms in 1332, he was born *circa* 1315.

The younger Gray's first taste of real warfare may have come with the campaign of the disinherited which culminated in their overwhelming victory at Dupplin Moor in August 1332. This was a private expedition, and no records have survived to indicate who served amongst the disinheriteds' forces (if, indeed, any such records ever existed); yet the *Scalacronica* has a particularly vivid account of the battle, and the events leading up to it. Not only does this read like an eyewitness report, but it includes details recorded by no other sources, notably Beaumont's pre-fight speech - and unlike some medieval chroniclers, Gray was not given to inventing speeches for his characters.⁸⁴ Of course, the *Scalacronica*'s narrative may have been derived at second hand from the eyewitness reports of others, an authority claimed by the composer of a Latin *Brut* owned by the monks of Durham.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, given the elder Gray's connections with Henry Beaumont and David of Strathbogie, both prominent amongst the disinherited, it is not unlikely that the younger Gray served with them on the expedition. Thomas Gray *le fitz* certainly did serve in Flanders, for in June 1338, he received a protection until the following Christmas to accompany William de Montague (newly created Earl of Salisbury) across the sea, in the service of the king; and whilst there, he was recompensed for losing a horse valued at £20. Gray was not the only northerner to serve with Montague, for John de Coupland, a figure who was later to dominate marcher society, received a similar protection at the same time.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Scrope and Grosvenor Controversy*, ed. Nicholas, i, 205, 198, 194, 126, 181. It has to be said that these depositions are not totally reliable about ages; for instance, Thirlwell claimed that his father died at the advanced age of seven score years and five (though this may have been a scribal error, for the father was said to have been armed for a somewhat less incredible sixty-nine years).

⁸⁴ *Scala.*, pp. 159-60. Other detailed accounts of the battle include Bridlington, pp. 103-7; *Brut*, pp. 274-279 (which quotes a different rousing speech, made by Fulk Fitzwarin instead of Beaumont); *Lanercost*, pp. 267-8; and Bower, vii, 72-81.

⁸⁵ H.S. Offler, 'A Note on the Northern Franciscan Chronicle', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* xxviii (1984), p. 46.

⁸⁶ *Fæderæ*, II, ii, 1048; *The Wardrobe Book of William de Norwell 12 July 1338 to 27 May 1340*, ed. M. Lyon, B. Lyon & H. S. Lucas (Brussels, 1983), p. 311. Coupland also lost a horse, worth £12.

Montague had been granted the castle of Wark on Tweed in 1329 by the king, but there were rival claimants; and his recruitment of locals such as Gray and Coupland may have been an attempt to buy local support for his lordship. If so, he was evidently not very successful, for Montague was one of those whose elevation to the nobility was criticised by the *Scalacronica* as a waste of crown resources.⁸⁷ As the *Scalacronica* subsequently describes how he was captured in 1340, along with the Earl of Suffolk, through their own carelessness ('par lour noun avisement de un fole chevauche furent surpris devaunt Lile et prisoneris'), Gray does not seem to have impressed by the *parvenu* earl with whom he served.⁸⁸ Indeed, the Flanders campaign of 1338-9, for which Gray's protection was granted, is described in rather caustic terms: Edward is said to have spent his time not in making war, but in jousting and living the fine life.⁸⁹

By 1340, Gray was back in the borders. It is unfortunately at this point where the only surviving manuscript of the *Scalacronica* has lost several folios; according to Leland's abstract, Gray repulsed a raid by the earls of March and Sutherland, made at the time of the siege of Tournai (a timing which was doubtless deliberate). This account receives corroboration from an anonymous letter which describes how, in June of an unspecified year, these two earls were defeated by the garrison of Roxburgh, supported by Gray, Robert Manners and John de Coupland.⁹⁰ Leland's abstract does not specify whether this was Gray the younger or his father, but as the elder Gray was to be dead within four years, and must have been well into his sixties by this stage, it is probably safe to assume that we are dealing with the exploits of his son. Gray the elder may well have been experiencing intimations of mortality, for in February 1342, he obtained a licence to alienate six marks of rent from the manor of Eworth to provide a

⁸⁷ *Scala*, p. 167. The grant of Wark to Montague, and the subsequent legal challenge, is discussed in *NCH*, xi, 39-41.

⁸⁸ *Scala*, p. 170; cf. Knighton (p. 26), which puts Salisbury's capture in a rather kinder light, relating that he and Suffolk attacked on their own initiative 'propter nimiam strenuitatem suam et audacie nobilitatem', and were only captured because they were unable to withdraw with honour. *Lanercost* records their capture without comment (p. 332), but Murimuth shared Gray's opinion, stating that they were captured 'propter eorum stultam audaciam' (*Chronica A. Murimuth et R. de Avesbury*, ed. E.M. Thompson, RS 93 (1889), p. 105).

⁸⁹ *Scala*, p. 168. Presumably, Gray must have been involved in some fighting, otherwise he would not have been compensated for the loss of his horse.

⁹⁰ *Scala*. (Lel.), p. 299; *CDS*, v, no. 809. Manners, Coupland and the garrison of Roxburgh are mentioned in Leland's abstract, but the exact context is not clear.

chaplain to celebrate masses at a chapel there. This is the sole recorded act of piety by either him or his son.⁹¹

In March 1344, the custody of the manor of Middlemast Middleton in Coquetdale, worth 10 marks *per annum* (in the king's hand because the rightful heir, William Middleton, had gone over to the Scots at the end of Edward II's reign) was granted to Thomas Gray, *le fitz*, 'in consideration of his good service beyond the seas as well as within'; and within a month, the same manor had been re-granted to him in fee.⁹² This second grant did not distinguish Gray as 'le fitz', for his father had died; the younger Gray received a pardon from Bishop Richard Bury of Durham, dated 10 April 1344, for minor breaches of the bishop's franchisal authority committed by his father, who was described as 'iam defuncti'. At the same time, he was granted seisin of all the lands that his father had held in the bishop's liberty. These included the manor of Heton (held as half of a knight's fee); two thirds of the manor of Kyley; five *librates* of land, another £5 8s. worth of land formerly held by one Martin Byset, and six burgages, all in Norham; and fishing rights on the Tweed. He immediately enfeoffed one John de Bellingham and Robert Gray de *Weperden* with these lands, presumably to set up an enfeoffment to use.⁹³ The death of Bishop Bury in April 1345 fortuitously enabled Gray to regain his father's erstwhile office as constable of Norham. Bury's replacement, Thomas Hatfield, had initially confirmed Robert Manners in the post, but Manners was then ordered to hand it over to Gray. This was followed by a writ demanding that he deliver up all the records pertaining to the offices of Constable, sheriff and chief justice of Norham. As the main purpose of medieval records was to

⁹¹ *CPR 1340-43*, p. 380. The licence was obtained jointly with a certain Alice, late the wife of John de Boroughdon. The allowance of 6 marks for the chaplain compares with the stipends of 5 marks *per annum* paid to the bishop of Durham's chaplains at Darlington, Auckland, Howden, Allerton and Norham, recorded in 1334 (*CCR 1333-7*, p. 277).

⁹² *Scala.*, pp. liii-liv; *CPR 1343-5*, pp. 220, 252, 275; *CDS*, iii, no. 1431; *CFR 1337-47*, p. 364-5; *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous 1307-49*, no. 1893; Middleton, *Gilbert de Middleton*, pp. 94-5. This grant has been assigned to Thomas Gray of Horton (*NCH*, xiv, 300); however, the grantee is referred to as 'le fitz', and as Horton died at a fair age in 1347, leaving a son called David as his heir, this identification seems unlikely.

⁹³ *Richard D'Aungerville of Bury. Fragments of his Register and other Documents*, ed. G.W. Kitchin, SS cxix (1910), pp. 57-8; 'Durham Cursitor's Records: Calendar of Rolls of Bishop Hatfield', *The Thirty-First and Thirty-Second Annual Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1870), Appendix ii, p. 72; *RPD*, iv, 310-11 (N.B., *RPD* is misdated to 1345; similarly, Stevenson misdates Gray's death to 1343, *Scala.*, pp. xxvii-xxviii).

prevent peculation, it is reasonable to suppose that Manners had been caught fiddling the books.⁹⁴

In May 1344, Gray was granted joint custody (with John Eure) of Calverton Darras in Northumberland, forfeited by Robert Darreys for debts incurred whilst he was sheriff; in May 1345, he was granted free warren in various of his demesnes and a licence to make a park; and in August, he was granted a burgage and dovecote in Newcastle forfeited by a felon.⁹⁵ These royal grants may well have been intended to secure Gray's presence for Edward's expedition to France in 1346, for in April 1345, he was granted letters of protection from the bishop of Durham, until the following Christmas, for service overseas with the king.⁹⁶ In the event, Gray probably did not go overseas, due to the threat of invasion from Scotland, for he was at the battle of Neville's Cross in October 1346. Here, he captured two prominent Scots, and was amongst the twelve individuals who received letters from Edward thanking them for their good service.⁹⁷ Just before Christmas, Gray and fifteen other northern magnates were summoned to come to Westminster in January (including all those - except the archbishop of York - who received letters of thanks for their services at Neville's Cross), to discuss the defence of the realm and a proposed expedition to Scotland.⁹⁸

Gray's military exploits also earned him an *entrée* to royal service of a more peaceful nature, for in April 1348, he was appointed to his first legal commission, to inquire into violations of the truce. Others followed; in May 1349, he was appointed to a commission to inquire into the seizure of an English ship by Scottish pirates, off Holy Island; he was acting as a justice in the bishop's court at Durham in January 1352; in July of that year, he was part of a commission of oyer and terminer concerning an assault on Thomas Hatfield, bishop of Durham (the assault took place at Morpeth, whilst Hatfield was travelling to Berwick to negotiate with the Scots for the release of

⁹⁴ 'Calendar of Rolls of Bishop Hatfield', pp. 133, 146, 147.

⁹⁵ *CFR 1337-47*, p. 381; *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1341-1417*, p. 38; *CPR 1343-5*, p. 537. Presumably, Gray did not consider royal patronage to be a waste of the 'appurtenances of the crown' when it applied to him ...

⁹⁶ *RPD*, iv, 312.

⁹⁷ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 678, 675; *Fædera*, v, 534, 528. Another who received a letter was Robert de Ogle, Gray's erstwhile partner in crime.

⁹⁸ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 679; *Fædera*, v, 535. Of course, the proposed Scottish expedition never materialised, presumably due to the prolonged siege of Calais.

David II); in the following February, he was appointed to a similar commission to deal with an assault and maiming perpetrated in Benwell, near Newcastle; and in June 1355, just before his capture, he was part of a commission concerning the abduction and robbery of Isabel de Eslington at North Gosforth.⁹⁹

Gray's involvement in local government took place against a background of continuing hostilities on the border. Even while the protracted negotiations for the release of David II dragged on, the Scots were reconquering much of the territory lost after Neville's Cross. However, as Leland's abstract notes, the Scottish magnates were hardly united in the absence of their king, 'and there was much envy among them who might be hyst; for every one rulid yn his owne cuntery'. This was a situation which John II of France sought to exploit, by sending the Sire de Garencières with fifty men-at-arms and 40,000 *deniers d'or a l'escu* (valued at 10,000 marks by Gray, £8,000 by Wyntoun), in an attempt to persuade the Scots to attack England. Garencières arrived in Scotland in March 1355; by September, he had obviously had some success, for according to French records, the money was handed over to a representative of 'the lords and barons of Scotland' at Bruges, on the 15th of that month. Evidently, these lords and barons did not include William Douglas, for Leland's abstract relates that the lords Percy and Neville, wardens of the march, agreed a truce with him; it was presumably on the strength of this truce that Edward took many northern magnates with him to Calais in October, including the keeper of Berwick. It is little wonder that Gray complains that 'King Eduarde was so distressid with his afferes beyound the se, that he toke litle regard to the Scottisch matiers', for it soon became clear that Douglas could only have been acting in a personal capacity. Patrick, Earl of March, was happy to accept Garencières' money and lead a raid across the border, a raid which led to Thomas Gray's capture on about 16 October, shortly after Edward's departure; and in the absence of its keeper, Berwick was captured by the Earl of Angus on 6 November.¹⁰⁰ Thus, it may be said that we owe the *Scalacronica* to the

⁹⁹ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 713-14; *CPR 1348-50*, pp. 317, 452; R.W. Hodgson, 'Deeds Respecting the Manor of Offerton', *AÆ*, 1st ser., ii (1832), p. 276; *CPR 1350-4*, pp. 339, 446; *CPR 1354-8*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁰ *Scala*. (Lel.), p. 303; Wyntoun, vi, 198-9; Avesbury, *Chronica Murimuth et Avesbury*, ed. Thompson, pp. 427, 431; James Campbell, 'England, Scotland and the Hundred Years War in the 14thc.', *Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. J.R. Hale, J.R.L. Highfield & B. Smalley (London, 1965), pp. 196-200; Nicholson, *Scotland*, pp. 156-62. Gray states that he was captured 21 days before the fall of Berwick (an action in which Garencières and his men played a major part, according to Bower, vii, 282).

machinations of the king of France, though this was hardly a conventional form of royal literary patronage.

Ironically, Gray's account of his own capture survives only in outline, as part of Leland's abstract. Fortunately, the event is recounted in Wyntoun's *Orygenale Cronykil*, written circa 1420 in an appropriately chivalric style, and, rather more prosaically, by John of Fordun, writing in the 1370s. According to Leland, the Earl of March set up an ambush on the Scottish side of the Tweed, and sent a banneret and 400 men to forage near Norham. Gray came out of the castle to intercept them, 'with few mo the 50. menne of the garnison, and a few of the communes', and was caught in the ambush. The English fought 'with a wonderful corage [*sic.*]', but were outnumbered six-to-one; the 'communes' fled and Gray was taken prisoner. This accords well with Fordun's account, which confirms that Gray was captured in an ambush, by a superior force of Scots led by the Earl of March, whilst pursuing Scottish raiders who had fled back into Scotland (the leader of the raiders is named as William de Ramsey of Dalhousie). Fordun's account is full of praise for the resistance of the English who 'took their lives in their hands and manfully resisted the Scots', rather than fleeing with dishonour, and describes Gray as a *miles nobilis*. It also states that Gray's son Thomas, 'filio suo et herede', was taken in the same action and adds the detail that a number of Frenchmen were amongst Gray's captors. There are only a couple of major contradictions between Fordun and the *Scalacronica*. Fordun has William Douglas as one of the leaders of the Scots, whereas - if Leland is to be trusted - the *Scalacronica* implies that Douglas was observing the truce. And, entirely unsurprisingly, they disagree over the breakdown of that truce. Fordun states that March had been provoked by English raiding; in contrast, Gray records that he had been unwilling to agree to a truce in the first place.¹⁰¹ Fordun was copied, virtually *verbatim*, by Walter Bower (writing early in the fifteenth century), with the addition of a lurid anecdote. This concerned one of the French knights, who is said to have bought some of the English prisoners captured in the battle, so that he could massacre them in

¹⁰¹ *Scala*. (Lel.), p. 304; Fordun, p. 371-2. Fordun also mentions that one of the Scottish casualties was John de Haliburton, who had been captured by Gray at Neville's Cross (*Rot. Scot.*, i. 678). Gray's son may well have died in captivity for the inquest *post mortem* after Gray's death (in 1369) recorded that his heir was his son Thomas, aged just 10 (Durham Cursitor's Records: Inquisitions Post Mortem, pontificate of Thomas Hatfield, *The Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1885), Appendix I, pp. 201-2). This Thomas would thus have been born c. 1359 and named after an elder brother who must have died before his birth.

revenge for the death of his father, killed by the English in France. Wyntoun's account is very similar; the main differences are that Gray's men are numbered at eighty, his son is named as William, and Garencières is said to be have been present, which is not inherently unlikely.¹⁰²

Gray cannot have spent more than a year in captivity, for he had presumably been freed by 28 November 1356, when he was included in a commission to inquire into the smuggling of English sheep into Scotland (to evade English customs) and to arrest those responsible; and a couple of days previously, the King had granted him a licence to export 100 sacks of wool directly from Berwick (saving him the expense of carting them to Newcastle), by way of a contribution towards his ransom.¹⁰³ On 3 October 1357, he was entrusted with the custody of John Gray, one of the hostages for the ransom of King David, the agreement for which was finally sealed on the same day.¹⁰⁴ He was soon being employed as a justice again. In February 1359, he was appointed to enquire into the misdoings of John Clifford, the constable of Berwick, who had imprisoned two Scotsmen in time of truce; one of his co-commissioners was John de Coupland, who would be murdered by Clifford and others in December 1363.¹⁰⁵ In the following autumn, he crossed the Channel in the *comitiva* of the Black Prince, with Edward III's expedition to France. To judge from the lively and detailed account of the expedition in the *Scalacronica*, the experience was rather more rewarding than his previous service overseas; certainly, Gray considered that the English hosts had 'contenuz la guere mervaillosemount'.¹⁰⁶ Reward also came in the rather more substantial form of the furtherance of his career; in October 1361, he was appointed a warden of the march, along with Henry Percy, Ralph Neville, Richard Tempest and John de Coup. land. This cannot have been an entirely harmonious association, for Tempest was one of those later accused of abetting Coupland's murderers.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Bower, vii, 278-81; Wyntoun, vi, 207-9. Gray did have a son called William who was of age in 1358 (*CFR 1356-68*, p. 74). He too must have predeceased his father.

¹⁰³ *CPR 1354-8*, p. 499; *CDS*, iii, no. 1625; *Fœdera*, III, i, 343; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 798.

¹⁰⁴ *CDS*, iii, p. 434; Nicholson, *Scotland*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁵ *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous 1348-77*, no. 343; *Scala*. (Lel.), p. 301; Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society', pp. 36-7.

¹⁰⁶ *Fœdera*, III, i, 443; *Scala*., pp. 186-96 (quote at 196). The expedition is described in Richard Barber, *Edward, Prince of Wales and A quitaine. A Biography of the Black Prince* (London, 1978), pp. 157-168.

¹⁰⁷ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 857; Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society', p. 37 and see below, pp. 63-5.

Before going to France, Gray had been employed by the bishop of Durham in the latter's dispute with Patrick, Earl of March, over the *vill* of West Upsettlington, Berwickshire. He was to hold an inquiry whether it lay within England, despite being to the north of the Tweed; not surprisingly, Gray found that it did indeed lie within England. Aside from any rancour against his erstwhile captor, a degree of self interest may well have coloured his judgement, for in November 1366, a fourth part of the manor was granted to him and his heirs by the king, for 'for free service to the king in the wars of Scotland and elsewhere, and for 10 marks paid by him to the king'.¹⁰⁸ This land had been forfeited by Nicholas de Hayden and his son for their involvement in Gilbert de Middleton's rebellion. Coupland's unscrupulous exploitation of the Middleton rebellion to acquire lands for himself, by bringing about retrospective forfeitures, was one of the factors that led to his murder; and it may be wondered whether Gray was involved in any similar practice. He was evidently one of de Coupland's allies for he was prominent amongst those who joined with his widow, Joan, in suing against 'the evildoers who slew the said John or those who harboured them'.¹⁰⁹ Certainly, as a follower of Henry de Beaumont, Gray the elder could hardly have had much sympathy for Middleton's supporters, and the *Scalacronica's* account of the rising suggests that his son had no greater sympathy either. Indeed, its comment that Middleton had 'tout Northumbreland a sa couvyne' (all Northumberland in his confederacy) except for Bamburgh, Alnwick and Norham castles, and that the first two of these were treating with him, is a gross exaggeration; this exaggeration may well have been deliberate, to provide some retrospective historical justification for the dubious activities of Coupland and his cronies, amongst whom Gray should clearly be counted.¹¹⁰ Gray also seems to have made some enemies of his own, for in February 1366, he obtained a commission of oyer and terminer, 'touching those who have made conspiracies, collusions and alliances in the county of York, whereby Thomas de Gray

¹⁰⁸ *CCR 1354-60*, p. 550; *CPR 1364-7*, p. 341; *CDS*, iv, no. 126. For the background of this longstanding dispute, see Cynthia J. Neville, *Violence, Custom and Law. The Anglo-Scottish Border Lands in the Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 29, 49 (Neville's reference to 'bishop Thomas Gray' is a surprising blunder ...).

¹⁰⁹ *CCR 1364-8*, p. 292; *CDS*, iv, no. 124. William de Nessfield was another of those involved in suing against Coupland's murderers, and was also the chief beneficiary of such retrospective forfeitures (Michael Prestwich, 'Gilbert de Middleton and the Attack on the Cardinals, 1317', *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages*, ed. Tim Reuter (London, 1992), p.193-4).

¹¹⁰ *Scala.*, p. 145. For Gray's connections with Coupland, see below, p. 60.

... is damaged; and also touching falsities, losses, grievances and excesses done to [him]'.¹¹¹ Shortly after this, Gray and three others received a commission - couched in strangely cryptic terms - to investigate a plot by certain unspecified Northumbrians to employ John de Clifford to capture Bamburgh castle, a plot which was said to be 'well known in the parts of Northumberland and not unknown to them'. However, most of Coupland's murderers had no great difficulty in making their peace with the crown; Gray would have had to swallow whatever enmity he felt himself, for in September 1367, he was again serving as a warden of the East March, along with Gilbert de Umfraville, Henry Percy and his son (the future earl), Peter de Mauley, Roger Widdrington, John de Bolton and, once again, Richard Tempest.¹¹²

By now, Gray must have been well into his fifties, and he seems to have felt his age, for at about this time, he re-ordered his affairs, setting up a jointure with his wife and a string of entails.¹¹³ This settlement proved a wise precaution, for he died just two years later, in October 1369, leaving a ten year old son as his heir. The legacy of a successful career in the king's wars included three manors and a moiety of another in Durham, along with other properties including 300 acres of land, and three manors plus moieties of five others in Northhamshire, and various other tenements and fisheries on the Tweed.¹¹⁴ But undoubtedly the greatest legacy of that career is the *Scalacronica*.

¹¹¹ *CPR 1364-7*, pp. 279-80.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 371; Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society', p. 37; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 914, 915. Gray continued to serve as constable of Norham (*ibid.*, 920).

¹¹³ 'Durham Cursitor's Records: Calendar of Rolls of Bishop Hatfield', *The Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1871), Appendix I, iii, pp. 279-80.

¹¹⁴ The first inquest *post mortem* was held at Durham on 22 October (Cursitor's Records: Inquisitions Post Mortem, Thomas Hatfield, *Forty-Fifth Report of the Deputy Keeper*, App. I, pp. 201-2. The settlement of 1367 mentioned several other properties, including two other manors, so the inquests *post mortem* appear to understate Gray's landed wealth, cf. 'Calendar of Rolls of Bishop Hatfield', p. 280). He also had considerable estates in Northumberland, such as the four and a half manors he held of the Percy family in 1368 (*Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Edward III*, xii, 228-9).

III. The Sources of the *Scalacronica* and its Literary Context

The Ladder in the Orchard

One night, while Thomas Gray was contemplating the form that his chronicle should take, he had a dream which he describes in the prologue of his work.¹¹⁵ In this dream, the Sybil appears to him, and leads him to an orchard, where they find a high wall, with a ladder of five rungs leaning against it, resting on two books, and supported by a Friar Minor. It is this ladder that provides the title of Gray's chronicle (*Scalacronica*, or 'The Scaling-Ladder Chronicle'), suggested by the Sibyl - doubtless a witty allusion to Higden's *Polychronicon*.¹¹⁶ The Sibyl was a familiar literary figure in England, and had lent her classical authority to an early fourteenth-century prophetic diatribe against the Scots; the *Historia Aurea* included a chapter devoted to her history and she is briefly alluded to in the *Historia Regum Britannie*.¹¹⁷ The dream, with its verdant setting, authoritative guide, and allegorical content, is very much in the style of the genre of dream poetry which was highly fashionable at the time.¹¹⁸ Such literary dreams were invariably allegorical; in this case, the allegory intended to be drawn is evidently the width and depth of Gray's cultural delvings. This prologue, which has been aptly described as a 'personified bibliography',¹¹⁹ is worth discussing in detail, as it reveals

¹¹⁵ *Scala.*, pp. 2-4. Discussed by Smalley, *Friars and Antiquity*, pp. 13-15. Incidentally, it should be noted that Corpus Christi MS 133 does not actually conform to this proposed division of the work into five books. Although illuminated initials are used to mark the text at the five points where such divisions might be expected, they are also used elsewhere without any differentiation. Nor are there any *incipits* or other headings.

¹¹⁶ *Scala.*, p. 4. Gray's title has been taken as punning reference to his family's arms or crest, which apparently included a scaling ladder (Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 284; Smalley, *Friars and Antiquity*, p. 13; Gransden, ii, 94. However, none of these cite any authority for this statement, and Gray's own rather cryptic description of his arms - *Scala.*, p. 1 - does not appear to make any reference to a ladder).

¹¹⁷ 'Latin Verses on the Scots', appendix iii, *The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft*, ed. T. Wright, RS 47 (1868), ii, 448-451; *Scala.*, p. iii n.; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britannie*, I: *Bern Ms*, ed. Neil Wright (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. 115, 146.

¹¹⁸ The obvious example is *La Roman de la Rose*, a thirteenth-century French work which was hugely influential in England - and which also includes an allusion to the Sibyl (ed. Felix Lecoy, *Les Classiques Français du Moyen Âge*, 3 vols (Paris, 1965-70), ii, 24, l. 8980). Two English examples of the genre, roughly contemporary with the *Scalacronica*, are the alliterative 'Wynnere and Wastoure' (datable to 1352 - c. 1370) and Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Book of the Duchess' (c. 1370).

¹¹⁹ Smalley, *Friars and Antiquity*, p. 13.

much not only about his sources, but also about his attitudes and methods as an historian.

The Sibyl explains that the two books are the Bible and the *gest* of Troy, and invites Gray to climb the ladder. When he has mounted the first rung, he sees a manor in a great city, in which sits a master, in fur-lined clothes ('un mestre bien furre'). The Sibyl tells him that this is 'Gauter erkedeken de Excestre', who translated the *Brut*, which is to provide Gray with 'le primer liuer de cronicles se cest isle'. This is, of course, a reference to Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum', a book belonging to one Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, which Geoffrey claimed to have used as the source for his *Historia Regum Britannie*.¹²⁰ Whether the infamous 'certain very ancient book' of Walter of Oxford ever actually existed - or whether Geoffrey of Monmouth was the perpetrator of one of the most successful historiographical hoaxes of all time - is now a moot point, though at least one other medieval historian, Geoffrey de Gaimar (writing in the mid-twelfth century), claims to have made use of the 'good book of Oxford, belonging to Walter the archdeacon'.¹²¹ What is certain is that, even if this book did exist, Thomas Gray never read it, for he writes that it was Walter who 'le Brut translata de Bretoun en Latin' (translated the *Brut* from Breton into Latin); however, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Walter's book was 'Britannici sermonis' (of the Breton - or possibly Welsh - language). Gray probably gleaned this reference from the *Historia Regum*, and simply misunderstood it (possibly, he was working without a copy of the *Historia Regum* before him, and his memory failed him; this would also explain the erroneous reference to Exeter).¹²² The practice of passing off material obtained through a secondary source as a primary reference is frowned upon in modern academic circles; but medieval writers, who had much greater difficulty in getting hold of books, commonly claimed an acquaintance with revered authorities which they could not actually have read. Anyway, Gray's vision may only have been intended to suggest that

¹²⁰ *Historia Regum Britannie*, pp.1, 129, 147.

¹²¹ Ian Short, 'Gaimar's Epilogue and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Liber Vetustissimus*', *Speculum* lxxix (1994). See also *Historia Regum*, ed. Wright, pp. xvii-xix; Gransden, i, 202-3.

¹²² In his discussion of the historicity of King Arthur, Gray again mentions 'la gest bretoun estoit dit en breton tanqe Gauter Archedeken de Oxenford, le translata en latin' (Corpus Christi MS 133, fo. 83^v). This time, he manages to get Walter's toponym right, at least.

Walter of Oxford's book was the basis of the material in the *Scalacronica's* first book, and not necessarily the direct source.

The second rung of the ladder reveals a black monk writing in a study. The Sibyl tells Gray that this is Bede at Wearmouth, 'le reuerent doctour qescriit le liuer De gestis Anglorum', which book will inform him about the deeds of the Saxons for the second book of his chronicle. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* was widely read in England; more than sixty manuscripts were produced there during the Middle Ages (eighteen of them during the fourteenth-century), several of which had a North-Eastern provenance. Not surprisingly, Durham Cathedral owned a copy (and still does - MS B.ii.35), acquired *circa* 1083.¹²³ There is therefore no good reason to doubt that in this case, Gray had actually read the work. The third rung of the ladder reveals another black monk, writing in a cloister. The Sibyl describes him as 'le moigne de Cestre qi escript le Polecronicon', whose work rests on the authority of William de Malmesbury, Henry de Huntingdon, Roger de Howden and Marianus Scotus (who are intriguingly described as 'entrepretours Englesses'), and which will be most helpful with the third book of the chronicles, dealing with 'la vniment qe le roy Egbright fist de les vij. realmes Saxouns'. Again Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* was immensely popular; over 120 manuscripts survive, many dating from the fourteenth century, and Higden's work was very well known in his own life-time (he died in 1363).¹²⁴

On climbing the fourth rung of the Sibyl's ladder, Gray sees a chaplain writing at his desk, in a chamber in a village at the foot of a strong castle. The Sibyl reveals that this is 'le vike de Tilmouth, qe escript le Ystoria Auria' (the vicar of Tillmouth, author of the *Historia Aurea*), whose work will provide a source from the reign of William the Conqueror to the present. The *Scalacronica's* reference to the vicar of Tillmouth must be an error, for Tillmouth was not a vicarage - though there was a chantry there. Writing some fifty years later, John Boston of Bury refers to 'Johannes dictus Anglicus, vicarius de Tynemuthe, floruit mcccclxvi et scripsit Historiam Auream, etc.', and the St. Albans copy of the *Historia* also refers to the vicar of Tynemouth.¹²⁵ The

¹²³ R.H.C. Davis, 'Bede After Bede', *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C.J. Holdsworth & J.L. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989).

¹²⁴ Gransden, ii, 43-4, 55; Taylor, *Historical Literature*, p. 95.

¹²⁵ The exact identity of the author of the *Historia Aurea* is discussed, inconclusively, in *NCH*, viii, 124-7; & V.H. Galbraith, 'The *Historia Aurea* of John, Vicar of Tynemouth, and the Sources of the St. Albans Chronicle 1327-77', *Essays in History Presented to Reginald Lane Poole*, ed. H.W.C.

Historia Aurea was a universal history, along the lines of the Higden's *Polychronicon*, which was its inspiration (and one of its main sources). The work was not especially common, lacking the appeal of the *Polychronicon*, and only three complete manuscripts have survived.¹²⁶ However, one of these belonged to the library at Durham Cathedral; it is recorded in a catalogue made in 1395, and its narrative for the years 1328 to 1338 was incorporated into a Latin *Brut* compiled there. The *Brut* ends in 1347, and was presumably written soon after then, suggesting that Durham had already acquired its copy of the *Historia Aurea* by the time that Gray started work on his *Scalacronica*. The Durham monks evidently had a high regard for the work; another Durham manuscript, containing excerpts from it, describes it as 'the mother of all histories'. In all probability, it was Durham's copy which was used by Gray.¹²⁷ Unfortunately, no edition of the *Historia Aurea* has ever been printed - which is not altogether surprising considering the amount of effort that would be required to edit a work seven times longer than the *Polychronicon*. However, the *Historia* was used to provide a continuation, from 1327 to 1346, to Walter of Guisborough's chronicle, printed as the *Chronicon Domini Walteri de Hemingburgh* in 1849; this continuation 'may therefore be regarded as a rough-and-ready text of the *Historia Aurea*'.¹²⁸

Davis (Oxford, 1927), pp. 381-4. It might be added that Gray's description of a village in front of a strong castle would fit Tynemouth, especially for a professional soldier who might think of the place as a castle first, and as a Benedictine priory only second.

¹²⁶ Taylor, *Historical Literature*, pp. 103-5; Gransden, ii, 56. The *Historia*'s narrative of the reign of Edward III was used to provide continuations for a number of other chronicles, including Guisborough and the *Polychronicon* (Galbraith, 'The *Historia Aurea* and the St. Albans Chronicle'), but Gray implies that he had access to a copy going back at least as far as 1066, so he is likely to have been using the complete work.

¹²⁷ *Catalogi Veteres Librorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelm.*, SS vii (1838), p. 56; Offler, 'Northern Franciscan Chronicle'. The complete Durham copy describes its author as John of the diocese of York (Galbraith, 'The *Historia Aurea* and the St. Albans Chronicle', p. 385). It should be noted that if Gray did use the Durham copy of the *Historia Aurea*, this seems to have been the only work the monks were willing to lend him. He does not seem to have had access to works such as *Lanercost*, which the monks certainly knew, nor Robert Graystones' history of the Priory itself, completed in 1336 and which covered events up to 1334 (H.S. Offler, *Medieval Historians of Durham* (Durham, 1958), pp. 14-15).

¹²⁸ Galbraith, 'The *Historia Aurea* and the St. Albans Chronicle', p. 389 and *passim.*; 'De Gestis Regis Edwardi Tertii', in *Chronicon Domini Walteri de Hemingburgh*, ed. H.C. Hamilton, English Historical Society Publications (1849). Various passages concerning the reign of Edward II have been printed by V.H. Galbraith, 'Extracts from the *Historia Aurea* and a French *Brut*', *EHR* xliii (1928).

Gray's description of his vision continues with the Sybil telling him that he may not climb the fifth rung of the ladder, for it concerns ancient prophecies about the future. Nevertheless, the Sibyl quotes a couple of these sayings:

... en la vie seint Edward est troue le ditz de vn saint hom qe dist, 'Non solum de gente Francorum sed Scottorum quos Anglici vilissimos reputant', etc. Et auxi par ditz du Bruyt en Engles, 'bat Cadwaladre sal on Conan cal', etc., per ditz de Merlyn.

(in the *Life of Saint Edward* are found the words of a holy man who said, 'Not only the nation of the French but also that of the Scots, whom the English regarded as utterly vile', etc. And also from the sayings of the *Brut* in English, 'That Cadwallader shall on Conan call', etc., from the sayings of Merlin.

As the quote concerning *seint Edward* is in Latin, we may safely assume that the Sibyl was referring to a Latin work, and the standard Latin life of Edward the Confessor was that of Ailred of Rievaulx (also translated into French by Matthew Paris). This does indeed contain a lengthy relation of a vision experienced by Edward on his deathbed, but this prophecy concerns the immediate aftermath of Edward's death, and makes no mention of the Scots.¹²⁹ In fact, Gray's quote appears to have been derived from Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, which, in its account of the troubles of the reign of Æthelred, includes the following passage:

... quidam uir Dei ... predixit etiam quod non ea gens [*i.e.* the French] solum uerum et Scotorum, quos uilissimos habebant, eis ad emeritam confusionem dominaretur.

A certain man of God ... predicted that not only that people, but also the Scots, whom they considered to be most vile, would lord it over them to their well-merited confusion.¹³⁰

The most likely explanation is that Gray had at some point read both Ailred's *Vita Sancti Edwardi Regis* and Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, and when he came to write the introduction to his *Scalacronica*, he again suffered a lapse of memory - after all, as any modern scholar will realise, being able to remember a reference, but not where it came from, is hardly an unusual failing.

The second quotation, said to be from an English *Brut*, is a more or less direct translation of one of the *Prophecies of Merlin*, popularised (and doubtless concocted) by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum*.¹³¹ It does not appear to have been

¹²⁹ Ailred of Rievaulx, *Vita sancti Edwardi Regis*, in J.P. Migne, *Patrologiæ cursus completus: Patrologia latina*, cxcv, col. 771-4; Gransden, ii, 358.

¹³⁰ Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), pp. 338-41. This reference does not appear in the *Polychronicon*, which Gray states was his main source for late Anglo-Saxon history.

¹³¹ 'Cadualadrus uocabit Conanum [et Albaniam in societate accipiet]', *Historia Regum Britannie*, p. 77.

culled from the hugely popular English prose translation of the French *Brut* (edited by Brie) which was translated in the East Midlands at some time between 1350 and 1380, and is therefore unlikely to have^{been} available to Gray writing in Northumberland at the beginning of that period.¹³² The fourteenth-century English verse *Brut* ascribed to Thomas Castleford translates the same piece: ‘Cadwaldre Conan sal calle’.¹³³ However, the line quoted by Gray has the distinctive metre of fourteenth-century English alliterative verse, whereas Castleford’s work is in rhyming couplets of shorter lines. Gray was probably referring to an alliterative verse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth, or at least of the *Prophecies of Merlin*. Although no such work survives today, it is not at all unlikely that he should have known one; alliterative verse was associated with the North rather than the South, and (pseudo-) historical and Arthurian matter was a favourite subject matter for writers of alliterative verse.¹³⁴ Of course, Gray claims to have used the *Historia Regum* as one of his sources, and he could just as easily have quoted the Latin original. The fact that he chose to quote an English *Brut* instead probably stemmed from his desire to demonstrate the breadth of his reading; although largely redundant as an historical source, this reference bore out his claim that he had read ‘liuers de cronicles enrymaiez et en prose, en Latin, en Fraunceis, et en Engles’. Without the alliterative *Brut*, this would simply have been ‘liuers de cronicles en Latin et en Fraunceis’, which does not sound nearly so impressive...¹³⁵

Finally, the Sibyl alludes to the Franciscan friar (*cordeler*) who supports the whole ladder:

Thomas de Otreburn, vn mestre de diuinite et del ordre de Frers Menours, qi dez cronicles de cestisle se entremist, qe si tu pusses en cas ateiendre toutes heures a les propretes de ditz

¹³² Gransden, ii, 73.

¹³³ Castleford’s “Chronicle” or “The Boke of Brut”, ed. Caroline D. Eckhardt, 2 vols, Early English Text Society 305, 306 (1996), i, 426 (ll. 15818).

¹³⁴ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge, 1977), *passim*. There was an English alliterative *Brut* from the thirteenth century, written by Lazaman, but this cannot have been Gray’s source, for, following Wace, Lazaman omits Merlin’s prophecies, except that dealing with Vortigern’s own fate (Lazamon, *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook & R.F. Leslie, 2 vols, Early English Text Society 250, 277 (London, 1963-78), i, 414 - ii, 419; cf. *Historia Regum Britannie*, pp. 70-86).

¹³⁵ Gray’s reference to ‘liuers de cronicles enrymaiez’ can best be explained by his use of a verse *Brut*, for all the other books he names were prose works (of course, strictly speaking, alliterative verse was not rhymed, but we can assume that ‘enrymaiez’ is being used loosely as a synonym for verse, in contrast to prose). We have already noted Gray’s use of a French prose *Brut* (above, p. 4), which explains his allusion to chronicles ‘en Fraunceis’.

bastouns du dist eschel, si cherchez lez cronicles du dist Thomas, qe bien te moustrerount ta droit voy.

(Thomas of Otterburn, a master of divinity and of the order of Friars Minor, who concerned himself with the chronicles of this isle, so that if, by chance, you are able to attend all hours to the properties of the said rungs of the said ladder, then examine the chronicles of the said Thomas, which will clearly show you the right way)

A Franciscan friar called Thomas de Oterbourn (described as ‘sacrae paginae professori’) was licensed to hear confessions in the diocese of Durham in 1343, presumably the same Thomas Oterborne who became lector of the Franciscans at Oxford, probably before 1350.¹³⁶ As a village the size of Otterburn is unlikely to have produced two Franciscan masters of divinity named Thomas at the same time, it is not unreasonable to assume that this is the friar of Gray’s vision. There is a chronicle ascribed to Thomas of Otterbourne,¹³⁷ which begins at the earliest times and goes down to 1420, but obviously, this cannot be the work of a friar who was licensed to hear confessions in 1343. However, there was certainly a Franciscan historian writing in the borders in the mid-fourteenth century, this being the author of the continuation (1297 - c.1347) of the ‘Northern Franciscan Chronicle’, the lost chronicle which lies behind the *Lanercost Chronicle* and part of the *Anonimalle Chronicle*. Otterburn has been put forward as this author, largely on the questionable grounds that ‘it is unlikely that there should have been two English Friars Minor on the Scottish border writing chronicles about the same time’.¹³⁸ This Franciscan chronicle was certainly known by the monks of Durham who used it, along with the *Historia Aurea*, to provide a continuation to their Latin *Brut*.¹³⁹ There are some parallels between the Franciscan chronicle and the *Scalacronica*. Both describe the collapse of a bridge at Berwick in a flood, in 1294. Both associate the curious episode of John of Powderham (who, in 1318, proclaimed himself to be the true heir of Edward I) with Edward II’s apparent predilection for sailing with common mariners, and other such ‘unworthy occupations’. However, in both cases, while Gray’s account is much more concise, it differs markedly in detail; these, and the few other minor parallels, are thus of no significance

¹³⁶ Richard Bury. *Fragments of his Register*, ed. Kitchin, p. 28; Andrew G. Little, *The Grey Friars in Oxford*, Oxford Historical Society xx (1891), pp. 174-5.

¹³⁷ Printed by Thomas Hearne in 1732 as *Duo Rerum Anglicarum Scriptores Veteres viz. Thomas Otterbourne et Johannes Whethamstede*.

¹³⁸ A.G. Little, ‘The Authorship of the Lanercost Chronicle’, *EHR* xxxi (1916), p. 276.

¹³⁹ Offler, ‘Northern Franciscan Chronicle’.

compared to the many areas of disagreement.¹⁴⁰ Crucially, Gray makes no use of a reference in the Franciscan chronicle to his own father, who is said to have been appointed as Percy's deputy when the latter was appointed warden of Berwick, after the town was recaptured from the Scots in 1333.¹⁴¹ Given the emphasis which the *Scalacronica* places on the career of the elder Gray, it is unlikely that his son would have ignored what appears to be the only reference to his father in any surviving English chronicle. Taken with the lack of significant correspondences, the obvious conclusion is that Gray was not familiar with the Franciscan chronicle - with the corollary that Otterburn was therefore unlikely to have been its author. Which begs the question, what then was Thomas Otterburn's chronicle?

We have already seen that the chronicle bearing Otterburn's name ends in 1420, and half of it deals with the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V. However, the sixteenth-century antiquarian John Bale refers to an anonymous manuscript of what appears to be this work which ends in 1360. It is possible that rather than being a fragment, this was a complete recension, and the later material was added by a continuator. There are references to the fifteenth century in the earlier part of the version printed by Hearne, but these could be the interpolations of the continuator; certainly, although the later half of the work is derived from the same source as the *Historia Anglicana*, information has been interpolated on affairs in the north (indicating a northern provenance for the continuation at least). If this chain of speculation is correct, then Thomas of Otterburn produced a short universal chronicle which ended *circa* 1360.¹⁴² There is, admittedly, no evidence of direct borrowing by

¹⁴⁰ *Scala*, pp. 118, 147-8; *Lanercost*, p. 157, 236. A few additional minor parallels are discussed by Little ('The Authorship of Lanercost', pp. 277-8), to which the above is indebted. John of Powderham is discussed by W.R. Childs, "'Welcome, My Brother': Edward II, John of Powderham and the Chronicles, 1318', *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. I. Wood & G.A. Loud (London, 1991).

¹⁴¹ *Lanercost*, p. 275; *Anonimale Chronicle 1333-81*, ed. Galbraith, p. 1. There is also the ghost story about John Gray of Berwick and his son, Thomas Hugtoun - probably the chronicler's grandfather and great-grandfather - in the earlier part of the Franciscan Chronicle, which is thought to be the work of Richard of Durham (*Lanercost*, pp. 185-6 and see above, p. 9; Little, 'The Authorship of Lanercost'). However, given the *Scalacronica*'s general lack of interest in edifying tales of the supernatural, its omission of this story is perhaps not so significant.

¹⁴² Little, 'The Authorship of Lanercost', pp. 276-7. The later part of the chronicle is discussed by C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 21-3. The speculation that Hearne's Otterbourne should be identified with the man of that name who became rector of Chingford of Essex in 1393 (*ibid.*, p. 21) has no evidence to support it beyond the mere coincidence of names.

the *Scalacronica* from Otterbourne's chronicle as printed by Hearne. However, the latter gives as its authorities Galfridus Arthur (*i.e.* Geoffrey of Monmouth), Bede, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Roger of Howden and Higden's *Polychronicon*, all of whom are mentioned by Gray's Sybil - and Marianus Scotus, also mentioned by the Sybil, is referred to elsewhere by Otterbourne. In his literary vision, Thomas de Otreburn appears as the supporter of the ladder which gives Gray access to his sources; and the Sibyl's words to her student suggest that his work is to be used as a model for producing his own chronicle, rather than as a direct crib.¹⁴³ Perhaps the most likely explanation is that Otterburn's chronicle was one of the first histories which Gray read as a prisoner in Edinburgh, and which first fired his enthusiasm for the idea of writing his own; but when he actually started to work, he relied on other more detailed sources.

Lez Cronicles de Escoce

It is reasonable to assume that amongst the more detailed sources used by Thomas Gray were some Scottish works. After all, the library of Edinburgh castle is likely to have been furnished with works of Scottish history.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Gray does refer specifically to Scottish chronicles, an example being an anecdote about Malcolm Canmore. This tale, which bears the hallmark of hagiographic legend, concerns a plot by one of his chief nobles to 'ly destruyner par puyson', with the assent of the other magnates. Having discovered the plot, Malcolm takes the offender out hunting, and, when they are all alone in the wood, orders him to settle the business chivalrously, man to man:

"Treitris, moustrez a ore vostre felouny chevalerusement et eser vostre quer, qautre foitz ne vous foit furnys mordre, qe a moy defendre su aparaillez qe conus vostre counpassement."¹⁴⁵

Of course, the lord makes his peace with his king, and all is well. Gray explicitly cites 'lez cronicles de Escoce' as his source, and the longer version of Turgot's life of St. Margaret is the ultimate root of this tale, a tale which is repeated, at considerably greater length, by John of Fordun and the *Scot.ichronicon*, and by Andrew Wynton.

¹⁴³ Little, 'The Authorship of Lanercost', pp. 278-9.

¹⁴⁴ Gransden's suggestion that Edinburgh's library was left over from the English occupation of 1296-1314 (*Hist. Writ.*, ii, 93) is ruled out by Gray's own account that the castle had been demolished after its capture by the Scots (*Scala.*, p. 140), as well as by her unwarranted implication that the Scots did not read books (John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. A.A.M. Duncan (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 35n).

¹⁴⁵ *Scala.*, p. 20.

However, Gray could in fact have derived it from the *Polychronicon*, which contains the same story.¹⁴⁶ Whatever his source, Gray did adapt the story to his own ends, being the only source to include any reference to chivalry.¹⁴⁷

Much more significant is Gray's splendid story of Malcolm's death, at Alnwick in 1093, which was said to be brought about by trickery ('et, com est dit, par engyn'). The constable of the castle rides out with the keys hanging from the point of his lance, as if to surrender; he then lowers his lance, kills Canmore, and, in the resulting confusion, kills his son for good measure.¹⁴⁸ This version of events is not derived from the *Polychronicon*, which merely states that Malcolm and his son were killed in Northumbria by the knights of Earl Robert (*i.e.* Robert de Mowbray, Earl of Northumberland), and indeed, Gray's doubts about the reliability of his source is suggested by his use of the phrase 'com est dit'. The same legend is told by Fordun (though much elaborated and with significant differences in detail) where it is again attributed to Turgot, though no such story appears in any surviving manuscript of this work; and nor does it appear in Wyntoun's account of Malcolm's death.¹⁴⁹ However, the story does appear in the chronicle of Alnwick Abbey. This chronicle, probably written shortly after 1376, is a paltry affair, relating only matters of immediate local interest, calculated to flatter the Percy family, who were the canon s' main patrons.¹⁵⁰ Its account of Malcolm Canmore's death follows that of the *Scalacronica*, but with additional details thrown in for local colour. Thus, Malcolm's slayer is named as Hamund, who is then said to have leapt across the Aln to escape, lending his name to a local ford in the process. Although this account - and thus the *Scalacronica*'s - may

¹⁴⁶ Fordun, pp. 206-8; Bower, iii, 30-5, 193-4; Wyntoun, iv, 326-33 (the Fordun / Bower version differs in detail from that of Wyntoun); *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, ed. C. Babington and J.R. Lumby, RS 41, 9 vols (1865-86), vii, 356-8.

¹⁴⁷ Wyntoun's account does allude to Malcolm's 'curtasy', albeit in a different context. Of course, Turgot, writing in the early twelfth century, could hardly be expected to refer to a concept which was then only in the process of being formulated.

¹⁴⁸ *Scala.*, p. 21, a tale which is hardly spoiled by the fact that the castle at Alnwick was not built until well into the following century.

¹⁴⁹ *Polychronicon*, ed. Babington & Lumby, vii, 354-6 (based ultimately on the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which names Malcolm's killer as Morel of Bamburgh, Earl Robert's nephew); Fordun, pp. 218-19; Bower, iii, 75-7, 219-20; Wyntoun, iv, 348-9. For some reason, Joseph Stevenson, in the introduction to his edition of the *Scalacronica*, erroneously states that Gray's account also refers to Morel of Bamburgh (p. vii), despite the fact that his own text mentions Morel only in connection with Earl Robert's subsequent rebellion (p. 22) ...

¹⁵⁰ 'Chronica Monasterii de Alnewyk', ed. W. Dickson, *AE*, 1st ser., iii (1844).

have been derived from a local Alnwick tradition, the Alnwick chronicler is more likely to have been using existing local topography to lend a spurious credibility to his account, simply inventing a Hamund to go with the eponymous ford. The point is worth making, for if the additional details of the Alnwick Chronicle's account were indeed the chronicler's own invention, then the obvious source of the basic story is the *Scalacronica* itself, drawing on a Scottish source later used by Fordun, but unknown to Wyntoun. If so, this provides us with our only evidence for the *Scalacronica*'s dissemination, demonstrating that it was known in Alnwick Abbey a decade after its author's death.

Another example of Gray's probable use of Scottish sources is provided by his brief description of Edward Bruce, the brother of King Robert, and his invasion of Ireland, leading to his death in battle at Faughart near Dundalk in October 1318. The *Scalacronica* comments that Edward performed feats of arms that would make a grand romance if they were all recounted ('meruailles darmys ... qe serroit vne graunt romaunce a rementyner tout').¹⁵¹ The same was said by John Barbour, writing twenty years after Gray, *circa* 1375, though in this case, Barbour was commenting on Bruce's successful campaign in Galloway in 1313:

And quha wald rehers all ye deid
Off his hey worschip & manheid
Men mycht a mekill romanys mak.¹⁵²

The sentiment is hardly an exceptional one, but nevertheless, it is likely that Gray and Barbour were drawing from a common (and presumably Scottish) source. The difference in context can be explained by Gray's methods as an abridger. The *Scalacronica* mentions Edward Bruce only in this passage; having come across the phrase in his Scottish source, and not wishing to describe the Galloway campaign, Gray simply transposed it. Further evidence of his reliance on Scottish sources is provided by his description of Edward Bruce's death. According to Gray, Bruce was slain through overconfidence ('surquidery'), because he would not wait for the reinforcements which were but six leagues distant. A similar account is given by Bower, who relates, incorrectly, that 'his brother King Robert would have come to him with a great army if he had waited until the next day'; and by Barbour, who also

¹⁵¹ *Scala.*, p. 143.

¹⁵² Barbour, ii, 228.

recorded that Scottish reinforcements were just a day's march away (and six leagues could have been managed by a medieval army in one day). In this, they are backed up by the Irish *Annals of Clonmacnoise*. Following Fordun, Bower goes on to attribute the Scottish invasion of Ireland to Edward Bruce's ambition, as does the *Scalacronica*.¹⁵³ By contrast, apart from the *Scalacronica*, no English account makes any mention of Scottish reinforcements, nor do they suggest impetuosity or regal ambition on Edward's part.¹⁵⁴

Finally, allowing for the fact that this part of the *Scalacronica* survives only in summary form, Fordun's account of Gray's capture is so similar that it is tempting to speculate that it was derived from a version of the *Scalacronica* itself. After all, somebody in Scotland lent Gray the various chronicles which inspired him to write; and it is not unreasonable to assume that he should have been given a copy of Gray's work in return, if only an early draft.

A Knight's Tales

Visiting Norham castle, it is easy to imagine an elderly Thomas Gray whiling away the winter evenings in the great hall, sitting near the fire with a goblet of mulled wine, telling stories of his adventures fighting against the Scots. These stories so impressed his son that he later wrote them down, passing his time as a prisoner in Edinburgh. And apart from the fact that the elder Gray ceased to be the constable of Norham in 1327, this romantic picture is probably broadly correct, for much of the *Scalacronica*'s narrative of the reigns of Edward I and Edward II is clearly based on the anecdotes of the chronicler's father. Obviously, there was a gap of at least eleven years between the elder Gray's death in 1344 and his son's imprisonment in 1355, when he first started to

¹⁵³ Bower, vi, 412-13; Barbour, iii, 186; *Annals of Clonmacnoise* cited in *The Bruce*, ed. Duncan, p. 666; Fordun, p. 348 (Fordun, however, makes no mention of any Scottish reinforcements, let alone in the person of Robert Bruce).

¹⁵⁴ The most detailed English accounts of the battle are in *Lanercost*, p. 238 and the Continuation of Nicholas Trevet, extracted in Sean Duffy, 'The 'Continuation' of Nicholas Trevet: A New Source for the Bruce Invasion', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* xci C (1991), pp. 314-15. More summary accounts are provided by *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. Noel Denholm-Young (London, 1957), p. 90; Bridlington, p. 56 (which optimistically - and erroneously - names lord Robert Bruce as having been killed, instead of his brother); Murimuth, *Chronica Murimuth et Avesbury*, ed. Thompson, p. 30; 'Annales Paulini', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS (1882), i, 280, 284; etc.

write his history; and although communication from beyond the grave was not unknown in the Gray family, we can be reasonably sure that the author of the *Scalacronica* had no such means of checking his memory. Not surprisingly, this does lead to some errors, particularly of chronology. An interesting example is his account of the abduction of Lady Clifford by John le Irroys and his band of *schavaldours*, which nicely demonstrates the process by which Gray integrated his recollections of his father's stories with his written sources.

Le Irroys, presumably one of the men recruited in Ireland for service against the Scots, first appears in the records in the summer of 1314, in the company of a royal justice at Alnwick; there they were attacked by a group of Northumbrian gentry, in revenge for the execution of some alleged traitors in Berwick. Le Irroys was a yeoman of the king's household by the following April, when the sheriff of Yorkshire was ordered to pay him '£100 for his wages and the wages of other men-at-arms, both horsemen and footmen, staying with him in the king's service in the marches of Scotland.' He and his retinue were at Bamburgh castle, where the locals complained at his exactions, and he was appointed as keeper of Barnard castle on the death of Guy de Beauchamp - much to the displeasure of Richard de Kellaw, Bishop of Durham, who regarded this as a breach of his bishopric's liberty.¹⁵⁵ Lady Clifford was the (wealthy) widow of Robert Clifford, who had been killed at Bannockburn, and le Irroys may well have been hoping to acquire her lands when he abducted her at Bowes, North Yorkshire, in November 1315; however, she was rescued, and le Irroys was dismissed from his post - though not from the king's household.¹⁵⁶

Gray's account of this outrage is very short: 'En quel heure Johan le Irroys ravist la dame de Clifford; lez maufesurs estoient appellez schavaldours'; and it is much less detailed than the only other surviving chronicle account of the incident, that of an annalist at Bridlington Priory.¹⁵⁷ Gray also misdates the event. Presumably, he had been

¹⁵⁵ *CDS*, iii, no. 384; *CCR 1313-18*, p. 165 (another payment to him of 'up to 100m.' was ordered in September 1315; *ibid.*, p. 246); *Northumberland Petitions*, ed. Fraser, pp. 26-7; *RPD*, iii, 1-3, iv, 183-5; *Northern Petitions, Illustrative of Life in Berwick, Cumbria and Durham in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. C.M. Fraser, SS cxciv (1981), p. 245; J.R.S. Phillips, 'The Mission of John de Hothum to Ireland, 1315-16', *England and Ireland in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. J. Lydon (Dublin, 1981), p. 66.

¹⁵⁶ Bridlington, pp. 48-9; *CDS*, iii, no. 458; *CPR 1313-17*, p. 422; *CCR 1313-18*, p. 256. Le Irroys was serving near Berwick in April 1317 (*Northern Petitions*, pp. 61-3), so it is entirely possible that the elder Gray was personally acquainted with him.

¹⁵⁷ *Scala*, p. 147; Bridlington, pp. 48-9 (there is no reason to suppose that Gray was aware of this

told that this outrage had occurred in the time of the famine, a description of which follows soon after his brief account of the incident. However, he also seems to have associated le Irroys' escapade with Jocelyn d'Eyville's seizure of the manor of Northallerton (in November 1317), his description of which comes just before, separated only by a digression on the criminality which followed from a lack of respect for the king's authority. The reference to d'Eyville was probably culled from the *Historia Aurea*, which contains a much more detailed account of the affair¹⁵⁸ - complete with the fascinating detail, left unrecorded by Gray, that d'Eyville's men disguised themselves as lay brothers from Rievaulx - and clearly, the *Scalacronica* dates both events to 1317; it is a revealing indication of Gray's interests that he apparently used the abduction of Lady Clifford to date the famine, rather than *vice versa*, thus misdating both.¹⁵⁹

The *Scalacronica* describes le Irroys and his followers as *schavaldours*, the only occasion on which Gray uses this term - assuming that it did not occur in the part of the *Scalacronica* now missing. It was a word that seems to have arisen in the marches at the time when the maintenance of law and order was starting to break down under the impact of Scottish raiding, coined to describe members of the gentry and their followers when they were engaged in criminal activity. The earliest surviving instance of its use is from 1313, when Bishop Kellaw excused himself to the king for being unable to levy any money from the goods of the parson of Whickham, on the grounds that he had been pre-empted by 'fures et shavaldos'. Gilbert de Middleton's followers were so described (by Trokelowe and Murimuth), as were those of John de Harcla - the younger brother and confederate of Andrew. On the other hand, writing *circa* 1400, Wyntoun refers, with apparent approval, to a company of 'schawadouris' raised by one William of Carruthers in 1335, to fight against Edward Balliol.¹⁶⁰ A close account).

¹⁵⁸ Galbraith, 'Extracts from the *Historia Aurea*', p. 208. D'Eyville was pardoned as a Lancastrian retainer in November 1318, under the terms of the treaty of Leake, and hanged after the battle of Boroughbridge (*CPR 1317-21*, p. 228; Bridlington, p. 78).

¹⁵⁹ It is an intriguing coincidence that both the plundering of Northallerton and the abduction of Lady Clifford took place around the feast of St. Martin, which may go some way to explaining Gray's confusion (*ibid.*; Bridlington, p. 48).

¹⁶⁰ *RPD*, ii, 943; *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blaneforde Chronica et Annales*, ed. H.T. Riley, RS 28, 3 vols (1866), iii, 99; Murimuth, *Chronica Murimuth et Avesbury*, ed. Thompson, p. 27; Wyntoun, vi, 45; Middleton, *Gilbert de Middleton*, app. A, p. 5.

parallel to John le Irroys is provided by John de Weredale. Described by Robert Greystanes as a 'schavaldum vel predonum' (*schavaldour* or plunderer), Weredale was killed on Holy Island by one of the garrison of Norham castle, during Kellaw's pontificate. Like le Irroys, he was a member of the royal household; Edward was furious at his death, and blaming the bishop for the incident, tried to persuade the Pope to have him translated to a different see.¹⁶¹ Given his frequent employment as a justice and his personal involvement in border raiding, Gray must have had many dealings with exactly the sort of men who could be described as *schavaldours*; yet the context in which he uses the term hardly suggests that it was part of his everyday vocabulary, which tends to support the suggestion that it was an uncommon word, and confined to literary usage by Gray's day.¹⁶² The fact that le Irroys and his gang are singled out for this disapprobation suggests that they gained a lasting local notoriety. It also demonstrates the extent to which Gray relied on his father's stories for his information about events in Northumberland. The elder Gray did not become the constable of Norham until 1319, and had either no knowledge or no interest in events which occurred there before his appointment. Hence, the *Scalacronica* has nothing to say of John de Weredale.¹⁶³

Gray's use of the term provides an illuminating clue to the way he wrote, for the same word (or rather, its Latin equivalent, *schavaldus*) occurs in the *Historia Aurea* in a passage concerning the Earl of Arundel's defeat by James Douglas (in a skirmish at Lintalee in Jedburgh forest), a passage which immediately precedes the account of d'Eyville's raid on Northallerton. Here, the word is used to describe a 'schavaldus quidam nobilis clericus Helias dictus' (noble cleric called Ellis) who was fighting in the English cause with 30 companions (*consociis*). Gray himself describes the skirmish at Lintalee separately, in an account of James Douglas' exploits, but without mentioning Ellis. It is likely that reading the *Historia Aurea*, he came across this reference to a *schavaldour*, and was reminded of his father's tales of the infamous John le Irroys.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ CPR 1307-13, p. 542; *Historiæ Dunelmensis Scriptores Tres*, ed. James Raine, SS ix (1839), p. 94.

¹⁶² Middleton, *Gilbert de Middleton*, app. A, pp. 7, 11.

¹⁶³ It also suggests that Gray made no use of Graystones' work.

¹⁶⁴ Galbraith, 'Extracts from the *Historia Aurea*', p. 208; *Scala*, p. 143. The elder Gray lost a horse at Lintalee (above, p. 15).

The elder Gray served in the company of a number of magnates who were intimate with the king, providing his son with a source of anecdotes which are otherwise unrecorded. An example is Edward I's famous comment on handing the custody of Scotland over to John de Warenne: 'bon bosoigne fait qy de merde se deliver' (He does a good business who rids himself of a turd!). Gray was serving with Warenne a couple of months after this, and presumably heard it from the earl himself. The *Scalacronica* also records that Warenne was in the south ('le sue') when William Wallace invaded Northumberland in 1297. This tends to confirm the Guisborough chronicler's report that the earl was less than enthusiastic about his post; however, Guisborough's comment that Warenne preferred to remain on his Yorkshire estates, complaining that the Scottish climate was bad for his health, may just be malicious gossip, for the *Scalacronica* has nothing disparaging to say about the earl.¹⁶⁵

Milites Litterati

Thomas Gray stands out as being, 'as far as is known, the first [English] nobleman since Æthelweard to write a chronicle'.¹⁶⁶ However, Gray was not the only English 'nobleman' to indulge a taste for literary composition; a year before he started to write his history, Henry of Grosmont wrote his *Livre de Seyntz Medecines*, a devotional tract of great personal piety - indeed, the *Scalacronica* comments that Henry 'estoit sage, glorious et prus ... devaunt soun decesse durement bon Cristien' (was wise, great and gallant ... becoming a good Christian before his death), though there is, of course, no reason to suppose that Gray was aware of the existence of Henry's work.¹⁶⁷ Earlier examples of the literary endeavours of the English knightly classes (albeit on rather less exalted themes) include Walter of Bibbesworth's treatise on the French language and Walter of Henley's treatise on estate management. It is probable that

¹⁶⁵ *Scala*, pp. 123, 124; *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough*, ed. H. Rothwell, Camden Society, 3rd ser., lxxxix (1957), p. 294; and see above, p. 10. The elder Gray was certainly not averse to criticising the conduct of his lords on occasion (cf. the *Scalacronica*'s comments on Henry de Beaumont at Bannockburn, p. 141).

¹⁶⁶ Gransden, *Hist. Writ.*, ii, 92 (Æthelweard's Latin chronicle was composed in the late tenth-century - *ibid.*, i, 42-5).

¹⁶⁷ *Scala.*, p. 200. This is one of the very few comments in the *Scalacronica* on the piety (or otherwise) of any individual, and confirms Henry's reputation for Godliness. The *explicit* of Grosmont's work states that it was written in 1354 (*Le Livre de Seyntz Medecines*, ed. S.J. Arnould, Anglo-Norman Text Society (1940), p. 244).

both these authors were knights, writing in the thirteenth century.¹⁶⁸ Contrary to modern popular belief, functional literacy in French was the norm amongst the knightly classes by the beginning of the fourteenth century, though the ability to read Latin (which constituted the medieval definition of literacy) was less common.¹⁶⁹ Thus, there are numerous examples of letters composed, in French, by Gray's contemporaries: examples include the newsletters written by Bartholomew de Burghersh to Archbishop John Stratford, describing the course of the Crécy campaign, which were copied *verbatim* into Adam Murimuth's chronicle; and the letter to Edward III describing the defeat, by Thomas Gray and others, of a Scottish raiding party in 1340.¹⁷⁰ Of course, these letters were probably dictated to clerks, but in the present day, officials usually dictate their letters, and are not therefore assumed to be illiterate,¹⁷¹ when John, Lord Bouchier, was captured in Brittany in 1371, he lacked the services of a scribe, but was nevertheless quite capable of writing to his wife in his own hand to arrange his ransom. Earlier examples of literacy amongst the landowning classes are provided by the late thirteenth-century 'estate records' of the Hotot family of Northamptonshire, at least part of which was apparently written in the hand of Thomas Hotot (the head of the family who was responsible for compiling it); and by the similar 'estate book' made in 1322 by another member of the Northamptonshire gentry, Henry de Bray, who explicitly stated that he was writing in his own hand.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record. England 1066-1307* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1993), pp. 197-200; K.B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England. The Ford Lectures for 1953 and Related Studies* (Oxford, 1973), p. 242 (curiously, McFarlane's survey of the literary output of the nobility overlooks the *Scalacronica*). An early manuscript of Walter's treatise describes him as a knight who subsequently became a Dominican (*Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting*, ed. Dorothea Oschinsky (Oxford, 1971), pp. 123, 145). However, his knowledge of Latin for accounting is more likely to have been acquired in a secular capacity than as a member of an order of friars who professed to eschew worldly wealth.

¹⁶⁹ Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, pp. 224-52; Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry. The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London, 1984), pp. 149-52; Smalley, *Friars and Antiquity*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁰ *Chronica A. Murimuth et R. de Avesbury*, ed. E.M. Thompson, RS 93 (1889), pp. 200-1, 202-3; CDS, v, no. 809. Although the latter is anonymous, its content reveals that its author was a military commander (probably one of the officers of the garrison of Roxburgh), and certainly not a clerk. The letter writing of fourteenth-century laymen is discussed in Taylor, *Historical Literature*, pp. 222-30.

¹⁷¹ For that matter, the *Scalacronica* itself may well have been largely dictated, though Gray is unlikely to have been able to procure the services of a clerk whilst incarcerated in Edinburgh.

¹⁷² McFarlane, *Nobility of Medieval England*, pp. 45, 241; 'The Estate Records of the Hotot Family', *A Northamptonshire Miscellany*, ed. E. King, Northamptonshire Record Society xxxii (1983), pp. 11-12; *The Estate Book of Henry de Bray*, ed. D. Willis, Camden Society, 3rd ser. xxvii (1916), p. 3.

There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that interest in - and knowledge of - history was widespread amongst the nobility and gentry, if only on a parochial level. In the Court of Chivalry in 1386, John de Rither, of Scarborough, born *circa* 1320, was able to give an account of the triumph of Sir Geoffrey Scrope at a tournament at Northampton in the reign of Edward II, which had taken place when he was just three years old, because his ancestors had told him all about it.¹⁷³ Henry de Bray's estate books include a (tolerably accurate) list of the kings of England, as far back as Æthelberht, and a list of family and neighbourhood obituaries; this was stretched to include notices of the executions of Piers Gaveston and the Despensers, and the murders of Roger Bellers and Walter Stapledon. Rather more impressively, Thomas Hotot's books include full copies of Magna Carta, and King John's letter of submission to Innocent III of 1213, as well as notes on the Anglo-Saxon kings (derived from Henry of Huntingdon) and a list of French kings. Both contain oddments of local antiquarian and family history scattered liberally throughout.¹⁷⁴ Others commissioned chronicles to be written for them, such as the Oxfordshire knight Sir Thomas de la More. It was at de la More's prompting that Geoffrey le Baker wrote both his *Chroniculum* (a brief chronology of world history) and his *Chronicon*, containing a detailed account of the reigns of Edward II and Edward III. Indeed, de la More evidently harboured literary pretensions of his own: Baker's detailed narrative of the deputation which secured Edward II's abdication was based on the eyewitness account of de la More himself (who accompanied the deputation in the household of John Stratford, then bishop of Winchester), written down in French ('in Gallico scripsisti').¹⁷⁵ Nor were such lay pretensions confined to the gentry, if, as seems likely, the London fishmonger Andrew Horn was indeed the author of the *Annales Londoniensis*.¹⁷⁶ Historical literature was evidently no longer the exclusive preserve of

Note that both these estate books were written in Latin, and their authors would thus have been accounted as *litterati*.

¹⁷³ *Scrope and Grosvenor Controversy*, ed. Nicholas, i, 144-6. This account was confirmed by the 87 year old Sir William Aton, who had seen knighted at the same tournament (*ibid.*, i, 142-3).

¹⁷⁴ *Estate Book of Henry de Bray*, pp. 4-5 & *passim*; 'Estate Records of the Hotot Family', pp. 14, 41-2 & *passim*; Peter Coss, 'Identity and the Gentry c. 1200 - c. 1340', *Thirteenth-Century England* vi (1997), pp. 50-1.

¹⁷⁵ *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynebroke*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889), pp. v-ix, 26-7, 173. The *Vita et Mors Edwardi Secundi* is not, as was once thought, a Latin translation of de la More's tract, but merely a condensed recension of Baker's work (*ibid.*, p. vi).

the church. Seen in this context, neither Gray's literacy, nor his interest in history, were particularly unusual; what was unique was the extent of his literary interests and ambitions, and that he had the opportunity to put them into effect.¹⁷⁷

Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest where he acquired these literary interests: we have no records of his education, though he was obviously taught to read Latin, while the acrostic in the *Scalacronica* demonstrates a grasp of Latin grammar. These were hardly unusual accomplishments, though he does seem to have been unusually well read. Given that the only large library in the North East was that of Durham Cathedral Priory, and that his father was closely linked to Henry Beaumont, it is tempting to speculate that he was educated in the household of Henry's brother Louis, bishop of Durham from 1317, or possibly in the Cathedral Priory itself.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, Louis de Beaumont was hardly renowned for his literary interests, and the *Scalacronica* conspicuously lacks the interest in either the bishops of Durham or the Cathedral Priory which might reasonably be expected if Gray had indeed been brought up in Durham. Nevertheless, it is an intriguing coincidence that Thomas Gray began his adult career at about the same time that Durham got a new bishop, Richard de Bury, 'the greatest bibliophile of medieval Europe'.¹⁷⁹ Did Bury's huge enthusiasm for books rub-off on the son of one of his more important tenants?

¹⁷⁶ Jeremy Catto, 'Andrew Horn: Law and History in Fourteenth-Century England', *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.H.C. Davis & J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford, 1981).

¹⁷⁷ And, of course, the accident of the survival of his work; it is entirely possible that other laymen wrote historical works which have not survived.

¹⁷⁸ It was common for the sons of knights to be brought up in the households of their father's lords, and as Henry Beaumont was in exile from 1323, the bishop would be the obvious alternative; nor was it unusual for the sons of the nobility to be brought up in an ecclesiastical household or in a monastic institution, even if they were not destined for a career in the church (Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 55-65). One means by which a layman might acquire a good education was if he were originally intended for the church, but later abandoned this aim. The obvious example is Sir William Beauchamp, Lord Bergavenny, the fourth son of the earl of Warwick. He attended university at Oxford from 1358-61, having already acquired a canonry at Sarum, but following the deaths of three of his four brothers, he forsook his orders and took up a successful military career (McFarlane, *Nobility of Medieval England*, pp. 190-1, 235). As Beauchamp's example suggests, such a fate was likely to fall only to a younger son; however, Thomas Gray's forename would suggest that he was an eldest son, and there is no indication that he was ever a prospective clergyman.

¹⁷⁹ Noel Denholm-Young, 'Richard de Bury and the *Liber Epistolaris*', *Collected Papers* (Cardiff, 1969), p. 1.

IV. Local Identity and National Politics

Magnates of the English Marches

The *Scalacronica* is a work of universal history, setting out to describe the entirety of human history, albeit in a condensed form; nevertheless, like the *Historia Aurea*, another universal history which was one of its main sources, it contains much of purely local interest, relating to affairs in the North. This includes such trivial matters as an account of the collapse of the bridge over the Tweed, swept away in a flood just nine years after it had been built, because the arches were too low, an account reflecting the probable Berwick connections of Gray's ancestors.¹⁸⁰ This interest in northern affairs extends to his coverage of national events; thus, describing Richard I's wholesale efforts to raise cash for his crusade, he uses northern examples to illustrate the point, mentioning the sale of the castles of Berwick and Roxburgh to King William of Scotland, and the sale of the 'countees' of Northumberland & Sadberge to Hugh du Puiset, bishop of Durham.¹⁸¹ However, this interest does not appear to have extended to the internal affairs of the bishopric of Durham. This was despite the fact that the bishops were his family's lords and patrons, holding the castle of Norham where he served as their constable; that much of his land lay within the bishops' franchise; and that he was personally involved in the bishopric's business. He does include much information about Durham in the period of the Norman conquest, such as William I's confirmation of Durham's franchise and his grant of Billingham and Howden, the murder of the Bishop Walcher in 1080, the rebuilding of Durham Cathedral in 1093, and Robert de Mowbray's grant of Tynemouth to St Albans Abbey, 'qi par violenz auoit ofte lez moignes de Doresme'.¹⁸² However, after this period, his interest appears to tail off; certainly he has very little to say about the bishopric in his own lifetime and that of his father. He does make several references to Bishop Antony Bek, including a notice of his election to the Patriarchy of Jerusalem; but as befits a man who 'non vient

¹⁸⁰ 'pur ceo qe lez archis estoient trop bassez', *Scala.*, p. 118. The Northern Franciscan Chronicle had an account of the same flood, which it dated to 1294 (*Lanercost*, p. 157).

¹⁸¹ *Scala.*, pp. 48-9. Sadberge was actually a wapentake, and not a county (Richard Lomas, *North-East England in the Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 21).

¹⁸² *Scala.*, pp. 7, 20-21. These events are all extensively reported in the works of William de Malmesbury, Roger de Howden and Marianus Scotus, whom Gray mentions in his vision; the details were probably culled from the *Historia Aurea*.

en le patriarche mes durement fust noble en soun pays' (did not go to the Patriarchy, but lived as a noble on his own estates), these references mostly concern his involvement in affairs of state and military campaigns, as one of Edward I's closest advisers - such as his presence at the battle of Falkirk with three earls in his retinue.¹⁸³ There is no allusion to the long running and acrimonious disputes between Bek (and his successors) and the king over the extent of the franchise of the bishopric, primarily concerning rights to lands forfeited for treason; Gray does not even bother to record the fact that such a dispute directly affected his father's acquisition of the manor of Heton itself. Given the enthusiastically litigious nature of English society in the fourteenth century, this is precisely the sort of information which landed families would have needed to keep track of. This omission can hardly then have been the result of ignorance, particularly as Gray may well have been involved in a long running dispute over Heton stemming from this very issue.¹⁸⁴ Of course, we should not expect the minutiae of Gray's family affairs to be recorded in a work of universal history, but a reference to the franchise disputes which influenced those affairs might not have been out of place. There is no mention of the disputed election to the bishopric in 1317, described in great detail by Robert Graystones (a Durham monk and contemporary of Gray's), despite the fact that it ended with the appointment of Louis de Beaumont, brother of Henry, the elder Gray's patron, and thus led to the latter's appointment as constable of Norham.¹⁸⁵ Neither the eminent bibliophile Bishop Richard Bury nor the militant Bishop Thomas Hatfield, who fought at Crécy (and whose seal portrays him

¹⁸³ *Scala.*, pp. 135, 118-19, 120, 121, 125. Gray may have been following a historiographical tradition, perhaps ultimately based on a lost Life of that turbulent prelate, which favoured Bek by omitting un-flattering episodes, a tradition best exemplified by Pierre de Langtoft's chronicle (Gransden, i, 483).

¹⁸⁴ Above, pp. 13-14. An example of the care taken by landowning families to keep track of their rights is provided by the register of charters and final concords put together by the Northamptonshire squire, Thomas de Hotot, at the end of the 13thc., 'ad evidenciam habendam ... pro omnibus contingentibus litibus' ('Estate Records of the Hotot Family', p.43). The disputes over Durham's franchise are discussed by Lomas, *North-East England*, pp. 78-9; Constance M. Fraser, 'Prerogative and the Bishops of Durham, 1267-1376', *EHR* lxxiv (1959), p. 475; *Northern Petitions*, ed. Fraser, pp. 240-75.

¹⁸⁵ *Historiæ Dunelmensis Tres*, pp. 97-9; and see above, p. 15. According to Graystones, one of the other candidates in the disputed election was John Walwayn, a strong contender for the authorship of the *Vita Edwardi* (*ibid.*, p. 98; Noel Denholm-Young, 'The Authorship of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*', *Collected Papers* (Cardiff, 1969)).

on horseback in armour), apparently even merit a mention, despite the fact that Hatfield, in particular, did much to further Gray's own career.¹⁸⁶

Gray does include an account of the plundering of the manor of Northallerton in November 1317, by Jocelyn d'Eyville, presumably because the manor belonged to the bishops of Durham, a detail mentioned in the *Historia Aurea's* account of the same event (that Gray did not feel the need to explain this in his own work, suggests that his envisaged audience was one that was familiar with the landed interests of the bishopric of Durham). However, this also serves to confirm that the *Scalacronica* did not share the same political viewpoint as the ecclesiastical lords of Durham. Gray used d'Eyville's attack on Northallerton as an example of the lawlessness which resulted from a lack of deference for royal authority. Robert Graystones does not mention d'Eyville's raid at all, dwelling instead on the persistent disputes over Northallerton between the archbishops of York, the bishops of Durham and the Cathedral Priory.¹⁸⁷ Equally revealing is the *Scalacronica's* account of another outrage committed against the bishops of Durham, the abduction of Louis and Henry de Beaumont by the Northumbrian knight Sir Gilbert de Middleton in September 1317. This was deemed an especially infamous crime by contemporaries, for the Beaumonts had been travelling in the company of two cardinals - who were robbed by Middleton and his accomplices - and it was reported by virtually every chronicler of the period. Many of these accounts describe the affair without any attempt at explanation, or simply attribute it to delinquency on the part of Middleton; thus the *Vita Edwardi* pontificates at length about the evils of attacking cardinals without even mentioning the bishop of Durham.¹⁸⁸ However, Graystones, whose account is, unsurprisingly, one of the most detailed, relates the incident to the intended consecration of Louis de Beaumont, which the cardinals had hoped to perform at Durham; and the same connection is made explicit

¹⁸⁶ However, Hatfield's promotion to the see and the battle of Crécy belong to the period covered by Leland's abstract, which may have omitted minor references to the bishop (Hatfield's seal is illustrated in Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, p. 170).

¹⁸⁷ *Scala.*, p. 147; Galbraith, 'Extracts from the *Historia Aurea*', p. 208; *Historiæ Dunelmensis*, pp. 59, 105-6.

¹⁸⁸ *Vita Edwardi*, p. 82-4. The affair was also noted by the Scottish chronicler, Fordun (p. 347), though without comment. For modern accounts, see Middleton, *Gilbert de Middleton*; *NCH*, ix, 106-12; Michael Prestwich, 'Gilbert de Middleton and the Attack on the Cardinals, 1317', *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages*, ed. Tim Reuter (London, 1992); Lomas, *North-East England*, pp. 57-8.

by the Franciscan Chronicle and by Thomas Castleford. Other northern chronicles allude to Beaumont's consecration, including John de Trokelowe (who nevertheless describes the perpetrators as 'fatui' - half-wits), but unlike Graystones and Castleford, none of these mention the disputed election, so cause and effect are very much more implicit.¹⁸⁹ By contrast, the *Scalacronica* has a unique account, according to which, Middleton was motivated by anger at the arrest of his cousin, Adam Swinburn, held by the king because 'ly auoit parle trop rudement de lestat dez marchies' (he had spoken too plainly to him concerning the state of the Marches). In fact, Swinburn was not closely related to Middleton, but he was employed by the crown in the defence of the March, and was indeed imprisoned in August 1317; it is not unlikely that the elder Thomas Gray was personally acquainted with him, and was probably the source of this information.¹⁹⁰ The *Scalacronica* was written partly with the intention of glorifying the elder Gray, with a concomitant tendency to quietly ignore facts which might put its hero in a bad light, and as he was a retainer of the Beaumonts, its account may well be distorted; nevertheless, if only as a partial explanation of Middleton's motives, it is entirely plausible.¹⁹¹ What is unique about the the *Scalacronica*'s account is that it relates the incident primarily to the politics of Northumberland and the March, and only secondarily to the promotion of Louis de Beaumont to the see of Durham.

It is clear that, for all his interests and ties with the bishopric of Durham, Gray identified himself with the Marches¹⁹² (and specifically the East March, although he does not bother to make the distinction), and he consistently describes the men of his

¹⁸⁹ *Historiæ Dunelmensis Tres*, pp. 100-1; *Castleford's "Chronicle"*, ii, 1058-60; *Lanercost*, pp. 233-4; *Bridlington*, p. 52; *Anonimale Chronicle 1307-1334*, p. 90; *Johannis de Trokelowe et Henrici de Blanford Chronica et Annales*, ed. H.T. Riley, RS 28 (1866), iii, 99-101; *Brut*, p. 209.

¹⁹⁰ *Scala.*, pp. 144-5; Middleton, *Gilbert de Middleton*, pp. 36, 78-9; Prestwich, 'Gilbert de Middleton', p. 185.

¹⁹¹ Gray's account provides some interesting additional details. It describes how Middleton was captured by William Felton, Thomas Heton and Robert Horncliffe, 'par couyne de sez genz propres' (through the trickery of his own men). Subsequently, one John Fawdon petitioned for, and received, a reward from the king for his part in Middleton's capture. According to his own curiously guarded account, he had 'revealed himself' to Henry de Beaumont and was then able to bring about Middleton's arrest (*Northumberland Petitions*, ed. Fraser, pp. 137-8, 144-5). As Beaumont was imprisoned in Mitford castle, this suggests that Fawdon was actually one of Middleton's company, and that Gray's account is accurate.

¹⁹² And if Gray was at all typical of his class, this suggests that owning land in several counties did not preclude identification with one particular 'county community' (Coss, 'Identity and the Gentry', pp. 58-9; cf. C. Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies* xxxiii (1994), p. 362).

locality as ‘of the marches’, rather than as ‘English’, or ‘Northumbrians’ or ‘borderers’.¹⁹³ Much the most interesting example, and a fascinating anecdote in its own right, comes from the *Scalacronica*’s account of Edward III’s Scottish campaign of 1335, in support of Edward Balliol. Gray reports that there was a squabble within Balliol’s army when the marchers (‘les marchies’) killed a squire with the surname ‘de Gournay’, on the grounds that somebody with that surname was said to have been involved in the death of Edward II.¹⁹⁴ Adam Murimuth recorded that ‘it was commonly said that’ (*dictum tamen fuit vulgariter*), Edward had been murdered on the orders of lords ‘John Mautravers’ and ‘Thomas de Gorneye’.¹⁹⁵ However, de Gurney had died in custody at Bayonne in 1333, and in July of that year, his body had been brought to Edward III at Berwick, via Tynemouth;¹⁹⁶ it is hardly likely that the body could have been brought through the East March without any marchers noticing it, particularly as many of them would have been with Edward at the time, besieging Berwick. This makes all the more puzzling their murder of an unfortunate squire also named de Gurney, just two years later. Gray himself was obviously wary of the rumours that spread about the manner of Edward II’s death; the *Scalacronica* makes no mention of de Gurney (or John Maltravers) in its account of Edward’s deposition, commenting simply that he died at Berkeley, ‘la maner coment ne fust pas scieue, mais Dieux le sceit’ (in what manner is not known, except by God).¹⁹⁷ It is a pity that Gray was not more specific in identifying the men who murdered de Gurney in 1335, for it is usually supposed that Edward II’s incompetent handling of the Scottish wars earned him no

¹⁹³ A curious exception is the *Scalacronica*’s account of how Patrick, Earl of March, was robbed and nearly killed in Northumberland in 1334, despite his then being in allegiance to Edward III; as a result, he defected back to the Scots, having failed to obtain redress from Edward. Gray describes his assailants not as ‘marchies’, but rather as ‘maufesours de Northumberlond’ (*Scala.*, p. 164).

¹⁹⁴ *Scala.*, p. 165. The incident does not appear to have been recorded by any other chroniclers; certainly, it is not mentioned in the *Historia Aurea*, Gray’s main source (cf. *Chronicon Walteri de Hemingburgh*, ed. Hamilton, pp. 310-11).

¹⁹⁵ Murimuth, *Chronica Murimuth et Avesbury*, ed. Thompson, pp. 53-4. Murimuth worked from a diary he had kept during Edward II’s reign, and can therefore be counted as a contemporary authority (Gransden, ii, 3). Geoffrey le Baker’s notorious account appears to have been a colourfully imaginative embellishment of Murimuth (*Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, pp. 33-4; G.P. Cuttino & Thomas W. Lyman, ‘Where is Edward II?’, *Speculum* liii (1978), pp. 522-4).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

¹⁹⁷ *Scala.*, p. 152 (the bizarre possibility that Edward was not in fact killed at Berkeley, but managed to escape to the continent to become a hermit, is discussed in Cuttino & Lyman, ‘Where is Edward II?’).

great popularity in the marches, as the rebellions of Gilbert de Middleton and Andrew de Harcla would indicate. This incident suggests that some, at least, of 'les marchies' resented his supposed murder.¹⁹⁸

Gray's use of the term 'marchers' is chronologically quite precise. The Marches of England and Scotland had gained formal legal recognition in 1249, when the *leges marchiarum* were promulgated by an Anglo-Scottish treaty, though the laws themselves were much older. However, aside from a couple of stray references,¹⁹⁹ Gray uses the term 'marchers' only with reference to events after the outbreak of the Scottish wars. Recounting William Wallace's raid on Northern England in winter 1297, he described how Roxburgh castle had been relieved by men whom he described not as 'marchers', but as 'barouns du counteez de Northumbreland et de Cardoil'. On the other hand, he notes that John de Segrave's expedition of 1303, which led to his defeat at Roslin, included 'plusours grauntz des marchies Engleis' (several magnates from the English marches). This corresponds closely with the establishment of the Wardens of the March at the turn of the century, initially with primarily military powers. Gray clearly identified himself with a society which had grown out of the Anglo-Scottish wars; nor should this be surprising, for it was these wars which had been the making of his family's fortune.²⁰⁰

As well as his military career, Thomas Gray was actively engaged in royal service in a rather more peaceful capacity, serving on numerous commissions of oyer and terminer, commissions of the peace and commissions of array, in Northumberland, as well as serving as sheriff, escheator and chief justice of Norham for the bishops of Durham, and was obviously heavily involved in local crown (and mitre) administration. With his extensive landownership across Northumberland and the bishopric of Durham, Gray should certainly be numbered amongst the 'county gentry', the landed families whose wealth was sufficient to set them apart from lesser landholders whose interests were more localised, and who thus wielded less political weight.²⁰¹ It is

¹⁹⁸ In this context, it is interesting to note that one of the very few who did anything to defend Edward in 1326 was the marcher knight Sir John Felton (above, p. 19).

¹⁹⁹ Concerning Malcolm Canmore's argument with William Rufus in 1093, and describing King John's devastation of 'la marche de Escose' in 1216 (*Scala.*, pp. 21, 95)

²⁰⁰ *Scala.*, pp. 124, 126; R.R. Reid, 'The Office of Warden of the Marches; its Origins and Early History', *EHR* xxxii (1917), p. 479-81; Neville, *Violence, Custom and Law*, pp. 1-26.

²⁰¹ Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages. The Fourteenth Century*

therefore perhaps surprising that the *Scalacronica* has not been pressed into the current historical debate on the rôle, if any, of the 'county community' in the fourteenth century.²⁰² If there was any such thing as a 'county community' in fourteenth-century Northumberland, then Thomas Gray is typical of the sort of figure who could be expected to be part of it. However, it has to be said that local administration is, on the face of it, conspicuously absent from Gray's writing. The county court, for instance, has been proposed as the main instrument for the expression of local concerns and opinions, and for the dissemination of information (and indeed propaganda) from Westminster,²⁰³ but the county court of Northumberland is mentioned nowhere - nor, for that matter, is the court of the bishopric of Durham. Of course, we should not perhaps expect a medieval work of universal history to be concerned with the minutiae of local crown administration,²⁰⁴ but Gray shows little interest in the sort of political matters which are supposed by modern historians to have been of major concern to the country gentry. For instance, the king's parliaments are now generally considered to have provided another vital link between the crown and the localities, yet they are hardly prominent in the *Scalacronica*. Neither Gray nor his father appear to have served as MPs, but many of their colleagues did, and they were presumably the source of such brief notes on events in parliament as he provides, so he obviously did not lack information.²⁰⁵ Even when he does mention parliament, he ignores measures which might be thought to have been of particular interest to a 'county community'. For instance, his comparatively lengthy notice of the Westminster

Political Community (London, 1987), pp. 69-74.

²⁰² The whole concept of a 'county community' has been savaged by Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England'.

²⁰³ J.R. Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. xxviii (1978).

²⁰⁴ Although many monastic chronicles were intensely parochial in their concerns, such as the *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa*, which mixes national history with a detailed narrative of the abbey's own business and legal affairs.

²⁰⁵ The returns are not complete, so it is impossible to be sure that neither Gray nor his father served as MPs, but if they had, the *Scalacronica* might be expected to reflect this. Associates and acquaintances who definitely did serve as MPs include Roger Mauduit, Robert Manners, John de Lilburn, Roger de Widdrington, Walter Creyk and William del Strother, as well as William de Pressen, the younger Gray's father-in-law (C.H. Hunter Blair, 'Members of Parliament for Northumberland (October 1258 - January 1327)' & 'Members of Parliament for Northumberland (September 1327 - September 1399)', *AAE*, 4th ser., x, xi (1933, 1934)). It should be noted that the elder Gray was returned to attend a Great Council at Westminster in May 1324 (*Parliamentary Writs*, II, i, 649).

parliament of October/November 1362 neglects to mention the renewal of the Statute of Labourers, despite the fact that, immediately following this parliament, Gray was himself appointed to a commission to enforce this statute in Northumberland.²⁰⁶

Nevertheless, despite Gray's apparent lack of interest in the 'county community', it is possible to build up a picture of the social and political circles in which he moved. There are many Northumbrians whose names recur in the *Scalacronica*, and Gray (or his father) can be shown to have known all of them, and to have fought along side most of them. Given their prominence in the Marches, it comes as no surprise to find the Percies and the Nevilles amongst them. Indeed, Gray describes the circumstances, as he understood them, surrounding the arrival of the Percies in the Marches in 1310, when Antony Bek sold the barony of Alnwick to Henry Percy, having been granted it by William de Vesci (in 1295). Gray's account includes the detail, otherwise unrecorded, that Bek made this sale 'qi pur chaucez paroles de Johan, fitz bastard le dit William' (because of the angry words of John, the bastard son of William). In conjunction with the account of Robert Graystones, which states that Alnwick had been granted to Bek on the understanding that he would pass it on to Vesci's illegitimate son when the latter was of age, this suggests that Bek's sale of the barony was of dubious legality, though modern research has cast doubt on both accounts.²⁰⁷ However, while Gray was writing some fifty years after the event, his father would have had a direct knowledge of the affair, for in 1323, at York, he was a witness to a deed by Gilbert Aton, Vesci's heir, which confirmed Bek's grant of Alnwick to Percy.²⁰⁸ He was also connected to Vesci's wife, Henry de Beaumont's sister, though this may have coloured his view of these proceedings; after all, Isabella de Vesci is unlikely to have had a particularly high regard for her husband's bastards. At the same time, he also had links with the Percy family, so there is no reason to suppose that he was biased against them.

²⁰⁶ *CPR 1361-4*, p. 291-2; *Scala.*, p. 202. However, the *Scalacronica* does note that Edward fixed the wool staple at Calais at this time, a change which personally affected Gray, who had relied on wool exports to pay off his ransom in 1356.

²⁰⁷ *Scala*, pp. 118-19; *Historiæ Dunelmensis Tres*, p. 91; J.M.W. Bean, 'The Percies' Acquisition of Alnwick', *AE*, 4th ser., xxxii (1954), p. 309-14. Until their acquisition of estates in Scotland in 1299, the Percies had owned no lands beyond the Tees, and Alnwick was their first acquisition in Northumberland.

²⁰⁸ *Percy Chartulary*, ed. Martin, p. 232.

The *Scalacronica* also describes the killing of Richard fitz Marmaduke by Robert de Neville, on Framwellgate Bridge in Durham, an event which left the Nevilles without rivals in the bishopric. According to the Bridlington chronicler, Neville justified his actions on the grounds that fitz Marmaduke was ‘regis et regni perfidum proditorem’ (a faithless traitor to the king and to the realm); there may well also have been a political aspect to the affair, for fitz Marmaduke had been an adherent of Thomas of Lancaster.²⁰⁹ However, it was the local politics of the killing which interested Gray, who attributed it to ‘coroucesours entre eaux par enuy qi enferoit le plus graunt meistre’ (a quarrel between them out of jealousy over who should be reckoned the greater lord). Indeed, his account is very matter-of-fact; while one chronicler considered the affair to be ‘res mirabilis et omnino detestabilis’ (a strange event and altogether detestable), Gray made no comment, saving his obloquy for the ‘faus traitres des marchies’ (the false traitors of the march), who brought about Neville’s death at Berwick, ‘par couyne’ (by treachery).²¹⁰

Like the Grays, the Percies and the Nevilles conspicuously owed their advancement to the Scottish wars, and were very much part of the Marcher community which came into existence after 1296; describing how Henry Percy and Ralph Neville (brother and heir of Robert) came to the aid of his father at Norham, during the siege, Gray describes them as ‘sagis, nobilis et richis, qi graunt eide firent as marches’ (wise, noble and wealthy, who did great service in the marches).²¹¹ Nevertheless, these two families are not as prominent in the *Scalacronica* as Henry de Beaumont, which, on the face of it, is somewhat surprising, given the supposed pre-eminence of the Percies in marcher society. However, Gray’s father had owed his advancement largely to his employment in Beaumont’s retinue, which led to his appointment as constable of Norham; and as a man on the make, he had also cultivated links with the Earl of Atholl, and, to a lesser extent, the Percies, links which brought him further gains. On the other hand, having inherited a comfortable landed estate at a time when the ravaging of the Scots had

²⁰⁹ *Scala.*, pp. 143-4; Bridlington, p. 57; H.S. Offler, ‘Murder on the Framwellgate Bridge’, *AÆ*, 5th ser., xvi (1988).

²¹⁰ A detailed account of the skirmish which led to Neville’s death is given by Barbour (iii, 116-121), who makes no reference to any treachery on the English side; nor does Neville’s brother Ralph, captured in the same skirmish, in his petition for aid towards paying his ransom (*Northern Petitions*, ed. Fraser, pp. 178-9).

²¹¹ *Scala.*, p. 147.

been contained, the younger Gray could afford to be more independent. Although he held lands of the barony of Alnwick, amounting to a couple of knight's fees and rendering a total of about three marks in lieu of castle guard at Alnwick,²¹² he had only marginal connections with the Percy family. He must have been reasonably well acquainted with Henry Percy (father of the first earl), for he served with him on various legal commissions, and as a warden of the march (in 1361 and 1368); and in January 1357, soon after his release from captivity, he also witnessed a licence for Robert de Hilton to build himself a mill-pond, granted by Percy at Warkworth.²¹³ Yet this hardly amounts to classic 'bastard feudalism', and demonstrates that it was entirely possible to build a successful military career in the East March in the mid-fourteenth century, without the patronage of the Percies. From the *Scalacronica's* disapprobation of William Montague, his erstwhile lord, it is tempting to speculate that Gray had some sort of disagreement with Salisbury, a disagreement which put him off being a retainer for the rest of his life. Anyway, he was able to obtain employment in royal service on his own account, following from his services at the battle of Neville's Cross, and simply did not need the patronage of a good lord to further his career.

Less prominent marchers also appear in Gray's narrative. Thus he describes how Robert Manners successfully defended Norham against Robert Bruce in 1328; how he (or possibly his son, who died in 1345/6) was captured in a skirmish at Pressen, near Wark-on-Tweed, in 1338, due to the rashness of the English marchers; and his involvement in Gray's own defeat of a Scottish raiding party in 1340, along with John de Coupland; and a certain 'Maners' is listed amongst those who accompanied William the Conqueror in 1066, in Gray's version of the 'Battle Abbey Roll'.²¹⁴ John de Coupland also appears as the captor of David II at Neville's Cross.²¹⁵ The

²¹² The manors of Doddington, Weetwood, Hawkhill, Ewart and Howick (*Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Edward III*, xii, no. 242, pp. 228-9).

²¹³ *CPR 1348-50*, pp. 317, 452; *CPR 1361-4*, pp. 65, 291-2; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 857, 914; *Percy Chartulary*, ed. Martin, p. 346.

²¹⁴ *Scala.*, pp. 17, 155, 168; *Scala. (Lel.)*, p. 299; Manners' capture is recounted by Bower (vii, 148) and Wyntoun (vi, 146-51), but not by Fordun. Gray's account may be based, at least partly, on the Scottish source(s) used by Bower and Wyntoun, as he was in Flanders with Edward III at that time of this incident. The Scottish raid of 1340 is discussed above, p. 23. The *Scalacronica's* treatment of the 'Battle Abbey Roll' is discussed by Thiolier, 'La *Scalacronica*: Première Approche', pp. 138-47.

²¹⁵ *Scala. (Lel.)*, p. 301. Coupland's capture of David II was noted by some, but not all, accounts of the battle, including two laudatory poems (one in Latin and Lawrence Minot's in English, *Political Poems and Songs from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III*, ed. Thomas Wright, RS 14,

Scalacronica describes William de Felton's part in the capture of Gilbert de Middleton in 1318, and his marriage to the daughter of Earl Duncan of Fife; and how, in 1362, his son, another William, defeated a company of Bretons from the Great Company in the Limousin, of which region he was seneschal for the king of England.²¹⁶ Other marcher gentry who appear in Gray's pages include Robert de Ogle, who, in 1336, helped Edward III in his dramatic dash to Lochindorb Castle, to rescue the beleaguered Katherine de Beaumont; and William de Pressen, who had captured the Earl of Moray during a raid into Scotland in the previous year.²¹⁷

These same names also appear in records in connection with the Gray family. Robert de Manners (whose castle at Etal was just a couple of miles down the river Till from the Gray's *caput* at Heton) replaced the elder Gray as constable of Norham in 1327, and was in turn replaced by the younger Gray in 1345.²¹⁸ Manners witnessed deeds with the elder Gray, including one by Henry Percy;²¹⁹ he also colluded in the younger Gray's abduction of John de Raynton in 1332,²²⁰ and in 1348, they were both appointed as judges to enquire into violations of the truce, and, along with John de Coupland and others (including Henry Percy), to negotiate with the Scots.²²¹ Coupland was an old comrade-in-arms of Gray's, having served in Flanders with him in 1338-9, and they had both been summoned to Westminster, along with other prominent northern lords, to discuss a proposed Scottish expedition in the aftermath of Neville's Cross.²²² In 1361, while the *Scalacronica* was being written, Gray was appointed to a commission of the peace, and as a warden of the march, with Coupland as one of his colleagues.²²³ In 1331, a youthful Thomas Gray had poached deer from Gilbert de

2 vols (1859), i, 46, 85) and *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, p. 88 (contemporary accounts); and Knighton, p. 72; Bower, vii, 258-60; Wyntoun, vi, 184-5 (all written decades later). *Lanercost*, p. 351, mentions Coupland, but not in connection with David's capture.

²¹⁶ *Scala.*, pp. 145, 175, 201. Curiously, Gray describes the younger Felton as a 'cheualer Englois', but without bothering to mention his connection with the Marches.

²¹⁷ *Scala.*, p. 166. Fordun notes sourly that Moray was captured by certain *ignobiles*, whom he does not name (p. 359). The incident is discussed by Ranald Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots* (Oxford, 1965), p. 213.

²¹⁸ Above, pp. 19-20, 24-5. Manners died in 1354, just before Gray started to write the *Scalacronica*.

²¹⁹ *NCH*, ii, 238n.; *CPR 1330-4*, p. 261.

²²⁰ Above, p. 21.

²²¹ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 713-14, 717.

²²² Above, pp. 22, 25.

Umfraville's park at Birtley, with a gang of gentry led by William de Felton and Robert de Ogle.²²⁴ Subsequently, Gray had many dealings with Felton when the latter served as escheator and sheriff of Northumberland.²²⁵ Ogle was, along with Gray and Coupland (and others), a recipient of a personal letter of thanks from the king for his efforts at Neville's Cross, and was amongst those summoned to discuss the proposed Scottish expedition. He was appointed, along with Gray, as a commissioner of array in Northumberland in October 1353, when a Scottish invasion was expected. Ogle was obviously close to Gray because he was named in the chain of remainders in the entail on Gray's estates.²²⁶ And William de Pressen was Gray's father-in-law.

All of these were men who, like Gray and his father, had risen from comparative obscurity and made a successful career out ^{of} the Scottish wars, gaining royal patronage in the form of local office and lands, frequently at the expense of their neighbours who had been unable to adjust to the changed circumstances of Northumberland after 1297. The most spectacular example is, of course, John de Coupland, whose capture of David II at Neville's Cross literally made his fortune.²²⁷ However, on a less sensational level, the Feltons had sprung from obscurity after 1296, and made a successful career out of royal service in the Scottish wars, and elsewhere; William de Felton, for instance, was granted a considerable reward for his part in the capture of Gilbert de Middleton (though he does seem to have had considerable difficulty in getting his reward actually put into effect). The Ogles were another family who gained considerable advancement through war service, and while the Manners family was somewhat more established before 1296, they too successfully adapted.²²⁸

²²³ *CPR 1361-4*, p. 65; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 857.

²²⁴ Above, p. 21.

²²⁵ e.g. *CFR 1337-47*, p. 364-5; *CPR 1343-5*, p. 220, 252; *CFR 1337-47*, p. 381. Furthermore, William's brother John was, like the elder Gray, a retainer of the Despencers.

²²⁶ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 713-14, 717, 762; *Fædera*, III, i, 91-2, 97; 'Durham Cursitor's Records: Inquisitions Post Mortem, pontificate of Thomas Hatfield', *The Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1885), Appendix I, pp. 201-2 (it must be said that there would have to have been a catastrophic failure of heirs throughout Gray's family before Ogle actually gained anything ...). Ogle's father had also been associated with the elder Gray (e.g. *CDS*, iii, no. 787; *Percy Chartulary*, ed. Martin, p. 232).

²²⁷ *NCH*, xi, 218-20; Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society', p. 36; McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, p. 30.

²²⁸ *NCH*, vii, 107-16; *CPR 1338-40*, pp. 119-20; W. Percy Hedley, *Northumbrian Families*, 2 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1968), ii, 141-5; *NCH*, xi, 442-7.

Of course, these Northumbrian families were by no means unique in making a career out of warfare. There are numerous examples of men who made their fortunes in France and gained considerable social advancement, such as Hugh Calvely, Gregory Sais and Robert Knollys. Knollys, in particular, seems to ^{have} begun to begin his career as a humble bowman; and it is interesting to note that the *Scala cronica* includes a lengthy digression from its narrative specifically to record the feats of arms performed in France by various English *gentz*, ‘plusours sours dez archiers et puis deuenus chiualiers’ (many of them beginning as archers and afterwards becoming knights).²²⁹ Nor was it unusual to combine a military career with one in local crown administration; Thomas Wake, a knight of the royal household, even managed to retain his office of sheriff of Northamptonshire whilst serving with the king in Flanders in 1340.²³⁰ What was unusual was that the marchers had little choice in combining military and civilian careers, and, moreover, had to do so without having to leave their homes. For most of the gentry of England, serving in the king’s wars meant travelling overseas; but for the gentry of the Marches, the king’s wars frequently arrived at their own doorsteps. Inevitably, Marcher society therefore developed a somewhat militaristic character, reflected in its architecture. Whereas the gentry of more peaceful areas might choose to parade their status by building churches, the *parvenus* of the Marches marked their arrival by putting up castles.²³¹ After *circa* 1340, there was a rash of private castle building in Northumberland, albeit many of these edifices were on a small scale (a survey of 1415 describes many of them by the terms *fortalicium* or *turris*, rather than *castrum*). Gray’s associates were at the forefront of this architectural fashion. Robert de Manners and Robert de Ogle both obtained licence to crenellate their houses at (respectively) Etal and Ogle in May 1341.²³² The Feltons did not bother to obtain a licence when they added a splendid solar tower to their hall house at Edlingham; however, as the crown issued only one licence for Northumberland after 1346 (for

²²⁹ *Scala.*, p. 181. Gray records an incident involving Knollys in Brittany, where he describes him simply as a *cheualer Engles*, without reference to his lowly origins (*ibid.*, p. 192).

²³⁰ Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III*, p. 151.

²³¹ Nigel Saul, *Scenes from Provincial Life. Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280-1400* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 140-60. It is surely no coincidence that Northumberland is virtually devoid of fourteenth-century ecclesiastical architecture.

²³² Cadwallader Bates, *The Border Holds of Northumberland, AÆ*, 2nd ser. xiv (1891), pp. 9, 12-19; Philip Dixon, ‘Fortified Houses on the Anglo-Scottish Border. A Study of the Domestic Architecture of the Upland Area’, Unpublished D-Phil Thesis, Nottingham University (1977), pp. 28-9.

Fenwick, in 1378), and castle building in the Marches continued unabated, the tower at Edlingham presumably dates to after Neville's Cross.²³³ The survey of 1415 records that the Gray family owned a *castrum* at Heton, which was never licensed. Though now largely obliterated, an Elizabethan sketch reveals it to have been a courtyard castle similar to Ford, Ogle and Chillingham, licenced in 1338, 1341 and 1344 respectively, and it is probable that Heton castle was built not long afterwards. Thomas Gray inherited Heton in 1344, and the proceeds of the ransoms of David Graham and John de Haliburton, whom he captured at Neville's Cross, would have provided the necessary capital for building work.²³⁴ Clearly, this proliferation of castles in the area of England most frequently and directly affected by raiding and the threat of invasion cannot be divorced from the perceived need to defend against raiding, although by this time, the Scottish raiding was greatly reduced, and largely confined to the immediate border area. However, the ostentatious decoration of the main chamber of the tower at Edlingham, 'clearly designed for the maximum display possible', and the large window embrasures on the ground floor, suggest that these castles were not built solely - or even primarily - from considerations of practical defence.²³⁵ Against the background of such a martial *milieu*, the *Scalacronica* celebrated the heroic military achievements of the elder Thomas Gray and set them in a historical context, providing a literary counterpart to the rather more concrete statement of military values made by Heton Castle.

In December 1363, marcher society was riven by the murder of John de Coupland, killed on Bolton Moor, near Alnwick. Gray does not report this event, for his narrative

²³³ Dixon, 'Fortified Houses', pp. 28-9. The reason for the cessation of crown licencing is obscure; Bates suggested that this was a deliberate policy to encourage the building of fortifications in the aftermath of the Scottish invasion of that year (*Border Holds*, p. 11). However, the last castle in Northumberland to be demolished for not having a licence was Nafferton, pulled down in 1221 after complaints from the neighbours (Charles Coulson, 'Freedom to Crenellate by Licence - An Historiographical Revision', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* xxxviii (1994), pp. 95-6), so the crown can hardly be said to have been restricting the building of castles in the period before 1346 (Coulson argues cogently that the system of licencing castles never was restrictive in any case - *ibid.*).

²³⁴ Bates, *Border Holds*, pp. 9, 14, 329-30; Dixon, *Fortified Houses*, p. 33; *Fæ dera*, III, i, 95. As Heton lay within the palatinate of Durham, any licence for a castle would have been issued by the bishop rather than the crown, but no such licence is recorded amongst the surviving calendared records of the bishopric.

²³⁵ G. Fairclough, 'Edlingham Castle', *Transactions of the Ancient Monument Society*, new ser., xxiv (1984), p. 57.

comes to an end with King David II's marriage to Margaret Logie, in April 1363. Gray was certainly close to Coupland, and may well have been party to his nefarious attempts to dispossess the ancestors of those who had been involved in Gilbert de Middleton's rebellion, in 1318 - and it was partly these activities that led to Coupland's murder.²³⁶ Several knightly families were implicated in the affair, and a commission of inquiry (which included Henry Percy and Ralph Neville) seems to have colluded in trying to hide the identity of the perpetrators, which suggests that the murder was the culmination of deep and long standing divisions in marcher society.²³⁷ However, there is, on the surface, little evidence of such divisions in Gray's work. Nevertheless, there may be significance in the absence from the pages of the *Scalacronica* of another prominent marcher family, the Herons, whose castle at Ford lay just a few miles from Heton.²³⁸ Of course, this may well be accidental, but it is interesting to note that Scottish descriptions of the skirmish at Pressen in 1338 (in which Robert de Manners was captured) mention the escape of William Heron; Gray, by contrast, states that all the English were killed or captured ('et touz playn mortez et prisoners').²³⁹

Unlike the Grays, the Feltons and the Couplands, the Herons had already made their mark before 1296, serving as sheriffs and MP's for Northumberland;²⁴⁰ it may be that this well established family resented the *arrivistes* who emerged as potential rivals. If so, this resentment was returned with interest. There is certainly good reason to suppose that Gray did not get on with them, although he served on numerous commissions with William Heron.²⁴¹ A second investigation into the murder of John de

²³⁶ Gray himself was granted Middelmast Middleton in 1344 on the death of Idonia de Middelton, after an inquisition taken before William de Felton, Thomas de Heton and John de Coupland found that her heir, William de Middleton, had been involved in his kinsman's rebellion (*CPR 1343-5*, pp. 220, 252); and in 1366, Gray paid 10 marks for a quarter of the manor of West Upsetlington, recently forfeited when its owners were also found to have been adherents of Gilbert de Middleton (*CPR 1364-7*, p. 341 - also calendared in *CDS*, iv, no. 126).

²³⁷ Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society', pp. 36-8.

²³⁸ Gray's version of the 'Battle Abbey Roll' does mention one 'Heroun' (*Scala.*, p. 17). Sir William Heron received a licence to crenellate his manor at Ford in July 1338 (Bates, *Border Holds*, p. 305); Ford was thus one of the first of the mid fourteenth-century Marcher castles (cf. *ibid.*, p. 9; Dixon, 'Fortified Houses', pp. 38-41).

²³⁹ Bower, vii, 148; Wyntoun, vi, 150-1; *Scala.*, p. 168.

²⁴⁰ Hedley, *Northumbrian Families*, ii, 41-3.

²⁴¹ e.g. *Rot. Scot.*, i, 717, 826; *CPR 1348-50*, p. 452; *CDS*, iii, no. 1556; *Fæ dera*, III, i, 393, 394; *CPR 1361-4*, p. 65. In July 1355, Gray, Coupland, Manners and Heron all witnessed a deed in favour

Coupland revealed that the Herons were heavily implicated in the affair, along with Sir Richard Tempest and Sir Nicholas Raymes.²⁴² Gray himself had helped to exacerbate the tensions which led to the killing, for in January and March 1362, he had been appointed (along with Ralph de Neville) to commissions which had investigated the conduct of Tempest whilst the latter had been keeper of Roxburgh castle, a post he had just been ordered to deliver to John de Coupland. These commissions found that John Heron, Tempest's sidekick, had been involved in a variety of misdemeanours and abuses of office.²⁴³ Nor was this the first time that the Herons had come into violent conflict with one of Gray's associates. In 1354, Robert de Ogle had obtained a commission of oyer and terminer to hear his complaint that William Heron had carried away his goods and assaulted his men at East Matfen, Northumberland. Heron subsequently petitioned that Ogle was so powerful in Northumberland that 'les gentz du ditz pais ne seront osees pur poure du dit Robert e de ces alliez a dire la verite'.²⁴⁴ Given his close links with Ogle, Gray can probably be numbered amongst his *alliez*. At any rate, Gray was clearly no friend of the Herons, and their omission from his chronicle may well be a deliberate snub. On the other hand, he had to continue working with Coupland's enemies, for the latter's murder does not seem to have hindered the careers of those who were behind it; one of Gray's associates as warden of the march in 1367 was none other than Richard Tempest. As we have noticed, the *Scalacronica*'s narrative comes to an end just before the time of Coupland's murder. Gray could hardly have ignored such a momentous event in marcher politics,²⁴⁵ and it is tempting to speculate that he chose discreetly to end his history at a point before it came too close to home for comfort.

of Henry Strother, concerning ^{land} Glendale ('Calendar of Deeds in the Laing Charters Relating to Northumberland', ed. A. MacDonald, *AÆ*, 4th ser., xxviii (1950), p. 116).

²⁴² Tuck, 'Northumbrian Society', p. 37.

²⁴³ *CPR 1361-4*, p. 204 (also calendarized in *CDS*, iv, no. 64); *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous 1348-77*, no. 501.

²⁴⁴ R. Kaeuper, 'Law and Order in Fourteenth-Century England: The Evidence of Special Commissions of Oyer and Terminer', *Speculum* liv (1979), p. 763.

²⁴⁵ Coupland's murder was, for instance, recorded by Knighton (p. 186), writing *circa* 1378, though not the circumstances behind it.

Kings, Lords and Commons

Gray tended to view national politics from a local viewpoint; for instance, he clearly felt that the rebellions against Edward II were a distraction from the more important business of defending the marches against the Scots. Thus, describing events in 1321, he writes that:

Le roy lessa sez marchies en grant tribulacioun saunz rescous et se retrey deuers le sewe, ou de nouel lez grantz de soun realme rebellerent encontre ly ...

(The King left his marches in great distress without aid, and retired towards the south, where the magnates of his realm were rebelling against him again ...) ²⁴⁶

This is in marked contrast to other northern chroniclers; the Franciscan chronicle describes Thomas of Lancaster's reaction when some northern knights arrived at Pontefract, to request his assistance against the Scottish invasion of January 1322: 'dissimulavit, nec mirum; noluit enim pugnare pro regno illius qui eum voluit impugnare' (he feigned excuse, and no wonder; for he did not wish to fight in the cause of his king, a king who wished to fight against him). ²⁴⁷ However, Gray had little sympathy for the *Contraïants* anyway - which comes as no surprise, considering that his father was closely aligned with the court at this period - and the *Scalacronica* describes Lancaster's execution with evident approval, stating that he was beheaded at Pontefract in revenge for Piers Gavaston,

... et dez autres vilenies qil auoit fount et coustumablement fait au roy, et en meisme la place ou il auoit vn foiz hue et fait huer sure le roy com il cheminot deuers Euerwik.

(and for other villainies which he had frequently and habitually committed against the king, and in the same place where he had once raised a hue against the king when the latter was travelling towards York) ²⁴⁸

Again, this was a somewhat minority view. Whilst the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* (written probably before Edward II's deposition) commented on Lancaster's death that, 'Sic

²⁴⁶ *Scala.*, p. 148.

²⁴⁷ *Lanercost*, p. 242. However, another pointedly pro-Lancastrian northern chronicler, whilst applauding Lancaster's part in the removal of Piers Gaveston, recognised that this dissension in England worked to the advantage of the Scots: 'Qwiles in Englande durede slik debate | In Scotelonde [Bruce] recouerde gret state', *Castleford's "Chronicle"*, ii, 1054.

²⁴⁸ *Scala.*, p. 149. This is a evidently a reference (slightly erroneous in detail) to the occasion in September 1317, when Lancaster blocked the bridges at Pontefract, refusing to let troops through to the king at York (*Vita Edwardi Secundi*, p. 81; J.R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-22: A Study in the Reign of Edward II* (Oxford, 1970), p. 208). Given his hostility to Lancaster, and that he is generally well informed on Scottish affairs, it is intriguing that Gray does not repeat the well documented charge that the earl was in league with the Scots (discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 301-3, 312, 330-1). Even the fanatically partisan author of the *Brut* was unable to ignore this issue (cf. *Brut*, p. 217).

vicem pro vice, forsan non iniuste, comes reportavit' (Thus, perhaps not unjustly, the earl received measure for measure), other chroniclers preferred to record the miracles which were said to have been worked through the departed earl; the *Brut*, in particular, portrayed his execution almost in terms of a martyrdom.²⁴⁹

Recording the seizure of Northallerton by Jocelyn d'Eyville in November 1317, Gray commented that 'y ly out tiel ryot par cause qe lez barouns ne obeyerent pas a droit le roy, qe chescun sesoit qe le plus' (such disorder came about because the barons did not respect the authority of the king, so that everyone did what he wished), adding, by way of example, his notice of the abduction of Lady Clifford by le Irroys and his *schavaldours*. He then goes on to describe how 'lez barouns' went to a parliament in London, dressed in livery with quartered coats; this, he held to be the beginning of the 'mortal hatred between them and the king' (le mortiel heyne entre eaux et le roy).²⁵⁰ This telling juxtaposition has the effect of subtly equating the actions of *lez barouns* with those of the *schavaldours*;²⁵¹ and, considering the modern academic orthodoxy concerning the mutual reliance of the king and his nobility, it is also interesting that Gray should use the term 'barons' as an unqualified synonym for 'opponents of the king'. Elsewhere, Gray expounded his views on the behaviour of England's political community at greater length; in a fascinating passage, which is worth quoting at length, he explained that in parliament, the 'grantz' and 'tous les comunes' had welcomed the coronation of Edward III, because of the *mesoeure* (iniquity) of his father, but also '... pur lour changeable costome, com par condicioun de vn coillet de diuers naciouns' (because of their fickle manner, which results from the fact of being a mixture of diverse nations). He added that some considered this the cause of England's frequent political upheavals (*lez chaungementz du siecle*):

... qar en temps de chescun roy pius Vortiger ount aliens este grantement auancez illoeqes de toutz naciouns, qe diuers ount condiciouns, par quoy lour estuyt desa corder en voloir chescun enuoroit estre sires, pur ceo qe lez seignurages illoeqes ne fuount pas nature mes fortune. Pur ceo desirent ils le mouement, qe chescun quide le fort le soen.

²⁴⁹ *Vita Edwardi*, p. 126; *Brut*, pp. 221-4; *Lanercost*, pp. 244-5; *Anonimale Chronicle, 1307-34*, pp. 112-15. Castleford refers to 'Saynt Thomas', *Castleford's "Chronicle"*, ii, 1062.

²⁵⁰ *Scala.*, p. 147. The reference to a livery identifies this as what the *Brut* described as 'þe parlment wiþ þe whit bende' (p. 213), in July 1321, actually several years after d'Eyville's raid on Northallerton. This parliament is discussed by Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 278-89.

²⁵¹ Of course, given the somewhat annalistic style of the *Scalacronica* at this point, this juxtaposition may be merely accidental, but as a writer, Gray is generally sufficiently in control of his material to suggest otherwise.

(for in the time of every king since Vortigern, aliens of all nations, who have disparate customs, have been greatly advanced; so that when they happened to differ in purpose, each one desired to be lord, because the lordships in that country follow not birth, but fortune. Therefore, they wish for change, as each supposes that the prize will be his)

With a remarkable turn of phrase, Gray went on to add that just as running water can pierce hard rock, because the particles of water all act together with the current:

... ensi est il dun nacioun qe dun corage mettount la mayn a maintenir lestat lour siris qi ne desirent fors le bien estre du comune, ne ne tirent autre acorde singulerement. Entre tiel gent est moult reurement vieu chaungement du siecle, au mainz muement de lestat lour siris le greindre deshonor a le poeple.

(so it is with a nation which exerts itself with one mind to turn its hand to maintaining the estate of its lords, who desire nothing except the good of the community, and do not individually follow any other design. Amongst such a people an upheaval of society is seen very rarely, nor an overthrow of the estate of their lords, the greatest dishonour to the people)²⁵²

The unruliness of the English political community was a common theme in contemporary historiography. The theory of racial diversity as a cause of disorder is echoed in the *Brut*, which attributed the savagery of the battle of Boroughbridge to the fact that ‘þe grete lordes of Engeland were nouȝt alle of o nacioun, but were mellede wiþ oþere naciouns’ (which nations it preceded to enumerate), adding that ‘if þe grete Lordes of Engeland hade bene onelich wedded to Englische peple, þan shulde pees haue bene, and reste amongus ham, wiþouten eny envy’, although the *Brut*’s simplistic xenophobia was somewhat less sophisticated than Gray’s analysis.²⁵³ Of course, Gray and his father had had personal experience of foreigners who received great advancement in England. Henry de Beaumont was a Frenchman who owed his landed wealth in Britain not to birth, but to the good fortune of being favoured by first Edward I and then Edward II; and then he had turned against the latter and supported Mortimer’s *coup* because of his failure to protect Beaumont’s interests in Scotland.

Gray’s comment about lordships in England is reflected in his complaint concerning Edward III’s creation of earls in 1337:

As queux countis et autres ses bons gentz le roy departy sy largement de sez possessions qe apain reteint il rien deuers ly de terres apurtenantz a sa corune, mais ly couenoit viure de sereuenous et subsidies a graunt charge du poeple.

(Upon which earls and other of his good men the king bestowed so liberally of his possessions that he retained for himself scarcely any of the lands appertaining to his crown, but was obliged to live off levies and subsidies, which was a heavy burden upon the people)²⁵⁴

²⁵² *Scala*, pp. 152-3.

²⁵³ Scott L. Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 118; *Brut*, p. 220.

The level of taxation certainly aroused widespread grievance, a grievance aired in the contemporary 'Song against the King's Taxes', and was a prime cause of the political crisis of 1339-40.²⁵⁵ However, the *Scalacronica's* comments are particularly interesting considering that Durham and the Marches habitually paid no taxes, due to Durham's franchise and the alleged effects of the Scottish wars; Gray was not therefore personally affected by high taxation - indeed, in as much as it paid for his wages in Flanders in 1338-9, he could be said to have benefited from it. This suggests that Gray's political concerns extended beyond the boundaries of his own locality and immediate self-interests, implying the concept of a 'community of the realm', a community which he considered himself to be part of. Gray's criticism of Edward's generosity was more unusual. No other chronicler made such a comment, nor does there appear to have been any complaint by the Commons at the time; however, when Edward fell out with Archbishop John Stratford in 1341, a *libellus* was circulated, containing the accusation (amongst others) that Stratford had taken advantage of the king's youth to persuade him to make 'donationes prodigas ac alienationes prohibitas', so that the treasury was totally exhausted, and the royal revenues (*fiscales redditus*) were greatly diminished. These charges, and the *Scalacronica's* comments, reflected long standing demands that the royal demesne should be preserved to provide for the king's expenditure; thus, the Ordinances of 1311 had demanded the revocation of recent crown grants, 'pur ce qe la Corone est taunt abeisse et demembree par diverses donns' (because the crown is so reduced and dismembered by divers gifts).²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the *Scalacronica* signally fails to mention the Ordainers, portraying the politics of the first years of Edward II's reign purely in terms of antagonism to Piers Gaveston. This may be explained by reason of the elder Gray's closeness to Henry de Beaumont, who was singled out by the Ordainers as a recipient of such gifts, 'au damage et deshonor du Roi' (to the loss and dishonour of the king). However, by the time that the *Scalacronica* came to be written, Beaumont's historiographical

²⁵⁴ *Scala.*, p. 167.

²⁵⁵ G.L. Harriss, *King, Parliament and Public Finance in Medieval England to 1369* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 231-69; 'Song against King's Taxes', *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, ed. Isabel Aspin, Anglo-Norman Text Society xi (1953), pp. 105-15.

²⁵⁶ *Chronica A. Murimuth et R. de Avesbury*, ed. E.M. Thompson, RS 93 (1889), p. 335; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 6 vols (London, 1767-77), i, 281, 284; Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, p. 220; Harriss, *King, Parliament and Public Finance*, pp. 160-85.

reputation had been saved by his leadership of the disinherited to their stunning victory at Dupplin Moor; thus, writing in the fifteenth century, John Capgrave considered Beaumont suitable to rank alongside kings and emperors as an illustrious Henry to provide a rôle model for the somewhat less than illustrious Henry VI.²⁵⁷ Therefore, Gray chose to highlight his father's association with such an eminent person, and to gloss over the inconvenience that his father was thereby associated with an unpopular court faction. By contrast, he quietly omitted all reference to his father's links with the irredeemably evil Hugh Despenser.

²⁵⁷ Johannis Capgrave, *Liber de Illustribus Henricis*, ed. F.C. Hingeston, RS 7 (1858), pp. 167-9.

V. Thomas Gray and the Order of Chivalry

The Helm of Gold

Once upon a time, at a lordly feast, a lady brought forth a helm with a crest of gold, and presented it to her lover, demanding that he make it famous at the most perilous place in the realm. The knight duly set off to a castle far away on the Northern borders, a castle that had been besieged for a year by the king's enemies, and which the assembled guests judged to be suitably perilous. Here, he was made welcome by the constable; and when a group of enemy knights appeared outside the castle, he came forward wearing the helmet given by his lady and, with the constable's encouragement, charged out on horseback to attack them singlehandedly. He fought hard, but was surrounded, unhorsed and wounded; and in the nick of time, the constable came to his rescue and the king's enemies were routed.

Described in bare outline, this story could have been lifted straight from the pages of one of Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian tales. Of course, in reality, the feast took place in Lincolnshire in 1319, the knight was Sir William Marmion, the castle was Norham, besieged by the Scots, and the constable was Sir Thomas Gray, father of the author of the *Scalacronica*; and while the story may have improved in the telling, there is no reason to doubt that it is essentially true (though in a more cynical age, we might suspect that Marmion's lady had hit upon a scheme to rid herself of the attentions of an unwelcome suitor).²⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, this splendidly romantic anecdote has been used by numerous authors to illustrate how chivalric life could imitate chivalric art.²⁵⁹ It has also been used as an illustration of the chivalric values of the *Scalacronica* itself.²⁶⁰ But does it actually live up to its reputation as a work of chivalric history?

Chivalric ideals such as these were taken very seriously by many contemporaries who regarded them as a set of values that could provide a model for a virtuous lifestyle for the lay nobility. Perhaps the most explicit statement of this view is the manual of

²⁵⁸ *Scala*, pp. 145-6.

²⁵⁹ e.g. Maurice H. Keen, *Chivalry* (London, 1984), p. 117, 213, 215; Peter Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England 1100-1400* (Gloucester, 1993), p. 110; McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces*, p. 153. See also the latest guidebook to Norham castle (A.D. Saunders, *Norham Castle* (London, 1998), p. 17).

²⁶⁰ Gransden, ii, 94; Taylor, *Historical Literature*, pp. 173-4. A somewhat more sceptical view is taken by Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. 285-6 and Smalley, *Friars and Antiquity*, pp. 14-15.

chivalry written by the younger Thomas Gray's French contemporary, Sir Geoffroi de Charny.²⁶¹ De Charny was a French nobleman and a councillor of Philippe VI and Jean II, and like Gray, he was an active warrior, being captured at Morlaix in 1342 and again in 1349, during an attempt to recapture Calais by bribery; his career ended in a suitably chivalric style when he was killed at Poitiers, bearing the sacred Oriflamme banner for his king.²⁶² De Charny evidently believed that knightly prowess was intimately connected with virtuous and chivalric behaviour (indeed, he regarded chivalry as inseparable from virtue). Thus his book describes how the love of a noble woman spurs on the good man-at-arms (*bonnes gen d'armes*) to perform valiant deeds, along with notes on the etiquette required in the courtly relationship of a knight and his lady. It also advises that those who seek honour as men-at-arms should eschew pastimes such as gambling and tennis, engaging instead in more honourable activities such as 'jousting, conversation, dancing, and singing in the company of ladies and damsels'. And as befits the first documented owner of the infamous Turin Shroud, he believed that piety was absolutely central to the honourable pursuit of arms, a calling which he believed could lead to the salvation of the soul.²⁶³

Clearly, the attitudes of a French nobleman and intimate of kings cannot be taken as a reliable guide to the cultural norms of a Northumbrian knight; and no manual of chivalry was produced in England until Caxton translated Ramon Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry* at the end of the fifteenth century. However, there is plenty of evidence that the idea of chivalry as a code of conduct was influential in English society, and not just in the highest echelons of the nobility.²⁶⁴ Thus the highly popular (and populist) English translation of the *Brut* was heavily influenced by chivalric mores, as is evidenced by its comment on the battle of Boroughbridge: 'Allas þe shame & despite, þat þe gentil ordre of Knyghthode þere hade at þat bataile!'. One of the

²⁶¹ Geoffroi de Charny, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper & Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia, 1996).

²⁶² De Charny's career is detailed in *ibid.*, pp. 3-18. The *Scalacronica* notes both the occasions when he was captured (*Scala* (Lel.), pp. 299, 302).

²⁶³ Charny, *Book of Chivalry*, pp. 94-5, 112-15, 118-23, 162-7 and *passim*.

²⁶⁴ In fact, de Charny was evidently reasonably well known in England (where he spent some time in captivity) for he is mentioned in numerous chronicles (e.g. *Anonimale Chronicle 1333-81*, ed. Galbraith, pp. 30-1; *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, ed. Thompson, pp. 98, 103-7, 119, 124, 144, 155; *Brut*, p. 302; Knighton, pp. 42, 142, 146). However, he was not held in universally high esteem; the *Brut*, for instance, describes him as a 'fals conspiratour & traytour'.

casualties, the Earl of Hereford, is described as ‘a worþi knyght of renoune þrouzout al Cristendome’, and as ‘the floure of solace and of comfort, and also of curtesye’.²⁶⁵ Given the *Brut*’s sharply pro-Lancastrian bias, these comments obviously had a political basis, but nevertheless, it is interesting that political commentary should have been couched in such a chivalric vein. Nor was the translator of the *Brut* simply projecting the cultural *milieu* of Edward III’s reign onto that of his father. Edward II’s opponents certainly thought in similar terms at the time; one of the charges made against Hugh Despenser the younger in 1326 was that his cruel treatment of the widowed lady Barrett had been ‘contre le ordre de cheualrie’ (contrary to the order of chivalry).²⁶⁶ Thomas Gray was himself influenced by the same ideas. Commenting on the baneful influence of Despenser after the defeat of the *Contrarants*, he wrote that:

... il fist tout qi tout ly descounsailloit a cheualry, delitaunt foy en auarice et en delitz du corps, desheritaunt sez gentz qe auoint rebellez encountre ly, et a deuenir meismes riche dez grantz possessiouns de terres.

(he did wholly that which rendered him wholly unfit for chivalry, delighting himself in avarice and in the delights of the flesh, disinheriting his subjects who had rebelled against him, and making himself rich with their great landed properties).²⁶⁷

Similarly, Sir William Marmion would appear to have been a living embodiment of de Charny’s belief that the love of a lady could inspire a man-at-arms to great deeds. However, the adventures of William Marmion are perhaps not as typical of the *Scalacronica* as some have thought. In fact, apart from Marmion, we find very few love-sick knights performing deeds of valour in the names of their ladies, though Gray must have known of other stories on such a theme, stories which he could have included if he had desired. John Barbour relates a similar tale of a certain Sir John Webton, captain of the castle at Lanark (and otherwise unrecorded) killed there by Sir James Douglas in 1307; on his body was found a letter from a lady, promising that if he defended that perilous castle for a year, he could then ask for her love. Jean le Bel tells of some English knights at Valenciennes in 1340, each of whom vowed to wear a patch over one eye until he had performed a feat of arms worthy of his lady.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ *Brut*, pp. 219, 220, 224.

²⁶⁶ G.A. Holmes, ‘The Judgement on the Younger Despenser, 1326’, *EHR* lxx (1955), p. 265. Thomas of Lancaster obviously viewed himself in a chivalric light, for he adopted the romantic pseudonym of ‘Roi Arthur’ in his treasonable communications with the Scots (*Fædera*, II, i, 474; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 301-3).

²⁶⁷ *Scala*, p. 150.

²⁶⁸ Barbour, ii, 206-8; Jean le Bel, *Chronique*, ed. J. Viard & E. Déprez, 2 vols (Paris, 1904-5), i,

Similarly, a Flanders chronicle has a tale of a London squire at Tournai who promised his beloved that 'he would take a quarrel from each tower or die in the process'. After he had been duly shot by a French arbalaster, he finished his journey round the town, rode up to King Edward, pulled the quarrel from his body and dropped dead. The English lords were greatly saddened and, in a doubtless well-intentioned gesture of *macabre* insensitivity, sent the offending quarrel to the lady in question.²⁶⁹

What distinguishes the *Scalacronica's* tale of Sir William Marmion from these other chivalric exploits is the thoroughly practical approach of the elder Gray. On first reading, Gray appears to have entered entirely into the spirit of the thing:

Sire cheualer, vous y estes venuz cheualer erraunt pur faire cel healme estre conuz, et si est meutz seaunt chos qe cheualery en soit fait a cheual qe a pee, ou couenablement ceo purra faire, moustez uostre cheual, veez la voz enemys, si ferrez cheual dez esperouns, va assemblere en my lieu dez eaux, si renay ieo Dieux si ieo ne rescouroi toun corps viue ou mort, ou ieo murreray.

(Sir Knight, you have come here as a knight-errant to make that helm known, and it is more fitting that knightly deeds should be performed on horseback than on foot, whenever this can be done practically. Mount your horse, there are your enemies. Put spurs to your horse and do battle in their midst. And I'll deny God if I don't rescue your body, dead or alive, or perish in the attempt!)

However, having sent Marmion out to win renown on his horse, in the manner in which knightly deeds ought to be performed, Gray and his men followed on foot, bringing down their enemies' horses with lance blows. Indeed the *Scalacronica* had already described how Gray had been captured at Bannockburn when his horse had been killed by the 'launces' of the Scottish infantry; here, just five years later, he is shown successfully using exactly the same techniques against the Scots themselves. Only when the Scots were already in flight did the women of the castle bring out the garrison's horses so that they could give chase; clearly, Gray was quite happy for some reckless fool to ride headlong into the Scottish ranks, thereby disrupting their

124; Maurice Keen, 'Chivalry and Courtly Love', in *idem.*, *Nobles, Knights and Men at Arms in the Middle Ages* (London, 1996), p. 40. Le Bel's story may be connected with the satirical French poem *Les Voeux du Héron* (ed. & tr. Norris J. Lacy & John Grigsby, Garland Library of Medieval Literature 86, ser. A (London, 1992)), which includes a passage describing William Montague's oath that he would keep one eye shut throughout the war, the point being that he had already lost an eye in Scotland in 1333, as le Bel himself had recorded (*Voeux du Héron*, ln. 156-206; le Bel, *Chronique*, i, 110-11. The nature of the poem is discussed by B.J. Whiting, 'The Vows of the Heron', *Speculum* xx (1945)).

²⁶⁹ Kelly DeVries, 'Contemporary Views of Edward III's Failure at the Siege of Tournai 1340', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* xxxix (1995), p. 102.

formation and spoiling their attack, but the real business of war had little to do with the knightly heroics of chivalric romance.²⁷⁰

Gray does display an interest in that most archetypal of chivalric activities, jousting. The *Scalacronica*, for instance, is the only source to mention that jousts took place during the sieges of Alnwick and Warkworth castles in 1328, described as ‘grantz ioustes de guere par couenaunt taille’ (great jousts of war by formal agreement). Other northern English accounts of this campaign make no mention of jousting, preferring instead to dwell on the devastation caused by the Scots; the first continuation of the *Anonimale Chronicle*, for instance, describes how the Scottish host invaded Northumberland ‘ardant robbant et destruant, et fesoient molt des maux’ (burning, robbing and destroying, and they did great harm), an aspect of the war which receives no mention in the *Scalacronica*.²⁷¹ John Barbour does comment that ‘And mony fayr chewalry | Eschewyt war full doughtely’ (many a fair chivalry was achieved full courageously), but, of course, this does not necessarily refer to jousting.²⁷² The *Scalacronica* also contained a description, now surviving only in Leland’s abstract, of the ‘justes of werre by covenant’ arranged by Henry, Earl of Derby, at Berwick, at which two English knights were killed. The same event was recorded in elaborate and loving chivalric detail by Andrew Wyntoun (albeit writing some eighty years later), and rather more briefly by Walter Bower, and also by Henry Knighton, probably on account of his interest in the house of Lancaster - thus he manages to include a fulsome compliment on Derby’s conduct.²⁷³ In a similar vein, Gray recorded an incident

²⁷⁰ John Barnie, *War in Medieval Society. Social Values and the Hundred Years War 1337-99* (London, 1974), pp. 93-5; Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses* (Woodbridge, 1994), p. 20. This was three years before Andrew de Harcla earned himself an earldom by employing the same tactics against Thomas of Lancaster at Boroughbridge. Clearly, the marchers were quick to learn from their enemies.

²⁷¹ *Scala*, p. 155; *The Anonimale Chronicle 1307-1334*, ed. Wendy R. Childs & John Taylor, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series cxlvii (1991), p. 138; cf. Bridlington, p. 97; *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa*, ed. E.A. Bond, RS 43 (1867), ii, 357; *Lanercost*, p. 260.

²⁷² Barbour, ii, 239. According to Wyntoun (vi, 92-3, 128-9), similar jousts of war occurred when the Scots besieged Cupar castle in 1337, and the town of Perth in 1339.

²⁷³ *Scala*. (Lel.), p. 299; Wyntoun, vi, 100-15; Bower, vii, 136-8; Knighton, pp. 1, 38 (in such meagre detail as Leland provides, Gray agrees with the Scottish chronicles against Knighton); Richard Barber & Juliet Barker, *Tournaments. Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 34. For the background, see Nicholson, *Scotland. The Later Middle Ages*, p. 143. Leland’s term ‘justes of werre by covenant’ is obviously a direct translation of a phrase of Gray’s similar to that used by the latter to describe the jousts at Alnwick in 1328.

from the French campaign of 1359 (in which he himself served), when Bartholomew de Burghersh engaged in 'ioustes de guere par couenaunt taille' at the challenge of the French at Rheims. One Frenchman was killed and two were wounded. Another encounter on the same campaign concerned a French knight, going under the romantic pseudonym of the 'Cheualer Blaunche', who challenged the constable of the English fortress of Fregeuil to a 'batail personel', matching himself and his squire against two Englishmen. This exploit could again have come straight from Chrétien de Troyes, whose *Perceval, Le Conte du Graal* includes an episode with a *Chevalier Vermeil*. In the event, the English (who, Gray notes, were dressed in *vermial* - scarlet) won the day, and the White Knight ended up as a prisoner for his pains.²⁷⁴

However, on the whole, Gray's interest in jousting and tournaments extended only to jousts of war and jousts *à outrance*; he appears to have considered jousting *à plaisance* to be a rather frivolous pastime.²⁷⁵ An example is the famous Cheapside tournament held by William Montague, Gray's erstwhile lord, shortly after Edward's coup against Roger Mortimer. The 'hastilude' is briefly outlined by the *Historia Aurea*, one of Gray's main sources. Other chronicles of a more chivalric bent describe the event in somewhat greater detail. The first continuation of the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, the *Annales Paulini* and Bridlington all have lengthy descriptions of the collapse of the stands erected for the benefit of the female spectators; the *Annales* goes on to describe the masquerade which preceded the tournament, in which King Edward appeared dressed up as a Tartar. The same source also reports the tournaments held at Dartford and Stepney in the same year. In contrast, the *Scalacronica* merely comments rather sourly that under Montague's influence, Edward lead a merry life of jousts, tourneys and entertaining ladies, until more serious matters arose, in the shape of the demands of the disinherited.²⁷⁶ In a similar vein is Gray's summary description of the Flanders campaign of 1338-9 (in which he was a participant); he writes that Edward went to

²⁷⁴ *Scala.*, pp. 188, 190; Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. William Roach, *Texts Littéraires Français* lxxi, ll. 938-1130. The fact that Chrétien's Red Knight was actually rather disreputable does not seem to have especially concerned his would-be imitators...

²⁷⁵ The distinction between jousting *à outrance*, with lethal weapons of war, and jousting *à plaisance*, with blunt weapons (and therefore with a greatly reduced risk of injury or death) is explained in Barber & Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 212.

²⁷⁶ *Scala.*, pp. 158-9; *Chronicon Walteri de Hemingburgh*, ed. Hamilton, p. 303; *Anonimalle Chronicle 1307-1334*, p. 146; 'Annales Paulini', pp. 352-5; Bridlington, p. 102; Barber & Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 32.

Antwerp 'ou il gisoit xv. moys saunz rien faire de guerre fors a iouster et a demener iolif vie' (where he stayed for fifteen months without making any war, only jousting and living the fine life), the only result of which was the birth of a son, Lionel.²⁷⁷ The *Scalacronica* does mention the 'grant fest de joustes et revelle' held at Windsor on St. George's Day, 1358. However, whilst Henry Knighton was so impressed by the splendour of the festival that he felt himself unable to do it justice, and the author of the *Eulogium Historiarum* wrote that such jousts were 'invisa a tempore regis Arthuri' (unseen since the time of King Arthur), Gray was rather more interested in the injuries received by Henry Grosmont whilst jousting, and in the diplomatic endeavours of the dukes of Luxemburg and Brabant, who attended in the hope of acquiring English support against the count of Flanders.²⁷⁸

Other chronicles do contain criticisms of the tournament. Knighton, for instance, refers to a band of women who took to appearing at tournaments dressed in men's finery. This was evidently displeasing to God, as well as to Knighton himself, for He arranged for the offending women to be drenched by a particularly violent rainstorm. Such ecclesiastical disapproval is reflected in the guilt felt by Henry of Grosmont for his enjoyment of jousting, given expression in his *Livre de Seyntz Medecines*. In a rather more worldly vein, the second continuation of the *Anonimale Chronicle* complained that the Round Table for 300 knights and their ladies at Windsor in 1343 was held at 'a outrage despens et a graunt coustage' (outrageous expense and great cost).²⁷⁹ This echoes the *Brut's* report of the comment of King Jean of France (in English captivity after Poitiers), on the St. George's Day celebrations at Windsor in 1359: 'wherfor þe King of Fraunce, in scornynge, sayd þat he saw neuere ne herd such solempne festes ne ryalties holden ne done with taylles, wipoute paying of gold or

²⁷⁷ *Scala.*, p. 168. This is an interesting parallel to *Les Voeux du Héron*, in which Edward's Queen is the only character who is depicted as actually having fulfilled her vow at the end of the poem, by giving birth to Lionel of Antwerp (In. 398-442).

²⁷⁸ *Scala.*, pp. 176-7; Knighton, p. 158; *Eulogium Historiarum*, ed. F.S. Haydon, RS, 3 vols (1858-63), iii, 227 (this confirms that Henry Grosmont was injured); Barnie, *War in Medieval Society*, p. 84. Curiously, despite his obvious interest in the career of Henry Grosmont, Knighton omits any mention of his presence at this event.

²⁷⁹ *Anonimale Chronicle 1333-81*, p. 18. Interestingly, surviving versions of the Northern Franciscan chronicle (from which *Anonimale* is derived) add the qualifier 'secundum decentiam regie maiestatis' - befitting the dignity of royal majesty (Durham Dean & Chapter Library MS. B.ii.35, f. 33^{va}; *Lanercost*, p. 341). On the relation between MS. B.ii.35 and *Lanercost*, see Offler, 'Northern Franciscan Chronicle'.

siluer.²⁸⁰ However, Gray's evident contempt for the *hastilude* seems to have been prompted by neither moral nor financial concerns. This is brought out by the *Scalacronica*'s comment on the aftermath of the English victory at Halidon Hill in 1333: 'Cest batail finy, le roi Degleterre se trey deuers le sew, ou il hauntoist curiousement lez faitz darmes de pese' (When the battle was finished, the king of England took himself back to the south, where he attended assiduously to peaceful deeds of arms).²⁸¹ There can be little doubt that this was a sarcastic jibe from a man who regarded *faitz darmes de pese* as a contradiction in terms. Such opinions confirm that the tournament had now become entirely divorced from the battlefield, and was no longer regarded as a useful training exercise. Nor does Gray appear to have appreciated that Edward III's patronage of chivalric display, such as the tournament, brought him a political cohesion with the nobility which had been all too sadly lacking in the reign of his father.²⁸²

Gray certainly had little interest in *courtoisie*; and, apart from a brief (and not especially accurate) account of the foundation of the Order of the Garter,²⁸³ *courtoisie* is conspicuously absent from his work. Thus we learn only incidentally, as an introduction to another story illustrating his heroism, that Gray's father attended the coronation of Edward II, and there is no description of the event itself, even though it must have been a fairly memorable occasion: not only did Piers Gavaston act with unprecedented arrogance, but a certain Sir John de Bakewell was crushed to death when a wall collapsed under the pressure of the crowd.²⁸⁴ Edward III's coronation is mentioned only to underline the king's youth, for Gray tells us that he was just fourteen at the time.²⁸⁵ The third continuation of the *Anonimale Chronicle* (written at the end of the fourteenth century) has a description of the reception given in London in 1371, to John of Gaunt and his Spanish bride, 'une tresbele damosel'. They were escorted through

²⁸⁰ Knighton, pp. 92-4; *Le Livre de Seyntz Medecines*, ed. S.J. Arnould, Anglo-Norman Text Society (1940), p. 78; *Brut*, p. 309; Barnie, *War in Medieval Society*, p. 84.

²⁸¹ *Scala.*, p. 163.

²⁸² Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry* (Woodbridge, 1982); Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, pp. 102-5.

²⁸³ *Scala.* (Lel.), p. 300.

²⁸⁴ *Scala.*, p. 138 (and cf. p. 13, above; 'Annales Paulini', p. 260), *Brut*, p. 205. It will be noticed that while Gray does not bother to describe the coronation, he still manages to impart the information that his father was important enough to be present...

²⁸⁵ *Scala.*, p. 153.

the city by the mayor and citizens, who were 'bien arrayes et noblement mountez', and a great crowd of lords, ladies and damsels came to Cheapside to admire the beauty of Gaunt's young lady.²⁸⁶ We search in vain for similarly romantic scenes in the *Scalacronica*. There is, of course, Gray's famous closing comment, on the marriage of King David of Scotland to Margaret Logie, a marriage 'fait soulement per force damours, qe toutz vient' (made solely by the force of love, which overcomes all things). This passage, which has been decribed as 'Chaucerian', has again been taken as an indication of the essentially chivalric nature of the *Scalacronica* and its author.²⁸⁷ However, the fact that this passage ends the book has exaggerated its importance, and taken in context, it begins to lose its courtly gloss. Gray had previously described how Katherine de Mortimer of London had 'estoit ... priue' (become intimate) with David, during his captivity. According to Gray's account, he was unable to live without her and so took her back to Scotland, in the absence of his wife who was then residing with her brother, Edward III of England. This aroused the resentment of certain Scottish lords, who arranged for her to be stabbed to death near Melrose, in June 1360.²⁸⁸ Gray describes David's marriage to Margaret, 'vn dame qautre foitz auoit este marie, qe oue ly auoit deuaunt demurrez' (a lady who had already been married, and who had been living with him for some time), immediately after his account of the rebellion of several major Scottish magnates. In this light, Gray's comment could be construed not as an invocation of courtly love, but rather as a sarcastic aside to the effect that David was ruled by another part of his anatomy than his head.²⁸⁹

There are other instances of marriages made *par amours* in the *Scalacronica*: Ralph de Monthermer is described in passing as having been taken as a husband by the countess of Gloucester 'par amours', in the reign of Edward I. Similarly, he describes

²⁸⁶ *Anonimale Chronicle 1333-81*, p. 69.

²⁸⁷ Gransden, ii, 94; Taylor, *Historical Literature*, p. 174; Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 286.

²⁸⁸ *Scala.*, pp. 196-7; cf. Bower, vii, 320. Of course, the affair had political overtones, which Gray does not record (Nicholson, *Scotland*, p. 168).

²⁸⁹ King David was certainly criticised for womanising by other English commentators (*Chronica de Melsa*, ii, 361-2; 'Prophecies of John of Bridlington', *Political Poems and Songs*, ed. Thomas Wright, RS 14 (1859-61), i, 143). Nor was this merely English prejudice, for certain Scottish chroniclers repeated the charge; indeed, Bower saw fit to add a lengthy digression on the treatment of wives after commenting that David had married Margaret for her looks, rather than her character (vii, 320, 333-59; Ranald Nicholson, 'David II, the Historians and the Chroniclers', *Scottish Historical Review* xlv (1966), p. 76).

how the daughter of Earl Duncan of Fife married the Northumberland knight William Felton 'par amours'. This latter affair had an added element of romance, for Felton was her guardian while she was in England, waiting for Robert Stewart to negotiate the purchase of her marriage.²⁹⁰ However, in both cases, the marriages involved enormous social advancement for the husbands (or potential advance, in Felton's case), for Monthermer rose from being an obscure knight of Gilbert de Clare's household, to become the Earl of Gloucester, by right of his wife. William Felton's wife was a claimant to the earldom of Fife, though in the event, he died before she was able to make good her claim.²⁹¹ This was an age when marriage was essentially a mechanism for the transfer of property, and strictly controlled by the king. Stories of marriages contracted purely for love, which brought with them advancement on this sort of scale, would thus have been of great interest to men of Gray's class, if only as a form of wish-fulfillment - for a marriage such as Monthermer's would have been roughly equivalent to winning the jackpot on the National Lottery. Moreover, in both cases, and perhaps of greater interest to Gray, the marriages had political significance: thus Monthermer came to be a commander in Scotland by virtue of his wife's title, whilst the earldom of Fife was the subject of complex machinations by David II; the *Scalacronica* records rumours that David had been persuaded to grant the earldom to William de Ramsey by Ramsey's wife, who was the object of his desire. It is also worth noting that Felton's marriage would have been of purely local interest to Gray, who was a neighbour and had had dealings with him throughout his career.²⁹² Finally, there is the case of Robert de Ros, Lord of Wark, who deserted Edward I and went over to the Scots in 1297, 'tout pur paramours qil ama Cristiane de Mowbray' (all for the love of Christine de Mowbray).²⁹³ However, it did him little good, for she 'ne le deigna auoir' (did not deign to take him) ...

²⁹⁰ *Scala.*, pp. 132, 175. Coincidentally, the daughter of the Earl of Fife was Ralph de Monthermer's grand-daughter, a connection which Gray was apparently unaware of (Gray erroneously describes her mother as the daughter of the king of England; she was actually Edward I's grand-daughter).

²⁹¹ Michael Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England. The Clares 1217-1314* (Baltimore, 1965), pp. 157-60; Stephen Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings. Robert II and Robert III 1371-1406* (Edinburgh, 1996), pp. 13-14.

²⁹² Above, p. 61.

²⁹³ *Scala.*, pp. 121-2. Walter of Guisborough (ed. Rothwell, pp. 271-2) tells the same story. However, he does not name Christine, or mention her rejection of her suitor, dwelling instead on Ros' treacherous attack on the English. *Lanercost* attributes Ros' defection to fear for the security of his lands, without mentioning any love interest (p. 172). Anthony Tuck has suggested that Ros'

Gray's attitude to the conventions of chivalric culture could certainly tend towards irreverence. Jean le Bel has an account of a set piece battle between thirty English knights and thirty of their French counterparts at Ploermel in Brittany in 1351, the famous 'Combat of Thirty'.²⁹⁴ Although most of the participants were actually mercenaries, and fifteen of them were killed, le Bel describes the event in terms of a chivalric challenge, with the English demanding jousts on behalf of their respective ladies. Henry Knighton records a similar 'hastilude' in 1353, where twenty Frenchmen fought twenty Gascons in a prearranged contest which left all but three of the Frenchmen dead. Unfortunately, the *Scalacronica's* description of the 'Combat of Thirty', added as an aside to its account of events in France in 1355, survives only in Leland's abstract, which records only that 'this Beaumaners had afore faught with the Englischmen by covenant 30. to 30. The Englischmen at the begynning had the better: but at the end they were vanquishid'. By way of contrast, Gray describes another occasion when five unarmoured English squires, foraging in a corn mill near Auxerre in 1360, were ambushed by fifty French men-at-arms; the English managed to defeat their attackers, taking eleven prisoners, and according to Gray, even the French mockingly referred to this as 'la iourne de l. contre v.' (the exploit of fifty against five).²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, whilst mocking chivalric culture, Gray unconsciously subscribed to its exclusiveness. He mentions that the five English squires were accompanied by three archers; however, it does not seem to have occurred to him to comment on the fact that the exploit was not known as 'the exploit of the fifty against eight'. For all his awareness of the social advancement open to the successful soldier - of which his own father provided a good example - Gray remained subject to the snobbery that was

allegiance was determined by the alliances he had made as a result of his involvement in the politics of the minority of Alexander III of Scotland ('The Emergence of a Northern Nobility', *Northern History* xxii (1986), p. 6); however, that Robert de Ros was actually the grandfather of the Robert who defected in 1297 (Hedley, *Northumberland Families*, i, 228-9).

²⁹⁴ Le Bel, *Chronique*, ii, 194-7. The combat is also described, in rather less chivalric terms, in a Breton poem, probably composed soon after the event ('Le Bataille de Trente Anglais et de Trente Bretons', ed. H. Brush, *Modern Philology* ix (1911-12) & x (1912-13)). Detailed accounts also appear in the works of Wyntoun (vi, 208-21) and Bower (vii, 282-4), who obviously relished such a conspicuous English defeat, and it is intriguing to note that both Wyntoun and Bower record the incident as a digression in their accounts of events in 1355, as does Gray. It is possible that all three accounts were derived from the same source (Wyntoun and Bower certainly share a common source).

²⁹⁵ *Scala.*, p. 189; *Scala. (Lel.)*, p. 304; Knighton, p. 124; Barber & Barker, *Tournaments*, p. 41-2.

central to chivalry, an inherently aristocratic code which did not extend to the common foot soldier.

While Gray may have been somewhat less than enthusiastic about the courtly trappings of the cult of chivalry, it should not be imagined that he was entirely cynical, regarding warfare simply as a means of furthering his own social position (even though his successful military career did in fact produce this result).²⁹⁶ There is plenty in the *Scalacronica* to show that its author admired feats of arms performed in battle, and that he considered such deeds worthy of commemoration. Thus, he interrupts his narrative of events in 1359 to put in accounts of various deeds performed by the English in France, because:

Queux Engles de leurs testes propres sez auoint mys en plusours lieux hu realme de Fraunce puis cest guere, qi gentz estoint de coillet, ieunes, mes counz de diuers countres Dengleter, plusours sours dez archiers et puis deuenus chiuualiers, lez vns capitayns, lez iournes dez queux ne purrount pas touz estre especifiez en le hour qils auindrent pur diuersete deaux.

(During this war these Englishmen had established themselves on their own account in many places throughout the realm of France, these gentlemen being gathered from different parts of England as youths, unknown to each other, many of them beginning as archers and afterwards becoming knights, and some captains; and their battles could not all be recorded at the time they took place, because of their diversity)²⁹⁷

Therefore, Gray felt it right that these deeds should be recorded by him now. In fact, most of these tales must have been garnered by him whilst he was in France with Prince Edward in that year. These tales purportedly go back as far as 1333,²⁹⁸ when *Gistres* abbey in Gascony was being besieged by the French; an English relief force led by Hugh of Geneva made a heroic river crossing in the face of superior numbers of French men-at-arms, who promptly fled. Similarly, on another occasion, seven men-at-arms and twelve archers, under the command of one John Griffith, defeated eighty French men-at-arms supported by forty archers, and captured twenty of them. Elsewhere, Gray describes how during the campaign of 1359, eight Welsh archers of the retinue of Lord Spencer defeated forty Frenchmen and Bretons, and rescued some of their English colleagues, who had surrendered to the French during the *mêlée*. Of course, archers were normally excluded from chivalric culture, as we have seen, and

²⁹⁶ Gray was certainly well aware that some fought for somewhat less than exalted motives; the *Scalacronica* relates that Robert de Neville began to serve in the king's war only in order to obtain a royal pardon for his murder of Richard fitz Marmaduke (pp. 143-4).

²⁹⁷ *Scala.*, p. 181.

²⁹⁸ As England and France were not at war in 1333, this incident has presumably been misdated.

especially if they were Welsh. However, Gray praises their performance ('... ditz Galois ... tresbien illoques firent').²⁹⁹ And further examples of such deeds could be cited *ad nauseam*. However, perhaps the most significant of these tales concern Thomas Gray's own father, and if the *Scalacronica* has a hero, it is he; tales of the elder Gray's courage and prowess dominate the *Scalacronica*'s account of the reign of Edward II, providing an example of heroic resistance in the face of overwhelming odds, when the North of England had been abandoned by the king, in the face of rebellion in the South.³⁰⁰ Although Gray and his father had come of knightly stock, their family was obscure and of no great significance; and like the captains who started as archers, the Grays owed their advance entirely to service in the king's wars. One of Gray's motives in writing the *Scalacronica* may have been to record the brave deeds of his father which had brought about this advance, and to place them in an historical context.

We can therefore be confident that Gray's accounts of his father's deeds reflect the values which he held to be most important. Clearly, the concept of honour was prominent amongst these values. During a skirmish that preceded the battle of Bannockburn, Gray's father was fighting under the command of Henry de Beaumont who was advancing towards Stirling castle. When a division of the Scottish host came out of the woods towards them, Beaumont ordered his men to wait and to give them ground. The elder Gray evidently felt that this was rash and replied to the effect that the Scots would soon have all the ground they wanted. "Very well", retorted Beaumont, "If you are afraid, flee". "Sir," answered Gray, "It is not from fear that I shall flee this day", and in the company of Sir William Deyncourt, he charged into the midst of the Scots. Deyncourt was promptly killed, and Gray was equally rapidly captured after his horse had been brought down by the Scottish pikes. Clearly, Gray felt that his honour had been impugned, and that he had to prove his courage, feelings which overrode his sound tactical judgement of the situation. Beaumont used a similar appeal to honour in his pep-talk to the disinherited before the Battle of Dupplin Moor in 1332, this time with rather more fortunate results.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ *Scala.*, pp. 181-2, 184, 194.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 159-60.

The equation of chivalry with honour also helps to explain Gray's condemnation of the behaviour of Edward II, under the malign influence of the younger Despenser, as unchivalric. By disinheriting rebels and thereby enriching himself, he was behaving dishonourably. Nevertheless, this criticism is somewhat at odds with other passages in the *Scalacronica* which present a portrait of Edward's character which is not altogether unfavourable,³⁰² nor does it square with the elder Gray's adherence to the Despensers (though the *Scalacronica's* deafening silence on this subject is itself revealing). This may partly be explained by the success of the propaganda disseminated in the aftermath of Mortimer's coup in 1326. As we have seen, the indictment against the younger Despenser included the charge that he had behaved unchivalrously against the lady Barrett. This indictment was widely circulated, probably through the county courts.³⁰³ A copy was preserved in Durham; it is not impossible that Gray had read it (or another copy) and been influenced by it, for his description of Despenser's banishment and return in 1321 follows the tenor of this document, and repeats the charge that Despenser indulged in piracy while he was in exile.³⁰⁴ Despenser's piracy was a notorious episode, so Gray may well have derived his account from other sources, but these too were influenced by the prevailing anti-Despenser rhetoric.³⁰⁵ However, the main reason for Gray's denunciation of Edward's lack of chivalry can be deduced from the fact that this passage follows an account of the thirteen year truce made with the Scots in 1322, after the disastrous battle near Byland. Gray comments that after this, Edward '... se tenoit tout coy en pese qi rien ne se entremist de honour ne pruesce' (kept himself in peace and quiet, undertaking nothing of honour or prowess).³⁰⁶ We may infer that for Gray, Edward had rendered himself unfit for

³⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 152. Gray must surely rank alone in his description of Edward as 'sagis' (wise).

³⁰³ The use of county courts for the proclamation of ordinances and decrees is discussed by Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion'; Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, p. 162.

³⁰⁴ *Scala.*, p. 150. The Durham copy of Despenser's indictment is printed by Holmes, 'Judgement on the Younger Despenser', and cf. John Taylor, 'The Judgement of Hugh Despenser, the Younger', *Medievalia et Humanistica* xii (1958). The charges were copied into Knighton's chronicle, and into Bridlington, in a Latin summary (*ibid.*, p. 72). Maddicott makes the point that copies of statutes and proclamations were often preserved by sheriffs, and it was presumably possible to consult these copies ('County Community', p. 36).

³⁰⁵ *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. Noel Denholm-Young (London, 1957), pp. 115-16; *Brut*, p. 214; *Anonimale Chronicle 1307-1334*, p. 100; 'Annales Paulini', p. 300; etc.

³⁰⁶ *Scala.*, p. 150.

chivalry not simply because he indulged himself in the pleasures of the flesh and enriched himself, but rather because he did so when he ought to have been fighting the Scots instead.

The *Scalacronica*'s attitudes to chivalry and honour are perhaps best demonstrated by its account of the death at Bannockburn of Sir Giles de Argentine. Argentine was described by the younger Gray as a famous knight ('vn chevaler renome'), a description which was not unjustified. He was a noted tourneyer; the *Annales Londonienses* describes how he held the field against all comers at a tournament at Stepney in 1309, under the chivalric *nom de plume* of 'the king of the greenwood'.³⁰⁷ He was also a noted crusader, reputedly killing two pagans on each of three encounters, on account of which he was described in Scottish sources as the third best knight of his time.³⁰⁸ However, Gray mentions none of this; for him, the most interesting fact about Argentine was that he had just returned from serving with the Emperor, Henry of Luxemburg.³⁰⁹ The *Scalacronica* also describes in detail how he came to be killed. He had been appointed to command the king's rein, and once it was clear that the battle had been lost, he and his fellows led Edward to safety. He then turned to the king and spoke thus:

"Sire, vostre reyne me fust baillez, ore estez a sauete, veiz cy vostre chastel ou vostre corps purra estre saue. Jeo nay pas este acoustome a fuyre, ne plus auant ne voil ieo faire, a Dieux vous commaunde."

(Sir, your rein was committed to me, you are now in safety; look, there is your castle where you body should be safe. I am not accustomed to flee, nor do I wish to start now. I commend your soul to God).

With this, he spurred on his horse and returned to the fray, where he was killed. To a twentieth-century liberal, de Argentine's refusal to flee the field when he had the opportunity appears to be an act of foolhardy stupidity, but it is clear from his account that Gray considered such conduct to be wholly admirable. And, in this, he was

³⁰⁷ 'Egidii Argentine dicebatur rex de Vertbois', 'Annales Londonienses', *Chronicles of Edward I and Edward II*, i, 157; and c.f. 'Annales Paulini', p. 267. Argentine may have won this title at a tournament held at Kennington in the previous year (*ibid.*, p. 264). Argentine's career is outlined by Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, p. 234-5.

³⁰⁸ Barbour, iii, 61-2; Bower, vii, 50-7 (with much greater elaboration).

³⁰⁹ *Scala.*, pp. 142-3. It is an interesting coincidence that Bower ranked Henry of Luxemburg with Argentine amongst the three best knights (though it comes as no great surprise to find Robert Bruce as the best of the three...).

entirely in agreement with other chronicles, ranging from the chivalric and patriotic Scottish verse of John Barbour, to the level-headed political narrative of the English *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, both of which reported the same incident in the same approving tones.³¹⁰ Of course, the equation of retreat with dishonour was hardly unique to fourteenth-century chivalry. De Argentine's conduct would have been considered just as commendable at the hall of Heorot in *Beowulf* as at Arthur's Camelot in *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*.

However, there was one aspect of chivalric culture which was peculiar to it, and which Gray wholeheartedly embraced; and this is brought out by comparing his account of Giles de Argentine with that of Barbour. Barbour's account is very similar, and indeed was probably derived from the same source as the *Scalacronica*, but it differs from Gray's in that, according to Barbour, de Argentine declares, 'And I cheys her to bid and dey | Yan for to lyve schamly and fley' (And I choose here to stay and die, Than to live, in shame, and fly).³¹¹ The difference is subtle, but significant, for Barbour implies that the only alternative to dishonour was death. For Gray, there was another alternative; and this was captivity. If a knight found himself in a hopeless position, no honour was lost by his surrender, providing that he had put up a good fight first. Thus, in 1303, the elder Gray was in the company of Hugh de Audley, who was caught by a Scottish night-time attack at Melrose abbey; all were killed or captured, including Gray, who fought on until the house he was defending burnt down over his head. Similarly, in 1355, Gray himself was ambushed near his castle at Norham. Despite being outnumbered six-to-one, the English fought 'with a wonderful corage [*sic.*];' but the 'communes' fled and at this point, Gray surrendered.³¹² Both accounts emphasise a brave fight in a hopeless situation, but there is no hint that Gray felt the need to justify surrendering rather than fighting on to the bitter end. As his account of his father's actions at Bannockburn demonstrates, Gray considered capture to be a wholly honourable conclusion to a lost battle.

It was only with the development of chivalric culture at the turn of the twelfth-century that such ideas had become acceptable, and this had done much to

³¹⁰ Barbour, iii, 61-2; *Vita Edwardi*, pp. 53-4.

³¹¹ Barbour, iii, 61.

³¹² *Scala.*, pp. 126-7; *Scala. (Lel.)*, p. 304.

improve the life expectancy of the warlike nobility of Western Europe; a defeated nobleman could now expect to be captured and ransomed by his opponents, instead of being slaughtered out of hand, as had been the norm throughout the early middle ages.³¹³ In this regard, it is surely significant that one of the *Scalacronica*'s few references to chivalry as a code of conduct concerns a dispute over a ransom. An English knight, James de Pipe, had been captured by the French and imprisoned in a castle; however, the garrison of a nearby English castle noted that he was allowed out to exercise himself at a certain time, and took advantage of this civilised treatment to rescue him. Not surprisingly, the French protested that this was a breach of his parole, 'countre couenaunt de loial cheualrie' (against [the] agreement of loyal chivalry), and a ransom was subsequently arranged. This same view of chivalry as a practical code for the conduct of warfare can be seen in the *Brut*'s account of the French prisoners taken at Poitiers, who 'were set at her raunsoun, & oppon her troupe & knyghthoode were charged, and had leue to go'.³¹⁴ That these ideas remained at the very heart of fourteenth-century chivalric culture is confirmed by Froissart's opinions on the battles of Crécy and Poitiers. He considered that Poitiers had been better fought because there were many more notable feats of arms performed at Poitiers, but fewer nobles had been slain, and because King John did not flee the battlefield, as had his father at Crécy, but stayed to be captured. After the battle, the Black Prince personally served his royal captive at table, saying that he had surpassed all the best knights on his side; and this despite his defeat and capture.³¹⁵

For Thomas Gray, the posturings and rituals of courtly chivalric culture were a foolish irrelevance which distracted from the real business of war. Rather, chivalry was a thoroughly practical arrangement, a medieval equivalent of the Geneva Convention, which ensured that a knight could fight and then surrender with honour, so that he could live and ransom himself to fight another day; and to this, we owe the *Scalacronica*.

³¹³ John Gillingham, '1066 and the Introduction of Chivalry into England', *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy*, ed. G. Garnett & J. Hudson (Cambridge, 1994).

³¹⁴ *Scala.*, pp. 191-2; *Brut*, p. 308.

³¹⁵ Barnie, *War in Medieval Society*, pp. 72-3, 80.

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