

Town Tykes and Butchers' Hounds: Urban Dogs at Work in the later Middle Ages¹

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Theis be the namys of houndes: first ther is a grehownd, a bastard, a mengrell, a mastyfe, a lemor, a spanyell, rachys, kenettys, terroures, bocheris houndes, myddyng dogges, tryndel tayles and prikherid curris and smale ladies popis that bere a way the flees and dyueris smale sawtis.²

Desperate to win a protracted lawsuit over the wardenship of St Anthony's hospital, London, which by 1420 had gone all the way to Rome, John Macclesfield needed to cultivate some powerful friends at the papal curia. To this end, he presented five "expertly trained and carefully chosen greyhounds of the noblest breeding," whose names were embroidered on their jewelled collars, to the cardinal charged with hearing his case. The latter was looking for an appropriate gift with which to impress the duke of Milan, and fell upon these rare creatures with delight.³ Aristocrats of the dog world were often employed to oil the wheels of diplomacy and figure prominently in depictions of medieval royal and baronial life.⁴ No doubt for this reason they have attracted a disproportionate amount of attention from historians, both amateur and professional, while their rougher and infinitely less pampered cousins, who made up the great bulk of the canine population, have been largely ignored.⁵ This is partly because evidence about the innumerable working dogs which guarded the homes and patrolled the streets of late medieval towns is often less easily accessible and more prosaic than the literature of the hunt or appealing tales of pet-ownership in nunneries and affluent households.⁶ It also reflects the

¹ I am grateful to the two editors of this volume and to Dr Emily Cockayne for references and suggestions, and to Dr Linda Clark and Ms Elizabeth Danbury for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. It is presented as a tribute not only to the friendship and support offered to me for more than four decades by Joel Rosenthal, but also to his forbearance towards a butcher's tyke and a sybaritic pug (two extremes of the canine spectrum) on his many visits to Norwich.

² *The Boke of Saint Albans by Dame Juliana Berners* (London: Elliot Stock, 1901, facsimile edn.), sig. F.iiiij.

³ David K. Maxfield, "A Fifteenth-Century Lawsuit: The Case of St Anthony's Hospital," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993): 199-23 at 219.

⁴ See, for example, Tamsin Pickeral, *The Dog: 5000 Years of the Dog in Art* (New York: Merrell, 2008), pp. 12, 16-17, 19, 26-7, 49, 76-83, 117, 142, 163-9, 186-7, 213-14; and for dogs as diplomatic gifts, Glenn Richardson, "Hunting at the Courts of Francis I and Henry VIII", *The Court Historian* 18 (2013): 129-41 at 139.

⁵ Most of the medieval material presented in George R. Jesse's encyclopaedic *Researches into the History of the British Dog*, 2 vols. (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1866), concerns elite animals. Far more recently, almost all of the fifteen essays presented in *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature and Society*, ed. Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden: Brill, 2016), share a similar focus, Emily Cockayne, 'Who Did Let the Dogs Out? Nuisance Dogs in Late-Medieval and Early Modern England', pp. 41-67, furnishing a notable exception.

⁶ As, for example, John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London: Phoenix Press, 1988); Kathleen Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012).

strict contemporary social hierarchy that affected dogs as much as people, disparaging strays in the same terms as the feckless, vagrant poor. Albertus Magnus's belief that well-bred individuals and dogs shared the same slender, elegant physiognomy did not reflect well on either the butcher's stocky cur or his pugnacious master.⁷

In response to this state of neglect, the following article explores the contribution made by working dogs to the life of late medieval urban communities, while also investigating official attempts to curb the various nuisances that they (and their owners) appeared to create. Subject to many of the same assumptions about status and moral worth as members of the human proletariat, these animals were expected to behave in a correspondingly obedient and deferential manner. Yet, as we shall see, the ubiquity of butchers' dogs, which were in great demand for the popular sports of bull- and bear-baiting, and of the large, intimidating "house hounds" used to guard property, was bound to cause problems, especially when they were not effectively restrained. Some of these dogs were highly prized and even enjoyed protection at law, but few could expect much in the way of care or comfort once their working days were over. Before considering the various types of dog that found employment in English towns and cities, it will first be helpful to examine some of the attitudes that determined how they were regarded, not least in relation to their superiors among the canine elite.

When writing his influential treatise *De canibus*, which was posthumously translated as *Of Englishe Dogges*, the physician John Caius (*d.* 1573) drew heavily upon the medieval tradition of categorising dogs primarily in terms of status rather than breed. This, in turn, depended upon their type of occupation or "office", with hunting dogs and "gentle" lap-dogs taking pride of place over the canine equivalent of artisans and journeymen. Last of all came dogs of the "mungrell and rascall sort," chiefly notable for their failure to "exercise any worthy property of the true perfect and gentle kind".⁸ Some earned their keep as turn-spits in kitchens, rotating the spit by means of a wheel, which they propelled "rounde about with the waight of their bodies, so diligently ... that no drudge nor skullion [could] doe the feate more cunningly". Others were obliged "to begge for theyr meate" by performing tricks, learned from "theyr vagabundicall masters, whose instruments they are to gather gaine".⁹ At best menial, and at worst a noisy and dangerous nuisance, these animals were dismissed by Caius in a few lines.

⁷ I. M. Resnick, "Ps.-Albert the Great on the Physiognomy of Jesus and Mary," *Medieval Studies* 64 (2002): 217-40 at 222. The encyclopaedist, Bartholomaeus Anglicanus (fl.1220-40), likewise stressed that "gentylnesse and nobilite of houndes and of bicches is yknowne by lengthe of face and of the snowte": *On the Properties of Things*, ed. M. C. Seymour, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. 2, p. 1168.

⁸ John Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, trans. Abraham Fleming (London: Richard Johnes, 1576), p. 34.

⁹ Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, pp. 34-5.

He passed over the “myddyng [midden] dogs, tryndel tayles and prikherid curris” listed at the start of this article in complete silence, since they so clearly resembled that *bête noire* of the Tudor Commonwealth, the sturdy beggar.

Anxieties of this kind had long informed civic ordinances, such as a ruling adopted in Norwich in the aftermath of the Black Death to prevent the “great injury and contentions” occasioned by the large number of dogs wandering free. Some had clearly lost their masters to plague, but others had simply been consigned to a semi-feral existence by negligent owners and were henceforth to be restrained at all times or exterminated forthwith. Significantly, though, these provisions did not extend to greyhounds, spaniels, small hunting dogs and others used for sport.¹⁰ A similar cross-section of higher status dogs (*chiens gentilz*) was likewise exempted from a bylaw of 1387 which fined any Londoner who allowed his animal “to go at large out of his own enclosure, without guard thereof, by day or night”.¹¹ The prohibition was repeated in 1475, when “bochers dogges” were added to the list of exceptions, presumably because their work driving cattle to slaughter made it essential for them to be unleashed.¹²

Owners, as well as dogs, were expected to know their place. During the early fourteenth century the mere fact of leaving London “with arms and a *greyhound* at the time of vespers” and returning in the morning was enough for one suspicious character to be indicted as “a common ill-doer and a vagrant with arms by day and night” and imprisoned in irons, even though he had committed no specific crime.¹³ His perceived offence was clearly compounded by the possession of such a high status animal, as we can see from an act of 1390, which restricted the keeping of hunting dogs to individuals with a landed income of 40s a year or above, ostensibly on the ground that artisans, tradesmen, and labourers were poaching game from parks and warrens when they should have been attending church. They were, moreover, said to have been using these expeditions as cover for conspiracies in the aftermath of the Peasants’ Revolt.¹⁴ A strong sense that the acquisition of elite dogs by working men

¹⁰ *The Records of the City of Norwich*, ed. William Hudson and John Cottingham Tingey, 2 vols. (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1906-10), vol. 2, pp. 205-7.

¹¹ *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis, III*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London: Longman, 1862), p. 178; *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London, H*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1907), p. 311.

¹² *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London, L*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1912), pp. 130-1. See Catherine Smith, “Dogs, Cats and Horses in the Scottish Medieval Town,” *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 128 (1998): 859-85 at 874, for a later dispute in Perth, during which the Butchers refused to muzzle their dogs in the daytime as it “would render them entirely useless”.

¹³ *Calendar of London Trailbastion Trials under Commissions of 1305 and 1306*, ed. Ralph B. Pugh (London: HMSO, 1975), no. 49.

¹⁴ *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, 1275-1504*, ed. Christopher Given-Wilson et al., 16 vols. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), vol. 7, p. 166; *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. Alexander Luders et al., 11 vols. (London: Record Commission, 1810-28), vol. 2, 13 Richard II, Stat. 1, c. 13, p. 65.

undermined the rightful social order resurfaced in the early sixteenth century, when the rulers of Coventry reiterated the ban, upon pain of a fine rising from 40*d* to a punitive 10*s* for the third offence.¹⁵ At about the same time a Basingstoke jury mocked the pretensions as well as the irresponsibility of the urban poor by openly criticising “them that keepeth hounds and be scant of power to keep themselves”.¹⁶

As might be expected, dogs famed for their exemplary devotion, such as “Saint” Guinefort, the holy greyhound which became the focus of a popular late medieval healing cult, invariably belonged to the ranks of the canine nobility.¹⁷ Clear distinctions in turn separated these superior animals from the subalterns of the hunting field. Gaston Phoebus (d. 1391), France’s leading authority on the chase, regarded the heavier and less fleet-footed alant as the natural inferior to the greyhound, even though its greater stamina and inherent aggression better equipped it for the kill.¹⁸ Significantly, his *Livre de chasse* describes three types of alant: the first and fastest alone was deemed “*gentil*,” being tenacious at bringing down its prey, despite an incorrigible propensity to savage other dogs and even humans.¹⁹ The second, a heavier, slower, and far uglier beast, could be pitted against bears and boars, as could the third, an ancestor of today’s bull terrier,²⁰ whose working-class origins and general ubiquity inevitably told against it:

Every day in towns you can see *alants de boucherie*, which butchers keep to help them to drive the animals that they buy in the countryside, because if a bull escapes from the butcher who is leading it his dog can seize and detain it until his master arrives and then help him to herd it back to town. And they cost little to keep because they eat the

¹⁵ *The Coventry Leet Book, III*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris (London: Early English Text Society, original series, 138, 1909), p. 630.

¹⁶ Francis Joseph Baigent and James Elwin Millard, *A History of the Ancient Town and Manor of Basingstoke* (Basingstoke: C. J. Jacob, 1889), pp. 321-2.

¹⁷ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le saint lévrier: Guinefort, guérisseur d'enfants depuis le XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

¹⁸ A contemporary depiction of these dogs, a far stockier version of the greyhound, with shorter heads and smaller ears, may be found in a facsimile edition of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS français 616: *The Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus* (London: Henry Miller, 1998), fol. 45v.

¹⁹ *Gaston Phébus Livre de chasse*, ed. Gunnar Tilander (Karlshamm: Cynegetica, 18, 1971), p. 125. This celebrated treatise was translated into English by Edward, duke of York, during the reign of Henry IV. For a modern English version, see *The Master of Game*, ed. William A. Baillie-Grohman and Florence Nickalls Baillie-Grohman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and for extracts from the original Jesse, *Researches*, vol. 2, chapters 44 and 45.

²⁰ The inadvisability of attempting to classify medieval dogs in terms of modern breeds is widely recognised, although the skeletal remains of “stouter limbed”, bow-legged animals with heavy mandibles found in Scottish towns makes a comparison with the bull-terrier “irresistible”: Smith, “Dogs, Cats and Horses,” pp. 864, 865.

offal from slaughterhouses. Also they guard their master's home and are good for hunting bears and boars, when they are led by greyhounds and coursers.²¹

While recognising their usefulness to those lesser mortals who hunted in order to obtain food rather than for pleasure, Gaston was even more condescending about mastiffs. This was in part because they, too, worked primarily as guard dogs and consequently appeared churlish or servile (*vileins chiens*), but also on account of their unprepossessing appearance (*vileine taille*). They were not, in short, “dogs about which one should say much”.²²

Like the urban proletariat which owned so many of them, working dogs were regarded as an essential but potentially disruptive component of daily life, their activities being tightly regulated and their misdemeanours harshly punished. Concern inevitably focussed upon the sturdy creatures kept by butchers, which often seemed as truculent as their masters [image 1].²³ The courage and tenacity praised by Gaston Phoebus made these dogs, along with mastiffs, ideally equipped for the popular sports of boar and bear-baiting and the more ubiquitous bull-baiting, which enjoyed enormous appeal among a public that shared few of today's sensibilities about cruelty to animals [image 2].²⁴ Spiked metal collars and, in some instances, quilted jackets offered a degree of protection, but rates of injury and death must have been alarmingly high.²⁵ William FitzStephen reported that, in twelfth-century London, “in winter on almost every feast-day before dinner either foaming boars, armed with lightning tusks ... or stout bulls with butting horns, or huge bears do battle with the hounds let loose upon them”.²⁶ Local rituals were also marked in this way: in Guildford, for example, the wealthier burgesses had to present a suitable bull for baiting on admission into the guild merchant or pay a forfeit of 20s, while Winchester's mayors regularly entertained bystanders at a “bulstake” temporarily erected outside their homes.²⁷ Nor were these events confined to high days and holidays. The striking

²¹ *Gaston Phébus*, ed. Tilander, p. 127; Jesse, *Researches*, vol. 2, p. 118. The consumption of “foule things” by butchers' dogs further reflected their inferior status, while also constituting a potential nuisance. In 1550, Southampton jurors complained that local butchers “caste owte theire oxe hedds to theire doges into the strete to the anoyance of the Kings people and contrary to the honest ordre of this towne”: *Court Leet Records, Vol. I (part I), 1550-1557*, ed. Fossey John Cobb Hearnshaw and D. M. Hearnshaw (Southampton: Southampton Record Society, 1, 1905), p. 12.

²² *Gaston Phébus*, ed. Tilander, p. 137; Cummins, *Hound and Hawk*, p. 15. Edward, duke of York, described them as being ‘of cherlich nature and of foule shape: Jesse, *Researches*, vol. 2, p. 120.

²³ For the sometimes questionable reputation of butchers, see Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 241-6.

²⁴ Bear-baiting in England had a long history. One of the annual Domesday renders to the crown from Norwich was a bear with six “bear-dogs” to bait it: Jesse, *Researches*, vol. 2, p. 16.

²⁵ Elizabeth Carson Pastan, “Fables, Bestiaries and the Bayeux Embroidery: Man's Best Friend Meets the ‘Animal Turn’,” in *Our Dogs, Our Selves*, ed. Gelfand, pp. 111-14; Cummins, *Hound and Hawk*, p. 14.

²⁶ *English Historical Documents, 1042-1189*, ed. David C. Douglas and George W. Greenaway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981; 2nd edn.), p. 1029.

²⁷ *The House of Commons 1386-1421*, ed. John S. Roskell et al., 4 vols. (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992), vol. 1, p. 633; *Guildford Borough Records 1514-1546*, ed. Enid M. Dance (Frame: Surrey Record Society, 24,

rise in the amount of beef being consumed by ordinary working people during the later-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, coupled with a conviction that the flesh of bulls which had not been baited with dogs was unfit for human consumption, meant that butchers could incur heavy fines for selling “poisonable” meat if they failed to comply.²⁸ Indeed, in some towns they were expected to make their own dogs available should others need to borrow them for baiting.²⁹

Since it initially took place in public thoroughfares, bull-baiting could pose a significant risk to the assembled crowd. One of the most dramatic of Thomas Becket’s early miracles describes the pandemonium that ensued as a bull broke its chains and ran amok along a London street with a pack of yelping dogs in hot pursuit. A small child narrowly escaped being gored to death, thanks to his mother’s timely appeal to the saint, who brought the frantic animals to a standstill.³⁰ The need to ensure public safety and to impose a degree of order on proceedings eventually led to the erection of bull-rings or provision of other designated places in most towns of any size, although, as we shall see, accidents still occurred when the dogs belonging to spectators became unduly excited.

The characteristics that so perfectly qualified a dog for bull-baiting seemed less desirable when it was free to intimidate members of the public or attack other animals. Not for nothing did the satirist John Skelton compare Cardinal Wolsey (the son of an Ipswich butcher) to a “mastyue cur” or “bochers dogge” that terrorised the English aristocracy:

For all their noble blode
He pluckes them by the hode,
And shakes them by the eare,
And brynge[s] them in such feare,
He bayteth them lyke a bere,
Lyke an oxe or a bull.³¹

Winchester’s butchers were required to keep their hounds securely chained or locked up indoors for all but a fixed time of day, although infringements were common, most often by those who maintained an equally cavalier attitude towards waste disposal and other

1958), p. 2; *The Black Book of Winchester*, ed. William Henry Benbow Bird (Winchester: Warren and Son, 1925), p. 161.

²⁸ See Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 241-3, for the medical rationale behind these beliefs.

²⁹ Derek John Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), vol. 1, p. 257.

³⁰ Ronald C. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), p. 110.

³¹ *The Poetical Works of John Skelton*, ed. Alexander Dyce, 3 vols. (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co., 1856), vol. 2, pp. 286-7.

environmental hazards.³² In King's Lynn during the 1420s two butchers were similarly accused of polluting waterways with offal, slaughtering beasts in the street and causing further alarm to neighbours because of their vicious dogs, whose misdemeanours might, perhaps, have gone unreported had their owners been less generally antisocial.³³ Yet even the best-behaved among them could seem threatening when left to their own devices, and it was as a result of various complaints (*diversis querelis*) about unsupervised butchers' dogs that in 1367 the rulers of Beverley imposed a substantial fine of 40*d* upon anyone whose hound wandered the streets or mauled another's pig or dog. Regulations of this kind were, however, easily ignored; and in 1494 no fewer than twenty-seven residents stood accused of allowing their *molossi* to run loose without muzzles.³⁴ The terminology here is significant, as these animals took their name from the ferocious guard dogs bred in Mollosia in Ancient Greece, which had been singled out for their courage in fending off robbers by Virgil in the *Georgics*.³⁵ John Caius paints a rather more workaday picture of *mollosi* as "stoute, stronge and sturdy" creatures that were "good in deede," although the fact that he only mentions them when discussing butchers' dogs clearly underscores the latter's collective reputation for aggression.³⁶ Not surprisingly, the long list of presentments made in the 1520s against the colourful Durham butcher, Richard Bullock, whose offences included selling corrupt meat, stealing pigs and killing them out of season, highlights his failure to restrain *canem suam molosam* during the daytime.³⁷

In practice, a motley assortment of creatures, great and small, did service as guard dogs in an age when policing was often rudimentary. Dogs were even employed at Chartres cathedral from 1357 onwards to protect the shrine from thieves, and it seems likely that the wealthier English pilgrimage centres would have done likewise.³⁸ Ironically, given the imminent fate of Becket's shrine at Canterbury cathedral, when fire broke out there in 1535 one of Thomas Cromwell's agents, who was then on a tour of inspection, promptly dispatched four monks

³² Keene, *Survey of Winchester*, vol. 1, p. 258; John Sampson Furley, *Town Life in the XIVth Century* (Winchester: Warren and Son, 1946), pp. 136-7.

³³ King's Lynn Borough Archives, KL/C 17/13 (1422) and 19 (1426).

³⁴ *Beverley Town Documents*, ed. Arthur F. Leach (London: Selden Society, 14, 1900), p. 29; *Historical Manuscripts Commission: Report on the Manuscripts of the Corporation of Beverley* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1900), p. 167.

³⁵ P. Vergili Maronis, *Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 77, ll. 404-8. According to legend, *molossi* were descended from Cerberus, the ferocious guardian of the underworld: R. H. Merlen, *De canibus: Dog and Hound in Antiquity* (London: J. A. Allen and Co., 1971), p. 39.

³⁶ Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, p. 18.

³⁷ *Records of the Borough of Crossgate, Durham, 1312-1531*, ed. Richard Britnell (Woodbridge: Surtees Society, 212, 2008), nos 696, 699, 706, 709, 712, 714, 720. The editor notes (p. 316) that the term '*molossus*' is invariably used in these records to denote a large and dangerous animal.

³⁸ James Bugslag, 'Pilgrimage to Chartres: The Visual Evidence', in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, ed. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), vol. 1, p. 171.

with “bandogges” (mastiffs) to frighten away looters. The speed of their response suggests that the animals were kept in the precinct for security purposes.³⁹ Since blind pilgrims appear sometimes to have been led by the precursors of today’s guide dogs [image 3], there may have been a significant canine presence in these places. Contemporary manuscript illuminations confirm that dogs of all shapes and sizes, generally of “the mungrell and rascall sort”, assisted the visually impaired, performing a service which rendered them invaluable.⁴⁰ The larger and better-trained guard dogs, or “house hunds”, were certainly highly prized and in some instances accorded legal protection. In Scotland, anybody who killed one “thruch villainy or aganis the lawe” had to stand watch (in place of the dog) by the owner’s midden for the next year, and make good any losses incurred because he no longer had a dog to ward off thieves.⁴¹ While allowing for cases of self-defence, the early fourteenth-century customs of Waterford awarded damages of 20s to an aggrieved owner, along with appropriate compensation for subsequent thefts.⁴² Such a substantial sum, which would have paid the annual rent on a large urban property, seems to have been the accepted valuation then placed on an experienced guard dog, such as the one included (with its chain) in 1305 as part of the lease of a London brewery.⁴³

Most daunting among these animals, not least in terms of their sheer size, were mastiffs, which were almost certainly the dogs employed to guard London Bridge from attack at a princely wage of 10d a week for ‘keeping and feeding’.⁴⁴ Caius describes them as “vaste, huge, stubborne, ougly, and eager, of a heavy and burthenous body ... terrible and frightfull to beholde, and more feare and fell then any *Arcadian* curre ... violent and valiaunt, striking could feare into the harts of men, but standing in feare of no man, in so much that no weapons will make him shrink”.⁴⁵ The legend that Sir Peter Leigh of Lyme owed his life to one of these

³⁹ The National Archives, Kew, SP1/98, fol. 54r-v. They may also have been used for hunting, a topic on which monastic visitors, preachers, and satirists waxed eloquent, in part because the keeping of sporting dogs by monks diverted alms from the poor: see, for example, *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln, II*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (London: The Canterbury and York Society, 33, 1919), pp. 234, 237. Friar Tuck’s retinue of fifty “good bandoggs”, all perfectly trained to attack in military formation at the sound of his whistle, is a striking feature of the ballad of Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar:

d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/robin-hood-and-the-curtal-friar.

⁴⁰ See, for example, British Library, MS Stowe 17, fol. 135r; Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodley 264, fol. 77v; and Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MS 456, fol. 89r.

⁴¹ *The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland, I, 1127-1423*, ed. Cosmo Innes (London: *sine nomine*, 1844), p. 325.

⁴² *Borough Customs, I*, ed. Mary Bateson (London: Selden Society, 18, 1904), p. 81.

⁴³ The arrangement subsequently became a matter for litigation: *Calendar of Early Mayor’s Court Rolls of the City of London*, ed. A.H. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 217. In 1284, Sir Philip le Taylur was awarded a cask of wine as compensation for the killing of his dog, but we do not know its breed or occupation: *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London, A*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1899), p. 81.

⁴⁴ *London Bridge: Selected Accounts and Rentals, 1381-1538*, ed. Vanessa Harding and Laura Wright (London: London Record Society, 31, 1995), p. xiv, nos 506-107, 243-94, 349, 395, 487.

⁴⁵ Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, p. 25. Arcadian dogs were believed to be part lion.

formidable beasts, which allegedly stood over him as he lay wounded at Agincourt, has (sadly) been dismissed as a Victorian fiction, but mastiffs are certainly known to have fought with the English army in France.⁴⁶ When recalling how, as an old man, Sir John Fastolf would enliven “the wynter nyghtys” by recounting his experiences as a soldier, William of Worcester noted their important contribution to the defence of Harfleur. Here, according to Sir John, “every man kepyng the scout wache had a masty hound at a lyes [on a leash], to berke and warne yff ony adverse partye were commyng to the dykes or to aproche the towne for to scale yt”.⁴⁷

More often, though, mastiffs were to be found on duty in workshops, storehouses and domestic premises, where the “feare and terror” occasioned by their “bigge barcking” was no doubt compounded by the fact that they were not always securely restrained.⁴⁸ Magistrates did their best to address this problem, not least because dogs that remained at large after curfew might be used as look-outs to warn “those that meanith to rob their neighbours when the wache goith in the streats”.⁴⁹ The annoyance caused by nocturnal disturbances, as well as the likelihood of random attacks on innocent passers-by, explains why the rulers of Coventry deemed it necessary in 1470 to “afferme the olde ordenaunce made for bochour dogges, that they tye them ouer nyght”.⁵⁰ Residents of Bristol who kept any “grete dogges oute of Cheyne” faced a fine of 40*d*, irrespective of the time of day, as did anyone whose “grette houndes” wandered the streets of Coventry from 1421 onwards.⁵¹ By the end of the century a more specific penalty of 2*s* for allowing “any maner of mastyes dogges or mastye bitches ... to go abroad” obtained in Southampton, to which was automatically added the cost of compensation for whatever “harme” might have ensued.⁵² As noted above, exceptions, usually relating to the dog’s breeding as well as its behaviour and size, could be made. Thus, in Northampton all animals had to be kept on a leash “*nisi gentilem et malum non facientem*”, while Exeter’s magistrates attempted during the 1430s

⁴⁶ Philip Morgan, ‘Did a Dog Fight at Agincourt?’, www.agincourt600.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/DidadogfightatAgincourt.pdf. I am grateful to Dr Morgan for drawing my attention to this article.

⁴⁷ *The Boke of Noblesse*, ed. John Gough Nichols (New York: B. Franklin, 1972), p. 16.

⁴⁸ Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Court Leet Records*, ed. Hearnshaw and Hearnshaw, p. 16.

⁵⁰ *The Coventry Leet Book, I*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris (London: Early English Text Society, original series, 134, 1907), p. 361. Presentments made against the King’s Lynn butcher, Robert Pynder, in 1426 specifically complained that his dangerous dogs ran free at night: see note 33 above.

⁵¹ *The Great Book of Bristol: Text (part 1)*, ed. Edward William Wodehouse Veale (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 4, 1933), p. 142; *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, ed. Francis B. Bickley, 2 vols. (Bristol: W. C. Hemmons, 1900), vol. 2, p. 226; *Coventry Leet Book, I*, ed. Harris, p. 27.

⁵² *The Oak Book of Southampton*, ed. Paul Studer, 3 vols. (Southampton: Southampton Record Society, 1910-11), vol. 1, pp. 145-6.

to confine dog-owning within the city to spaniels, being subsequently obliged to compromise by allowing them alone to run about in public places.⁵³

Working dogs in general, which sometimes served as ancillary weapons for personal protection, could pose a serious nuisance, and gave rise to a growing number of court cases about the trouble that they caused.⁵⁴ A degree of scepticism is, however, in order with regard to the frequency of allegations concerning animals of “bad fame accustomed to do damage,” since plaintiffs were more likely to prevail against a defendant who knowingly kept and failed to restrain - or even encouraged - a destructive dog. The Wye tanner whose hides were “torn and devoured” by the dog of a local butcher in 1359 was anxious to stress its evil reputation, although few bull-terriers, however docile, could have resisted such an enticing prospect.⁵⁵ Shortly afterwards a Colchester court ordered an enquiry to determine if Geoffrey Woolmonger’s notorious “biting dog” had “on account of its want of custody” mauled the leg of a bystander while they were watching a bear being bated. Clearly the beast’s past history, as well as the basic facts of the case, was at issue.⁵⁶ Of particular concern was the likelihood that unsupervised dogs would savage the sheep and other animals that grazed in the suburbs and sometimes on common land within the walls of most English towns. Even in London, the presence of flocks of sheep and herds of cows on their way to and from city markets proved irresistible to some dogs and costly for their owners, who faced charges of trespass for failing to control them and would be obliged to destroy a serial offender. In 1366, for example, Adam Pulter of Aldersgate ward incurred damages of 20s for allowing his dog to maul and kill fifty-four sheep that were being driven through the streets, presumably over a period of time.⁵⁷

Dogs all too often fell foul of a culture which placed such a high premium upon personal repute, both canine and human. In a warning to nuns about the dangers of malicious speech, one vernacular homily observed that “doggis be wont to byte suche as goo by them and with their ungracious tethe rente and tere theyr clothes, so doeth detractours the lyfe of theyr

⁵³ *The Records of the Borough of Northampton*, ed. Christopher A. Markham and J. Charles Cox, 2 vols. (London: E. Stock, 1898), vol. 2, p. 248; John Vowell, *alias* Hooker, *The Description of the Citie of Excester, Part III*, ed. W. J. Harte et al. (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, original series, 14, 1919), pp. 989, 920.

⁵⁴ See Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), chapter 22, for a discussion of numerous lawsuits involving allegedly vicious dogs.

⁵⁵ Palmer, *English Law*, p. 248.

⁵⁶ *Court Rolls of the Borough of Colchester*, ed. Isaac Herbert Jeayes, 3 vols. (Colchester: Colchester Town Council, 1921-41), vol. 2, p. 177.

⁵⁷ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 153-4; *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London, 1364-1381*, ed. Arthur Hermann Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 68-9. Dogs also damaged gardens, especially when they were not adequately enclosed: *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301-1431*, ed. Helena M. Chew and William Kellaway (London: London Record Society, 10, 1973), no. 66.

neighbours”.⁵⁸ It is surely no coincidence that many of the presentments made in local courts about the possession of vicious dogs involved dubious or intransigent owners whose personal conduct already invited suspicion. Thus, for example, a barber named John Thame was consigned to prison in 1377 by the mayor of London for persistently defying the authorities, his reputation as “a common fomentor of quarrels” owing not a little to the dangerous dogs that guarded his home.⁵⁹ Just as King’s Lynn’s less tractable butchers tended to attract attention on this score, so too did local ne’er do wells such as Robert Thakker, another rebarbative individual charged with gambling and brawling, and Robert Woderove, who not only littered public thoroughfares with garbage but also frequented brothels.⁶⁰ The latter’s dog was described as *furiosus*, a term more generally applied to the violently insane, and one which serves to contextualise the routine appearance of remedies for bites by aggressive, sometimes even rabid, dogs in medieval recipe collections.⁶¹

It is now impossible to tell how many of these working animals received any form of medical care when they fell ill or were injured, although it seems likely that the complex and often very costly forms of treatment recorded in veterinary manuals and hunting treatises were largely reserved for *chiens gentilz*.⁶² The fifteenth-century Londoner, Richard Knight, who described himself variously as a “ffecissian, ironmonger, surgeon and dog leche,” may well have tended some of the city’s more valuable guard dogs, his alleged breadth of expertise being less surprising when we consider that canine physiology was then understood, just like that of humans, in terms of humoral theory.⁶³ Lower status animals, and especially their unwanted offspring, were more likely to be utilised *as* medicine, at least if authorities such as Gilbertus Anglicus (fl. 1240) and John Mirfeld (d. 1407) are to be believed. In cases of “frenzy” (mania) the former recommended applying the warm body of a “yonge whelp” that had been “slit a-two” and eviscerated to the shaved head of the patient, followed, if necessary, by others in rapid succession.⁶⁴ One of Mirfeld’s remedies for tuberculosis involved bathing in the water in which

⁵⁸ *The Manere of Good Lyvyng: A Middle English Translation of Pseudo-Bernard’s Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem*, ed. Anne E. Mouron (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), p. 114.

⁵⁹ *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London, 1364-1381*, ed. Thomas, pp. 252-3.

⁶⁰ King’s Lynn Borough Archives, KL/C 17/18 (1425) and 20 (1427).

⁶¹ For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 155.

⁶² Briony L. Aitchison, “‘For to knowen here sicknesse and to do the lechecrafte there fore’: Animal ailments and their treatment in late-medieval England” (University of St Andrews, unpublished PhD thesis, 2009), pp. 4-14.

⁶³ Faye Getz, “Medical Practitioners in Medieval England,” *Social History of Medicine* 3 (1990): 245-83 at 274.

⁶⁴ *Healing and Society in Medieval England*, ed. Fay M. Getz (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 11-12. How often cures of this kind were actually employed remains unknown; we should bear in mind that medieval physicians tended to record them for curiosity value as well as proven reliability.

newly-born (still blind) puppies had been boiled, in the hope that their innate warmth would be absorbed through the pores.⁶⁵

Sick dogs rarely prompted concern unless they threatened to infect others, as is apparent from a presentment made against a King's Lynn butcher in 1430 for keeping one that was diseased (*morbidus*) and full of scabies.⁶⁶ Such creatures inspired little sympathy, often taking refuge on rubbish tips, where they contributed to the rich miasma of urban pollution. And, as a final *coup de grace*, "atte laste the scabbede hound is violentliche ydrawe out of the dung hille with a rope or with a whippe bounde aboute his nekke and is adraynt [drowned] in water ... and so he endeth his wrecchidde lyf".⁶⁷ The warning in the Towneley play of the Raising of Lazarus that all mortals would one day "stynke as dog in dyke" made few demands upon the audience's imagination.⁶⁸ Residents of York were, for example, forbidden in 1517 from dumping "any maner of fylthe of gougs or doggez at the end of the common stayth", while in Winchester anyone who blocked a watercourse with "dede hogge, dogge or cate" faced a fine of 12d for each offence.⁶⁹ Significantly, in his *Summarie of English Chronicles* John Stow gave more space to the fine of five pounds paid by a London alderman for refusing, with "unmete language", to remove "a dead dogge lying at his gate" than he did to the marriage and coronation of Elizabeth Woodville two years earlier.⁷⁰

Much of the evidence presented here reflects the "weirdly disjointed" attitude that has characterised human-canine relations throughout recorded history.⁷¹ Greatly valued for its loyalty and usefulness, the medieval working dog was simultaneously viewed with suspicion, being often treated in town and country alike as a disposable commodity to be cast aside once it had ceased to earn its keep. We can, moreover, easily recognise a tendency, so eloquently described by Barbara Hernstein Smith, to regard these animals as "difficult relations" (in this instance conceived in anthropomorphic terms as criminals, bruisers or workshy vagabonds), whose "problematic behaviour" casts an unflattering light on our own personal shortcomings.⁷²

⁶⁵ *Johannes de Mirfeld: His Life and Works*, ed. Sir Percival Horton-Smith Hartley and Harold R. Aldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 87. We should, however, bear in mind that the compilers of medical texts included remedies for their curiosity value and did not necessarily make use of them all.

⁶⁶ King's Lynn Borough Archives, KL/C 17/21 (1430).

⁶⁷ *On the Properties of Things*, ed. Seymour, vol. 2, p. 1171.

⁶⁸ *The Towneley Plays, I*, ed. Martin Stevens and Arthur Clare Cawley (Oxford: Early English Text Society, supplementary series, 13, 1994), p. 429, l. 156.

⁶⁹ *York Civic Records, III*, ed. Angelo Raine (Wakefield: Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, 106, 1942), p. 59; *Black Book of Winchester*, ed. Bird, p. 121. See likewise *Guildford Borough Records*, ed. Dance, p. 1.

⁷⁰ John Stow, *The Summarie of English Chronicles* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1566), fol. 125v.

⁷¹ Carson Pastan, "Fables, Bestiaries and the Bayeux Embroidery," pp. 100-1.

⁷² Barbara Hernstein Smith, "Animal Relatives, Difficult Relations," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15 (2004): 1-23.

The prescriptive nature of our sources and the lack of documentary or pictorial evidence of the affectionate companionship between man and animal that is so readily available for the late medieval canine elite further reinforce this impression. We are, however, vouchsafed occasional glimpses of a more sentimental attachment on the part of owners, as the fate of William Baman graphically reveals. Having “savagely struck” one of the dogs belonging to Philip de Spine while visiting his London home, in 1301, he was subject to an angry tirade from his host and then beaten to death by a servant.⁷³

It seems, too, that even if they were neither holy nor noble some of the dogs considered in this article could at least play their part, alongside their owners, in the sacred rituals of urban life. Art historians have noted that alabaster tablets and miniatures depicting St. John the Baptist preaching in the desert to an attentive congregation of wild animals include seated lions that look remarkably like dogs in disguise [image 4]. It has, as a result, been suggested that the artisans who presented the mystery play on this theme (and any others involving exotic beasts) may have enlisted a supporting cast of obedient hounds.⁷⁴ The proliferation of ordinary “mungrell” dogs, playing, fighting, resting, and in one notable case even devouring a large joint of meat (which must surely have been purloined from a local butcher), in the roof carvings of many Suffolk churches has prompted Birkin Haward to conclude that such “fully domesticated” animals were clearly “entitled to sympathetic inclusion in man’s concept of creation”.⁷⁵ Discoveries of this kind reveal that, despite the limitations of much of our source material, far more can be learned - and still remains to be discovered – about these neglected members of the medieval workforce than has previously been supposed.

⁷³ *Calendar of Coroners’ Rolls of the City of London*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: Richard Clay and Sons, 1913) p. 26.

⁷⁴ Philip Nelson, “Some Unpublished English Medieval Alabaster Carvings”, *Archaeological Journal* 82 (1925): 25-38 at plate XII, facing p. 36; W. L. Hildburgh, “English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval Religious Drama,” *Archaeologia* 93 (1949): 51-101 at 99; William Owen Hassall, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (London: Dropmore Press, 1954), p. 106 and fol. 18v. This practice continues to the present day. In 2016 the author’s dog played a brief, but central, role as the sacrificial lamb in the Norwich Masons’ play of Cain and Abel.

⁷⁵ Birkin Haward, *Suffolk Medieval Church Roof Carvings* (Ipswich: Suffolk Institute for Archaeology and History, 1999), pp. 13, 47, 53, 56, 76, 87, 135, 165, 167-8.