

The Wymondham Market Charter of 1440 and Ralph, Lord Cromwell

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Among the impressive archives held in the muniment room at Wymondham Abbey is a fine example of a charter of Henry VI.¹ This formal instrument, dated at Reading on 19 February, 18 Henry VI [1440], contains a grant of a weekly market and twice-yearly fairs to the inhabitants of Wymondham. Henry's was not the first charter relating to a market or fair which Wymondham received. At some point during his reign, between 1135 and 1154, King Stephen had issued an undated charter granting to the monks of Wymondham Priory a fair, to be held in the town, annually, over three days, between 7-9 September, i.e., from the eve or vigil of the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the feast was on 8 September) to its morrow.² The seventeenth-century antiquary, herald and scholar, Sir William Dugdale, recounted in his great work on monasteries that a fair had also been granted to the monks, either by Henry I or Henry II.³ On 2 September 1204, King John granted to William d'Albini, Earl of Arundel, an annual fair, to be held at Wymondham over the same three days in September, as well as a market, to take place weekly, on a Friday.⁴ However, by John's subsequent charter of August 1207 (probably the 27th),⁵ the market day was changed from Friday to Tuesday.

Henry VI's Charter

By his charter of 1440,⁶ Henry VI granted and confirmed in perpetuity to the men and inhabitants of Wymondham, and their successors, a weekly market, to be held in the town on a Friday. It also provided that, in every year, they were to have two fairs, each to take place over a three-day period. One was to be held from 30 April to 2 May, on the vigil, the day and the morrow of the feast of the Apostles, Philip and James, which feast fell on 1 May. The other was to be held in the winter time, between 24 and 26 November, on the vigil, the day and the morrow of the feast of St Katherine (25 November). This grant of a market and fairs included the reservation that it should not be made to the detriment of neighbouring markets and neighbouring fairs. The document ends with a standard clause granting that all who attended the fair with their goods and merchandise should be free to come, remain there and return home without any arrest, molestation, disturbance, perturbation or impediment whatsoever.

Although the term 'charter' is often loosely used to describe several different kinds of instrument by which the crown made grants, Henry's award of a market and fairs to

¹ It is referenced as Wymondham Parish Records 15/1. Its corresponding Chancery enrolment is in *Calendar of Charter Rolls, 1427-1516*, p. 7. I am grateful to John Herne, the Archivist at Wymondham Abbey, for his kind and courteous assistance in respect of this charter, and also wish to express my thanks to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Wymondham for permission to reproduce images of it. My gratitude is also due to Gregory Monks, English Heritage's Historic Properties Manager at Wingfield Manor, John Wilson, Secretary to the Parochial Church Council of Holy Trinity Church, Lambley, Patrick Burrows, Churchwarden there, and Dr Simon Payling, Senior Research Fellow at the History of Parliament Trust.

² *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* [hereafter, *Regesta*], ed. H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis (4 vols, Oxford, 1913-69), iii, no. 974.

³ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel (6 vols, London, 1817-30), iii, 331-2; *Regesta*, ii, no. 1888.

⁴ *Rotuli Chartarum in Turri Londiensi Asservati*, ed. T.D. Hardy (London, 1837), p. 114b.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168b. This document's Charter Roll entry bears no date, but, in the sequence of the roll, the ones on either side of it are both dated 27 August.

⁶ A full English translation of its Latin text will conveniently be found online at 'Wymondham Abbey, Treasure of the Month, July 2016: Wymondham Market Charter 1440' [<http://www.wymondhamabbey.org.uk/assets/Uploads/Treasure-of-the-month-Market-Charter.pdf>].

Wymondham, was indeed by royal charter and not by the more commonly issued royal letters patent. As a charter, this document was much more formal and lavish than letters patent.⁷ Whereas letters patent were always witnessed solely by the king himself, charters contained a long list of witnesses, in keeping with the conventional formality of this document type. The witnesses in the Wymondham charter were all of high social standing and close to the monarch. They included the king's uncle, Cardinal Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester; the two archbishops, Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, and John Kempe, Archbishop of York; the king's Chancellor, John Stafford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, William Alnwick, Bishop of Lincoln, and William Aiscough, Bishop of Salisbury; Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the king's uncle, and Richard, Duke of York; Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk; Ralph, Lord Cromwell, the Treasurer, and Walter, Lord Hungerford, barons; and Master William Lyndewode, Keeper of the Privy Seal.⁸ The list ends with the formulaic *et aliis* ('and others').

The charter is written in Latin on a sheet of parchment measuring 405mm x 225mm.⁹ Hanging from it, on blue and white silk cords, is Henry VI's pendent Great Seal, in green wax, measuring 115mm in diameter. Green wax was usually used in connexion with royal grants in perpetuity ('evergreen').¹⁰ The colours of the sealing cords may also possibly have some significance, as blue and white were the Lancastrian livery colours. However, one should perhaps not set too much store by this, as other near contemporary examples show the frequent use of other cord colours, especially red and green.¹¹ The seal is in reasonably good condition, although it has suffered some slight damage at points around its circumference, mainly to the lower left side. Because of the charter's enclosure of wood and glass, the obverse of the seal is not currently viewable. However, near contemporary impressions of the same seal indicate that it would, on its obverse, typically depict the king in majesty, seated on a throne.¹²

⁷ For the differences between royal charters and royal letters patent, see, for example, H. Hall, *Studies in English Official Historical Documents* (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 235-44; and *A Formula Book of English Official Historical Documents, Part i: Diplomatic Documents*, ed. H. Hall (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 24-7, 53-60.

⁸ Lyndewode subsequently became Bishop of St David's, 1442-6 (R. H. Helmholz, 'Lyndwood, William (c.1375-1446), Administrator, Ecclesiastical Lawyer, and Bishop of St David's', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter, *ODNB*], Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17264>]).

⁹ It is currently kept in a glazed, wooden frame measuring 520 mm x 485 mm.

¹⁰ E.A. New, *Seals and Sealing Practices* (London, 2010), p. 41; N. Vincent, 'The Seals of King Henry II and his Court', *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. Schofield (Oxford, 2015), p. 12.

¹¹ For example, red and green appear on a seal of 1442 attached to royal letters patent granting the Priory of St Michael's Mount and other properties to King's College, Cambridge (King's College Archives, KCE/134), while blue and green were used on Henry's charter to Norwich of 1452 (Norfolk Record Office [hereafter, NRO], NCR Case 26a/16). For a more detailed discussion of sealing cord colours, see J.R. Alban, 'Royal Livery Colours and Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Sealing Cords in Norfolk Archives', *The Norfolk Standard. Magazine of the Norfolk Heraldry Society*, 3rd series, iii, part 16 (September 2013), 731-6.

¹² Four identical, near contemporary impressions in the NRO (NCR Case 26a/16, NCR Case 26f/3-5) and one in the King's Lynn Borough Archives (KL/C 2/35) show the following design on the obverse: within a triple gothic canopy, the king is enthroned, crowned with a crown of three points fleury and wearing flowing dress. In his right hand is a long sceptre and in his left hand is an orb with a long shaft, terminating in a cross. His feet rest on a pediment flanked by two lions sejant, facing inwards. On each side of the king is a gothic canopied alcove, each of which contains a shield of arms, France and England quarterly, each shield supported on a stand topped with a fleur-de-lis. On the outer side of both alcoves, within a niche, is a small figure in armour, each bearing a banner, the one on the dexter side with a banner of the arms of France and England quarterly, the one to sinister with a banner of St George. The black letter legend reads HENRICUS : DEI : GRACIA : REX : FRANCIE : ET : ANGLIE : ET : DOMINUS : HIBERNIE. See also W. de Gray Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum* (6 vols, 1887-1900), i. 35.

The visible reverse of the seal on the Wymondham charter, as expected, portrays the king in armour, wearing a great helm, with mantling and topped with a crest of a crowned lion statant, on a cap of maintenance. He holds a chained sword in his right hand and bears a shield with the royal arms, France and England quarterly. He is riding a caparisoned horse which is galloping to the right. The legend, in black letter, reads HENRICUS : DEI : GRACIA : REX : FRANCIE : ET : ANGLIE : ET : DOMINUS : HIBERNIE (‘Henry, by the grace of God, King of France and England, and Lord of Ireland’).

At the end of the bottom line of the text and following on from it are two further pieces of writing. The first, which reads *per breve de privato sigillo* (‘by writ of Privy Seal’), is a note of warranty. This was not an integral part of the charter itself, but indicated the authority by which the Chancery issued it, in this case, by writ of Privy Seal.¹³ Such notes of warranty sometimes additionally specified the person at whose request (*ad instanciam*) the king had made grant, but in this case, unfortunately, no-one is mentioned.¹⁴

Inserted in the lower, right-hand corner of the document is the surname ‘Stopyndon’, which refers to the Chancery clerk who was principally responsible for the charter, in this case, the Keeper of the Rolls of Chancery. Master John Stopyndon occupied that office from 1438 to 1447. He also held, at different times, several ecclesiastical livings, including East Hendred in Berkshire, the Kentish ones of Gillingham, Minster in Thanet and Wickhambreaux, and was a canon of York and of St Stephen’s Chapel, Westminster. In May 1433, he was appointed Archdeacon of Colchester, but resigned in April 1440, before being collated as Archdeacon of Dorset in July of that year. He made his will in October 1442, died in the summer of 1447 and was buried in the church of St Dunstan-in-le-West, in Fleet Street, London.¹⁵

The Decoration of the Charter

The charter is lavishly decorated, with a high quality of workmanship. Elaborate pen and ink embellishment occurs in the enlarged initial letter ‘H’ of *Henricus* and in the strapwork letters of the top line of the charter’s text, which have elongated ascenders, ornately garnished with subtle patterns of leaves, stems and delicate tracery, giving a striking overall impact.¹⁶ Prominent among the decorations of the initial ‘H’ are two stylised money purses which hang

¹³ For the processes employed by the royal Chancery for issuing instruments under the Great Seal, see H. C. Maxwell Lyte, *Historical Notes on the Use of the Great Seal of England* (London, 1926), *passim*; V.H. Galbraith, *An Introduction to the Use of the Public Records* (Oxford, 1934); *idem*, *Studies in the Public Records* (London, 1948), pp. 73-4.

¹⁴ Maxwell Lyte, *Historical Notes on the Use of the Great Seal*, pp. 151-4.

¹⁵ To date, little has been written about John Stopyndon. M. Richardson noted in ‘Early Equity Judges: Keepers of the Rolls of Chancery, 1415-47’, *American Journal of Legal History*, xxxvi, no. 4 (1992), 441-2, that ‘the protective, self-effacing posture of the professional bureaucrat has meant that we know next to nothing of the men who administered the Chancery’ in the first half of the fifteenth century, thus studies have been made of ‘only those Keepers ... who were promoted to a bishopric’, a point borne out by the case of William Lyndewode, Keeper of the Privy Seal, who appears in the charter as one of its witnesses. However, see J. Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Angliae*, ed. T.D. Hardy (3 vols, Oxford, 1854), ii. 340, 639; A. Hanham, *John Benet’s Chronicle, 1399-1462: An English Translation with New Introduction* (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 23; E. Boswell, *The Ecclesiastical Division of the Diocese of Bristol, Methodically Digested* (Sherborne, 1826), p. 14. By the sixteenth century, the office of Keeper of the Rolls had evolved into the judicial one of Master of the Rolls, who is nowadays the second most senior judge in England and Wales. However, the office-holder preserved his clerical functions, as the nominal head of the Public Record Office, until the Public Records Act, 1958 transferred responsibility for it to the Lord Chancellor, although the Master of the Rolls still retains responsibility for the oversight of manorial records.

¹⁶ For comparable descriptions of such work, see E.A. Danbury, ‘The Decoration of the Doncaster Borough Charters’, *Doncaster. A Borough and its Charters*, ed. B.J. Barber (Doncaster, 1994), pp. 26-46.

from the finials of the ascender. The initial letter ‘D’ in the title *Dominus Hibernie* in the top line is embellished with two scrolls bearing the words, in Anglo-Norman French, *Nay ie droit* (‘Have I not [the] right?’). This was the motto of Ralph, third Baron Cromwell, while the purses which hang from the letter ‘H’ were his personal badge, which was intended to reflect his status and power as Treasurer of England, an office which he held from 1433 to 1443. Cromwell appears in the list of witnesses to the charter, but why of all the witnesses should it be *his* motto and badge which appear at its head? Two of the other witnesses, William Alnwick, a former Bishop of Norwich (1426-36), and William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, had connexions with Norfolk, but Cromwell’s links with the county, and especially with Wymondham, were by far the strongest. In light of this, it would perhaps not be unreasonable to think that Cromwell may have played a personal part in effecting the issuing of the grant. The motto and badge, and their significance, will be discussed in more detail below, but first, let us consider Ralph, Lord Cromwell himself.

*Ralph, Lord Cromwell*¹⁷

Ralph Cromwell, third Baron Cromwell (c. 1393-1456) was a prominent English politician and diplomat. He was born, possibly in Lambley, Nottinghamshire,¹⁸ the son of the second Baron Cromwell, also Ralph, and his wife Joan Grey. The family took their name from Cromwell (Crumwell) in Nottinghamshire and, by the late fourteenth century, they were firmly established in that county and in Lincolnshire, through a series of judicious marriages. In his youth, Cromwell was attached to the household of Henry V’s brother, Thomas, Duke of Clarence, and saw military service with him in France and Aquitaine in 1412-13. He appears to have participated in the Agincourt campaign and in the invasion of Normandy in 1417, and became captain of Harfleur in 1421. He was one of the negotiators of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420 and, shortly afterwards, embarked on a successful diplomatic and administrative career under Henry VI, so much so, that, in 1433, he was appointed Treasurer of England, an office which he was to hold until 1443. During this period, he was one of the most powerful men in the kingdom and accumulated the great wealth, which, among other things, allowed him to embark upon major building projects at Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire, Collyweston, Northamptonshire, and Wingfield Manor at South Wingfield, Derbyshire. Moreover, works on his collegiate church at Tattershall were initiated during his lifetime, but not completed until long after his death, while, under the terms of his will, he provided for the rebuilding of the church at Lambley after his decease.¹⁹ All these works were intended to be a reflection of his wealth, power and prestige, both as a great lord and as Treasurer of England.

¹⁷ Fuller biographical details will be found in A. C. Reeves, ‘Cromwell, Ralph, third Baron Cromwell (1393?-1456)’, *ODNB*, online edn, Jan. 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6767>]; R.L. Friedrichs, ‘Ralph, Lord Cromwell and the Politics of Fifteenth-Century England’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xxxii (1988), 207-27, which summarises her postgraduate dissertation, ‘The Career and Influence of Ralph, Lord Cromwell, 1393-1456’ (Columbia University, PhD thesis, 1974).

¹⁸ His birthplace is unknown, but a possible suggestion occurs in H. Gill, ‘A Local Patron of Architecture in the Reign of Henry VI’, *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, xix (1915), 105-40.

¹⁹ T. Avery, *Tattershall Castle* (revd edn, National Trust, Swindon, 2004); entry for ‘Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire and Ralph, Lord Cromwell’, in A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500: Volume 2, East Anglia, Central England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 308-16, 449-59; M.K. Jones, ‘Collyweston: an Early Tudor Palace’, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. D. Williams (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 129-41; A. Emery, ‘Ralph, Lord Cromwell’s Manor at Wingfield (1439-c. 1450): its Construction, Design and Influence’, *Archaeological Journal*, cxlii (1985), 276-39; M. W. Thompson, ‘The Construction of the Manor at South Wingfield, Derbyshire’, *Problems in Economic and Social Archaeology*, ed. G. de G. Sieveking, I. H. Longworth, and K. E. Wilson (London, 1976), pp. 417-37; Historic England listing, ‘Wingfield Manor: a Medieval Great House’ [<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1014829>]; S. Badham, ‘Patterns of Patronage: Brasses to the Cromwell-Bourchier Kinship Group’, *Transactions of the Monumental Brass*

Cromwell married, before 1433, Margaret (d. 15 September 1454), the daughter of John, Lord Deincourt, although there was no issue from this union and, on his death, the barony fell into abeyance between his two nieces, the daughters of his only sister, Maud. Ralph, Lord Cromwell died at Wingfield on 4 January 1456 and his last will, dated 18 December 1451 at Collyweston, with a codicil of 29 September 1454, was proven on 21 February 1456.²⁰ He was buried in Tattershall and the tomb of him and his wife, with its now damaged monumental brass, stands in the collegiate church there, which was completed many years after his death.²¹

Ralph, Lord Cromwell's Connexion with Wymondham

Although Ralph, Lord Cromwell's main residences were at Tattershall, Wingfield and Collyweston, he also had extensive estates in Norfolk, where he was a major land-holder. These included manors in Attleborough, Babingley, Banham, Besthorpe, Buckenham, Denton, Eccles, Ellingham, Gasthorpe, Hetherset, Tibenham and Wymondham. Other interests included a fourth share in the Tolbooth at Lynn and advowsons in Attleborough, Congham (two), Denton, Hetherset, Stanhoe, and Tasburgh.²²

Together with Sir John Clifton of New Buckenham, Ralph, Lord Cromwell was one of the two chief manorial lords in Wymondham.²³ His large manor there, known, since his grandfather's time, as Cromwell's Manor, or Wymondham Cromwells, contained, as Blomefield remarked, 'a third part of Wymondham, with a third part of the leet, which extended over part of the hamlets of Norton, Sutton, Watlefield, and Silfield. This manor fell to the share of the Bernaks ... and passed from them to Sir Ralf Cromwell, Knt. whose name it still bears'.²⁴

Society, xvii (2007), 423-52; A. Hamilton Thompson, *Tattershall: the Manor, the Castle, the Church* (Lincoln, 1928); R. Marks, 'The Re-building of Lambley Church, Nottinghamshire in the Fifteenth Century', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, lxxxvii (1983), 87-9.

²⁰ *Testamenta Eboracensia. A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York, Part ii*, ed. J. Raines, *Publications of the Surtees Society*, xxx (Durham, 1855), pp. 196-200. See R.L. Friedrichs, 'The Last Two Wills of Ralph, Lord Cromwell', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xxxiv (1990), 93-112; S.J. Payling, 'The "Grete Laboure and the Long and Troublous Tyme": the Execution of the Will of Ralph, Lord Cromwell, and the Foundation of Tattershall College', *The Fifteenth Century*, xiii, *Exploring the Evidence: Commemoration, Administration and the Economy*, ed. L. Clarke (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 1-29. See also NRO, NRS 18577, 33E2.

²¹ Cromwell had been personally involved in the endowment of the church with its collegiate status. By letters patent of 14 July 1439, he, together with the Bishops of Winchester and Lincoln, William Paston and several others, was licensed 'to transform the church of Tateshale into a collegiate church of seven chaplains, six secular clerks and six choristers ... and to erect an almshouse for thirteen poor persons of either sex' (*Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1436-41*, p. 292). In the event, the construction of the church, on the site of the previous one, which was demolished, did not begin until after his death, and was not completed until around 1500. See note 19 above.

²² NRO, NRS 18577, 33 E 2; NNAS G1/1/9; F. Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (11 vols, London, 1805-10), i. 252, 374-5, 503-4; ii. 482, 500; v. 23-4, 212, 411; viii, 389, 534; ix. 54, 295; x. 381, 384-5.

²³ They were described as '*Radulphi domini de Crumwell et de Tateshale ac Johannis Clifton militis capitalium dominorum predictae ville de Wymondham*' ('Ralph, Lord of Cromwell and Tattershall, and John Clifton, knight, chief lords of the said vill of Wymondham') in the indenture of agreement made on 27 January 1446 for the building of the new West Tower at Wymondham Priory church (Wymondham Abbey Muniment Room, Wymondham Parish Records 9/1/6).

²⁴ Blomefield, *Norfolk*, ii. 500, with further information at *ibid*, i. 374. Before Ralph, the first Baron Cromwell acquired it by marriage in the mid fourteenth century, the manor had previously been called Bernak's Manor. Wymondham is the largest parish in Norfolk, outside the area of the Fens, so a manor occupying a third of it, as Blomefield suggested, was a substantial one.

Previously forming part of the estates of the de Tattershall family, which extended over several counties, this Wymondham manor (and others in Norfolk, including ones in Attleborough, Buckenham and Hethersett) had, after the death of Joan de Tattershall in 1329, come by remainder into the hands of Sir William de Bernak (1278-1339), in right of his wife, Alice de Driby (c.1284-1341),²⁵ the daughter of Sir Robert de Driby and Joan de Tattershall. It subsequently passed to their second son, Sir John de Bernak (c.1305-46) and his wife, Joan Marmion (c. 1313-61), and thence to their daughter, Maud (c. 1337-1419). In around 1360, she married Sir Ralph Cromwell, first Baron Cromwell (d. 1398), who, according to Blomefield, held it ‘of the King *in capite*, as parcel of the barony of Tateshall’ and in right of his wife.²⁶ Having come into the possession of the first Baron Cromwell by this means, the manor then descended to his son, Ralph, the second Baron (1368-1417), and, eventually, to his son, Ralph, Lord Cromwell, the Treasurer.

While Ralph, the third Lord Cromwell held extensive estates in Norfolk, the greater part of his time was spent elsewhere, either in connexion with his duties as Treasurer, or at his principal residences at Tattershall, Collyweston and Wingfield. The day to day administration of his Norfolk properties was left in the hands of the lord’s officials, men such as Thomas Wederby, his receiver in the county of Norfolk, John de Mukelfeld, his reeve in Wymondham, Henry Tapulton, his reeve in Hethersett, or William Veske, his bailiff in Buckenham and Besthorpe.²⁷ Until 1446, his *capitalis senescallus* (head steward) for the manor of Wymondham Cromwells was the renowned lawyer and judge, William Yelverton, who was succeeded in that post in the same year by another Norfolk lawyer, John Jenney.²⁸

Whether or not Cromwell visited his estates in Wymondham, as a major manorial lord there he exercised great authority and influence locally. For instance, in 1446, as chief lords of the fee, he and Sir John Clifton gave their assent for the construction of the great West Tower at

²⁵ Sir William de Bernak and Alice de Driby were buried in the church of St Remigius in Hethersett, where their tomb still remains, although it is now completely hidden from view behind an organ screen, to where it was moved in the nineteenth century. Sadly, nowadays, it is in an extremely dilapidated condition, although this was not the case in Blomefield’s time, when it was also in a more prominent position within the church:

‘In our Lady’s chapel, at the east end of the south aisle, is an altar tomb, having the portraitures of a knight armed cap-a-pié, with a sword hanging from his head, which lies on a cushion, his spurs on, and a lion at his feet; he is in a surcoat of his arms, and hath his shield of them, viz. Bernak, erm. a fess g. By him is his lady with a dog at her feet, and on her mantle are the arms of Bernak, impaling Driby, arg. three cinquefoils and a canton gul. The inscription is lost, but was this,

Obitus Domini Willi de Bernake M^occc^oxxxix^o. vi^o Mensis Aprilis.

Obitus Domine Alicie de Bernake M^occc^o xli^o. xii^o die Aprilis.’

(Blomefield, *Norfolk*, v. 30, and noted also in J. S. Cotman, *Engravings of Sepulchral Brasses in Norfolk* (London, 1838), p. vi)).

²⁶ Blomefield, *Norfolk*, i. 374.

²⁷ NRO, NNAS G1/1/9; NRS 18577 NRS 18577, 33E2.

²⁸ For Yelverton: NRO, NRS 18500, 33D1, rotulets 5, 7, 12, 14; for Jenney: *ibid.*, rotulet 22 and NRS 14190, 28F12, *passim*. William Yelverton (d. 1477?) was a JP in Norwich in 1427 and recorder there between 1433 and 1450. He was MP for Great Yarmouth in 1435 and 1436, while, in 1439 he was made a sergeant-at-law, then became a judge of the King’s Bench in 1444, being knighted in around 1461. He was prominent in administrative and legal affairs in Norfolk, serving, for example, as under-steward of the Duchy of Lancaster’s estates in the county, and perhaps being best known as executor and heir to Sir John Fastolf and for his long-running dispute with the Pastons over Fastolf’s will (E. W. Ives, ‘Yelverton, Sir William (d. 1477?)’, *ODNB*, online edn, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30215>]). The John Jenney mentioned was probably the lawyer, John Jenney the younger (1419-96), who was described in 1456 by Sir John Fastolf as ‘yong Jenney, whych ys of my Lord Cromwell councell’ (*The Paston Letters, AD 1422-1509*, ed. J. Gairdner (6 vols, London, 1904), ii. 197 (letter no. 162), although it may possibly have been his father, John Jenney (1395-1465), also a famous lawyer. For short biographies of the father and son, see J.C. Wedgwood and A.D. Holt, *History of Parliament. Biographies of Members of the House of Commons, 1439-1509* (London, 1936), pp. 498-9.

Wymondham Priory, the extensive works starting in 1447.²⁹ Cromwell's and Clifton's association with the tower was commemorated in the heraldry which appears above its west door, where appear nineteen shields, which may originally have been painted with the arms of those who donated funds for the construction of the tower. However, while Clifton's arms appear in the left spandrel,³⁰ those of Cromwell, flanked on each side by eight smaller shields, prominently occupy the place of honour, centrally, over the doorway,³¹ a clear reflection of his importance and almost certainly of the part which he must have played in effecting the building of the tower.

Cromwell's Motto and Badge

The display of Cromwell's badge and motto, in prominent positions within the decoration in Henry VI's market charter of 1440 – respectively in the initial capital of *Henricus* and in the top line of the text – may be a further indication of the high regard in which he was held in Wymondham, or, more probably, may suggest that he had played an actual part in the acquisition of the charter. Grants of charters by the crown were usually the end result of previous negotiations and were rarely made spontaneously. Often, in such instances, townsmen petitioned the king to grant them privileges (for which they usually also had to pay³²), or else individuals of esteem, such as local lords, might lobby on their behalf, either separately or in conjunction with them.³³ It seems therefore possible that the men of Wymondham may have approached the Lord Treasurer, who was highly placed within in the royal administration and also had local connexions, and requested him to exert his influence on their behalf. While, in this instance, Cromwell's intervention cannot be confirmed, it does, however, seem likely, as there is more than a suspicion that he may have interceded in this way, elsewhere, on other occasions. Dr Simon Payling has noted that a petition submitted by the citizens of Lincoln to Parliament in 1426 bears the inscription *per dominum de Cromwell* ('by Lord Cromwell'), while another, presented in the Parliament of November 1449 by the MP, John Skelton of Armathwaite, Cumberland, for exemption from the Act of Resumption, similarly has on its face *per dominum de Cromwell*. Although both examples present no absolute proof, the

²⁹ P. Cattermole, 'The Gothic Additions', *Wymondham Abbey. A History of the Monastery and Parish Church*, ed. P. Cattermole (Wymondham, 2007), pp. 98-100. Cattermole gives the date of the indenture containing their assent as 14 January 1446 (p. 98), whereas it was 27 January 1446 (Wymondham Abbey Muniment Room, Wymondham Parish Records 9/1/6).

³⁰ The arms in the right spandrel are those of Clifton's son-in-law, Sir Andrew Ogard, a Danish knight, originally named Anders Pedersen Gyldenstjerne, of Aagaard in Jutland, who, from the 1420s, had a long military career in the service of the English crown, received letters of denization in 1433, acquired estates in Norfolk and elsewhere, and who was buried in Wymondham Abbey in 1454. See Wedgwood and Holt, *History of Parliament*, pp. 644-5; and A.E. Marshall, 'The Role of English War Captains in England and Normandy, 1436-61' (MA thesis, Swansea University, 1974), pp. 44-6, 155-6; and, particularly, J. Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories. The Worldly Goods of John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France (1389-1435)* (London, 1993), pp. 417-21; and C.M. Hansen, 'Sir Andrew Ogard, a "Stranger Knight"', *The Genealogist* [New York: Association for the Promotion of Scholarship of Genealogy], xix, part 2 (2005), 179-86.

³¹ T. Sims, 'Heraldry and Patronage', *Wymondham Abbey*, ed. Cattermole, pp. 34-5. Most of the heraldry is difficult to decipher, as many of the shields have suffered from erosion. However, Cromwell's achievement of arms, although weathered, has been deeply carved and so is still intelligible. It comprises a shield accouché, bearing quarterly, 1 and 4: Cromwell (Argent, a chief Gules, over all, a bend Azure); 2 and 3: Tattershall (chequy, Or and Gules, a chief Ermine), above which is a great helm with mantling, surmounted by a panache.

³² On the costs associated with acquiring a royal charter or letters patent, see Maxwell Lyte, *Historical Notes on the Use of the Great Seal*, pp. 327-59.

³³ See A. Musson, 'Queenship, Lordship and Petitioning in Late Medieval England', *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance*, ed. W.M. Ormrod, G. Dodd and A. Musson (York, 2009), pp. 156-72, espec. p. 158; D.M. Palliser, 'Towns and the English State, 1066-1500', *The Medieval State. Essays Presented to James Campbell*, ed. J.R. Maddicott and D.M. Palliser (London, 2000), p.129 and n. 9.

suspicion is that Cromwell brought his influence to bear in these instances and, if so, it is also more than likely that he played a key part in securing the Wymondham charter.³⁴

The Anglo-Norman French motto, *Nay ie droit*, renders itself into modern French as *n'ai-je pas (le) droit?*, a very appropriate axiom for a man with extensive estates and elevated status, holding high office under the crown, who, seemingly, could ask such a question with impunity, as there appeared to be few who could challenge his right to do things. At least, that was before the later years of his life, when, 'surrounded by powerful enemies, the subject of slanders and rumours, his friends and allies aged or dying, Cromwell saw himself increasingly cut off from power or favour'.³⁵

Cromwell made widespread use of his motto, particularly incorporating it into many of the buildings which he owned, most often employing it in association with his badge of a stylised treasurer's purse and always ensuring that it and the purse were displayed for maximum impact. Numerous examples of the motto with badge can be seen at Tattershall Castle, on the elegantly decorated chimneypieces, although at Tattershall, as elsewhere, the purse also appears by itself, without the motto.³⁶ Carved above the entrance to the surviving inner gatehouse at Wingfield Manor two purses flank Cromwell's arms, which are exhibited there with other shields.³⁷ Unfortunately, the numerous other examples which once graced the building have now disappeared, as have the 'divers baggs or purses cutt on the stone-work of the chapel and other places' within Cromwell's now demolished manor at Collyweston.³⁸

Indeed, such was the power of this image that it continued to be employed well after Cromwell's death. For instance, a purse appears on the pulpit and in window glass in Tattershall church, which Cromwell caused to be endowed by Henry VI as a collegiate church in 1439, and then made provision under his will for it to be rebuilt. The works did not begin until the mid 1460s, long after he had died, and were completed only towards the end of the fifteenth century.³⁹ Similarly, following a bequest in his will of £300 for Lambley church 'to be built anew', works began there after his death and the church was re-dedicated in 1480. Its east wall is embellished with two carvings of the purse.⁴⁰ However, while the purse badge, with or without the motto, was in widespread use in the many buildings connected with Cromwell, which are situated in other counties, there are no known instances of it in Norfolk – except, that is, for the examples which appear in Henry VI's market charter of 1440, now in the muniment room at Wymondham Abbey.

³⁴ TNA, SC8/121/6024, printed in *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (6 vols, London, 1783), iv. 313a (1426); TNA, SC8/86/4261, *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson *et al.* (Woodbridge, 2005), xii. 143 (1449). I am extremely grateful to Dr Payling for bringing these references to my attention.

³⁵ Friedrichs, 'Ralph, Lord Cromwell and the Politics of Fifteenth-Century England', p. 207.

³⁶ Avery, *Tattershall Castle*, pp. 12, 13, 15, 16, 22. Although some commentators have described the badge as a rebus, it is not, *per se*: it is suggestive of Cromwell's position as Treasurer, but is not an allusional device which uses pictures to represent words or parts of words, which is what a rebus does. However, several of the roundels on the chimneypieces at Tattershall Castle depict the purse surrounded by a stylised representation of Cromwell weed, which is a punning allusion to his name.

³⁷ P. Dixon, *Wingfield Manor* (Swindon, 1995, repr. 2007).

³⁸ *Testamenta Eboracensia*, p. 199; 'Collyweston', in *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northamptonshire, vol. v.; Architectural Monuments in North Northamptonshire* (London, 1984), pp. 30-6.

³⁹ Avery, *Tattershall Castle*, pp. 16-19.

⁴⁰ Marks, 'The Re-building of Lambley Church', pp. 87-9.