

## SHORT NOTE

### MATTHEW SWETTENHAM RICARDIAN PROFITEER

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Matthew Swettenham has – justifiably – largely escaped the notice of scholars.<sup>1</sup> Yet the grin of this obscure Cheshire yeoman of the chamber continues to shine through in the records of his rewards long after he, like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat, has faded away. Swettenham seemed to have shared the cat's talent for always landing on his feet.

The Swettenhams were an established family of minor Cheshire gentry. The family was associated with royal service, and when Chester became 'the inner citadel of Richard's kingdom,' Randle Swettenham served in one of the watches of Cheshire archers that guarded the king night and day and three other Swettenhams were retained as archers for life.<sup>2</sup> Yet, no member of the family in Richard II's service prospered more than Matthew.

Matthew seems to have been a younger brother of Thomas Swettenham, the proprietor of Swettenham; Thomas granted Matthew the manor of Kermincham as an appanage. Kermincham provided Matthew with subsistence, but its vistas were distinctly limited for a younger son with ambition. Swettenham, therefore, undertook a career in the royal household. He is noted in a patent of 1381 as a yeoman of the king's chamber. This patent was a life grant to Matthew of the office of laundener within the king's park of Clarendon in Wiltshire.<sup>3</sup> Matthew's horizons had already broadened.

Swettenham seems already to have been well entrenched in the king's favour and in the chamber which, under Sir Simon Burley, was to play a leading role in the early years of Richard's majority.<sup>4</sup> Burley's close relationship with Queen Anne may account for Swettenham's marriage to Katherine Swettenham who held an annuity from the Queen. Richard

II's interest in the marriage was demonstrated by a grant on 8 October 1385 to the king's damsel, Katherine Swettenham, from the forfeitures of an outlaw in lieu of the 40 marks the king had promised her at the time of her marriage with his yeoman, Matthew Swettenham.<sup>5</sup> The marriage itself took place sometime before 21 August 1384, the date on which Matthew and his wife were granted the custody of the manor of Langdon in Essex. This grant was at the expense of Richard Palmer, an ally of John of Northampton, the mayor of London whom Richard had condemned to imprisonment and forfeiture. Palmer successfully pursued his rights in the court of the Exchequer and in Chancery. Katherine, however, did maintain her title to a grant of a London dwelling of John of Northampton against a knight of the chamber who had received the same grant.<sup>6</sup> Richard II valued the service of the Swettenhams.

Richard's queen also posthumously rewarded their service. On 14 October 1397, Edward, duke of Albemarle in his capacity as a feoffee of Queen Anne's possessions released and pardoned Matthew Swettenham for all actions for estrepement or waste in the manor of Weedon Pinkney and pardoned Matthew for the payment of the farm for one year. Weedon Pinkney was located in Northamptonshire, and this may not have been merely coincidental. Matthew's bride may well have come from a Northamptonshire family, and this shire was to become a second and a more expansive home for this minor Cheshire landholder.<sup>7</sup>

Richard II provided Matthew with additional grants of offices in the forests and parks of Northamptonshire, and Matthew further entrenched himself in the county through an exchange of royal favours. On 20 August 1385, Swettenham had been one of twenty men retained by the king through a patent warranted by the signet as an archer of the crown. On March 23, 1388, Swettenham surrendered his grant of 6d. per diem in favour of Nicholas de Exton; in return, Exton surrendered in favour of Matthew the office of constable of Northampton Castle and keeper of the gaol there together with the rents of castleward which Swettenham retained until he was forced to surrender the grant in accordance with the restrictions on alienations of the farms of the shires imposed by the parliament of 1390.<sup>8</sup> Matthew was compensated for his loss by royal patronage in his native shire.

In compensation for this surrender, Matthew received a patent of 12 June 1391 which granted him an annuity of £20 a year from the issues of Drakelow and Rudheath. This grant

served to supplement the income which Swettenham was already drawing as a result of royal favour from that peculiar institution, the avowries of Cheshire. In 1383, Matthew had secured an annuity of 100s. from the revenues of the avowries, and in 1387 the keeper of the avowries surrendered his office and supplicated that the office should be granted to Swettenham for life.<sup>9</sup> Swettenham had broadened his horizons; he had not forgotten his birthplace.

It was natural that a household servant would also show an interest in London as a target for gain. In October of 1392, Matthew Swettenham secured a grant for life of a tenement in Marklane, London. Also in 1392, Swettenham and William Hart, yeomen of the chamber, were given a grant of the office of 'skawage' in the port of London. The exact nature of this grant is difficult to determine, but to Swettenham, it meant additional income through the king's favour.<sup>10</sup>

Richard II's patronage was useful not only as a means of tapping into the king's riches, but also because the king was able to dispose of the wealth of others. In 1385, Matthew received a gift of £20 which had been forfeited on a plea of debt. The king had earlier rewarded Matthew at the expense of the Mortimer wardship through a 7 February 1382 grant during the minority of the heir of the custody of the park of Brimpsfield in Gloucester; the grant was later extended to include the office of bailiff of the hundreds of Brimpsfield and Bisley, an extension warranted on the information of Sir Michael de la Pole. Dieulacres Abbey in Staffordshire was induced in 1383 to grant Matthew a corody which they had earlier granted to John Rose.<sup>11</sup> Swettenham used his connections at court to turn a shilling whenever, wherever and at whomsoever's expense he could.

The Dieulacres corody may well have been a business arrangement between Rose and Swettenham on the order of the grant trading that Swettenham and Exton undertook. Matthew seems to have served as a favour broker on other occasions. As noted, Swettenham received a life grant of the office of laundener within the king's park of Clarendon. Swettenham had no other interests in Wiltshire, and less than a year later, he alienated the grant. Swettenham entered into similar arrangements in 1389 for the office of bailiff of Brigstock, Geddington and Bollax and in 1390 for the office of parker of Moulton. In the latter case, Matthew did not wish to abandon his Northamptonshire interests fully; Sir Nicholas Lilling's grant stipulated that if Lilling were to predecease Swettenham, Matthew should again enjoy the office for his

lifetime.<sup>12</sup> Somewhere in the course of his wheeling and dealing, Swettenham acquired the profits of a ferry in Conway, Wales; no doubt many more such transactions have escaped notice.<sup>13</sup>

Swettenham was well rewarded for his service to Richard, but serve the king he did. Matthew remained on active service in the chamber throughout the reign, and it is noteworthy that several of Swettenham's grants involved offices in royal parks or forests, offices appropriate to paramilitary personnel.<sup>14</sup> This was emphasized anew in the fall of 1397. Richard, building his personal retinue, rewarded Swettenham with a life grant of the office of parker of Milton, Kent.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Swettenham had been actively involved in Richard II's military enterprises, notably in Ireland. In 1393, Matthew Swettenham was appointed admiral of Ireland, and he accompanied Richard II to Ireland in the following year. Swettenham again joined his master in Ireland in 1399; he received a protection for one year on 29 April 1399.<sup>16</sup> The relationship between Richard II and Matthew Swettenham was symbiotic, not parasitic.

Matthew had made enemies, and again was forced to rely upon royal patronage. In 1397, he received a special protection 'on his petition that in suing for recovery of his right to lands and tenements in Chester and in diverse courts within England and the king's dominions he fears mischief from his rivals.'<sup>17</sup> Matthew inescapably was tied to royal favour.

Although Swettenham was tied to the king, he proved not to be tied to Richard II. Matthew was an opportunistic but valuable servant of the crown. Swettenham quickly transferred his loyalties to Henry IV, and the new king proved eager to patronize him. Matthew served in the new household, and was to profit by the downfall of his former Ricardian cohorts. Matthew Swettenham, yeoman of the king's chamber, received a grant of corodies which had been held by one of Richard II's archers of the crown who had joined Thomas Holland in insurrection. Swettenham followed this grant on 22 July 1403 with a grant of all the possessions of John Kingsley and his mother in Cheshire which had been forfeited because John was with Henry Percy at Shrewsbury and because his mother had received him in her home after the battle.<sup>18</sup> Matthew was again building his resources in his native Cheshire, now through service to Henry IV.

Under Henry as under Richard, Matthew's horizons were not bounded by the confines of Cheshire. He proved a valuable military servant to Henry IV in both Scotland and Wales, and he was rewarded for such services in 1405 with a

grant of the office of bailiff and parker of Beverly for the archbishop of York, yet another grant at the expense of an enemy of the crown. In 1411, Matthew Swettenham, now referred to as an esquire of Northamptonshire, was provided with a general release of all actions by his successor as bailiff of Beverly.<sup>19</sup> Swettenham continued to enhance his position in his adopted home. He had received a royal annuity of £30 from the issues and profits of the county of Northampton in exchange for some albeit not all of his Cheshire annuities. The following year, Matthew exchanged more of such annuities for a messuage, a shop and two cellars in Northampton.<sup>20</sup> Swettenham was granted the office of clerk of the statute merchant in Northampton in 1407; and was to serve as escheator in Northamptonshire in 1408 and subsequently as sheriff. His last taste of royal favour was a 1413 pardon to the king's esquire Matthew Swettenham, of his £30 annuity forfeited to the king at the time he was sheriff of Northampton for the escape of felons from his custody.<sup>21</sup> Swettenham died sometime before 5 April 1417 when an annuity was granted under the same terms 'as Matthew Swettenham received the same during his life.'<sup>22</sup> A monumental brass commemorating Matthew Swettenham is to be found in the parish church of Blakesley, Northamptonshire.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Cf. Maude Violet Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies* (Oxford, 1937), 97; Michael J. Bennett, Sources and Problems in the Study of Social Mobility; Cheshire in the Later Middle Ages, *Ante*, 128 (1978), 76-7; Michael J. Bennett, *Community Class and Careerism* (Cambridge, 1983), 186, 189, 213, 228, 233-4. I regret that Dr. Bennett's book did not appear until this study had been completed.
- 2 George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, rev. edn., ed. Thomas Helsby, 3 vols. (London, 1875-82), III, 560; Thomas F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England*, 6 vols. (Manchester, 1920-33), IV, 59; P.R.O. E.101/42/10; Calendar of Deeds, Writs of Dover etc. on the Chester Plea Rolls, *29th Rep. Dep. Keeper of Public Records* (1867), 83.
- 3 *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (hereafter *C.P.R.*) 1381-5, 50, 165; *Calendar of Close Rolls* (hereafter *C.Cl.R.*) 1381-5, 257; *C.Cl.R.* 1385-9, 201, 203.
- 4 Richard H. Jones, *The Royal Policy of Richard II: Absolutism in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968), 116-143.
- 5 *C.P.R.* 1385-9, 23.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 161, 449; *C.Cl.R.* 1385-9, 127-8, 201-3, 423, 428-30.
- 7 *C.P.R.* 1396-9, 419; *C.P.R.* 1399-1401, 275; *C.Cl.R.* 1402-5, 205-6; *C.P.R.* 1405-8, 177, 224, 389; P.R.O. E.404/24/492; *C.P.R.* 1408-13, 149; *C.P.R.* 1413-16, 157.

- 8 *C.P.R.* 1385-9, 19, 269, 346, 414; *C.Cl.R.* 1385-9, 41; Ormerod, III, 78.
- 9 *C.P.R.* 1388-92, 425; *C.Cl.R.* 1389-92, 272; P.R.O. S.C.6/790/10; *C.P.R.* 1399-1401, 20-21; Margaret Sharp, *Contributions to the History of the Earldom and County of Chester: 1237-1399*, (Ph.D. 2 vols, Manchester University, 1925) II, 182; *Calendar of Recognizance Rolls of the Palatine of Chester, 36th Rep. Dep. Keeper of Public Records* (1874) 461-2; *C.P.R.* 1381-5, 338; *C.P.R.* 1399-1400, 20-21, 374; Lists of Officers of the Palatinate of Chester, *31st Rep. Dep. Keeper of Public Records* (1869) p. 248.
- 10 *C.P.R.* 1391-6, 147, 186, 192; *C.Cl.R.* 1392-6, 264; This office is not noted by Hubert Hall, *A History of the Custom-Revenue in England* (London, 1885) or Robert L. Baker, *The English Customs Service, 1307-1343* (Philadelphia, 1961). Professor Baker has suggested that the term sounds like an Anglo-Saxon survival, but he has advised me that he has never encountered it.
- 11 *C.P.R.* 1381-5, 94, 100, 580, 601; *C.Cl.R.* 1381-5, 143, 151, 418.
- 12 *C.P.R.* 1381-5, 50, 165; *C.Cl.R.* 1381-5, 257; *C.P.R.* 1385-9, 201-3, 424; *C.P.R.* 1413-16, 29.
- 13 *C.Cl.R.* 1392-6, 363-4.
- 14 P.R.O. E.101/403/10, 45.
- 15 *C.P.R.* 1396-9, 184.
- 16 *C.P.R.* 1391-6, 308, 472, 474; *C.P.R.* 1396-9, 541, 546.
- 17 *C.P.R.* 1396-9, 88.
- 18 *C.Cl.R.* 1399-1402, 117; *C.P.R.* 1401-5, 257; for Wimbush see James L. Gillespie, *The Cheshire Archers of Richard II: A Royal Experiment in Bastard Feudalism* (Ph.D., Princeton University, 1973), 242-3; The last surviving wardrobe debenture for Swettenham's wages and robes dates from 6 Henry IV. E.404/511/419.
- 19 *C.P.R.* 1405-8, 18; *C.Cl.R.* 1409-13, 227.
- 20 *C.P.R.* 1388-1401, 374, 453; *C.Cl.R.* 1399-1402, 335; cf. *C.Cl.R.* 1402-5, 54-5.
- 21 *C.P.R.* 1408-13, 459.
- 22 *Calendar of Recognizance Rolls of the Palatinate of Chester, 37th Rep. Dep. Keeper of Public Records* (1875), 447.
- 23 R. le Strange, *A Complete Descriptive Guide to British Monumental Brasses* (1972), 98; Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 228.