

Palatinate administration and local society
in the palatinate of Lancashire under
the Lancastrian kings, 1399-1461*

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The palatinate of Lancaster during the Lancastrian period is at the centre of an evident paradox. From 1399, the king held the duchy of Lancaster in his private person, as duke of Lancaster. In the palatinate of Lancaster though, the duke was entitled to exercise the public power of a king. The palatinate was a liberty governed separately from the rest of the English realm, but was tied to the management of the duchy of Lancaster lands. Any study of the palatinate must begin by defining precisely what that term meant for the county of Lancashire once the duchy of Lancaster came into royal hands and how that state of affairs came to be. Thus, the historian of the palatinate must start from its very origins.

The county of Lancashire acquired a palatinate jurisdiction on 6 March 1351 when Henry of Grosmont, earl of Lancaster, was created duke of Lancaster by Edward III. The palatinate jurisdiction was granted along with the title of duke in order 'to add some substance to the dignity'.¹ The Lancashire palatinate was modelled specifically on the palatinate in the adjacent county of Cheshire.² There was also precedent for this sort of 'realm within a realm' in the county of Durham, which was a palatinate controlled by the bishop.³

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¹ Robert Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster* (London, 1953), p. 40.

² *Ibid.*

³ For more on Durham and its administration, particularly judicial, see Kenneth Emsley and C. M. Fraser, *The courts of the county palatine of Durham from the earliest times to 1971* (Durham, 1984).

The duke was granted the right to his own chancery in the county and his own justices to hear all civil and crown pleas.⁴ Implicit in the grant of an independent chancery was that the king's writ was no longer to run in the county of Lancashire.⁵ Still, as in Cheshire, the king retained the rights of pardon and correction of errors in justice.⁶ Any direction from the king was now addressed to the duke or to his chancellor in the county palatine.⁷ The duke's other major right was the appointment of the sheriff in the county without royal consultation.⁸ Though modelled on Cheshire, the palatinate in Lancashire was more limited; Lancashire continued to send knights of the shire to parliament after the palatinate was granted.⁹ This meant that Lancashire, unlike Cheshire, was subject to direct taxation agreed upon in parliamentary sessions.¹⁰ Duke Henry's own organisation inside the duchy was heavily influenced by the practices of the royal administration.¹¹ The palatine chancery kept series of patent and close rolls dated by the years of the duke's regality.¹² In addition to the appointment of the sheriff in the county, Henry had his own escheator and appointed two justices to sit at Lancaster.¹³

When Henry died, he left two daughters, Maude and Blanche, but no sons. As was set out in the original grant, the palatinate ceased to exist.¹⁴ The Lancastrian inheritance descended through Blanche to John of Gaunt, brother to Edward III, who was created the second duke of Lancaster on 13 November

⁴ W. Hardy, ed., *Charters of the Duchy of Lancaster* (London, 1845).

⁵ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 42; F. W. Maitland, ed., *Bracton's note book: a collection of cases decided in the king's courts during the reign of Henry the Third* (London, 1887), p. 1127.

⁶ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 42.

⁷ *Calendar of the close rolls* (61 vols, London, 1892-1963), 1354-60, p. 316; Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

1362.¹⁵ John of Gaunt now held lands and wealth surpassed in England only by the king. On 28 February 1377, the palatinate was revived for John of Gaunt's lifetime, and in 1390 the palatinate was again made hereditary, allowing it to descend to his son, Henry of Bolingbroke, at his death.¹⁶ In rebuilding the palatinate, Gaunt followed his predecessor's example, in looking to royal administration for a model. Thomas Thelwall, a former king's clerk, was chosen as his chancellor.¹⁷ He appointed three justices to hear all kinds of pleas at two sessions annually (in later years, only two justices were appointed).¹⁸

On 13 October 1399, after he inherited the title of duke of Lancaster, Henry of Bolingbroke was crowned as Henry IV. From that day forward, the duchy has remained continually in possession of the monarch. Henry issued 'The Great Charter of the Duchy', directing that the duchy and the palatinate should remain an inheritance separate from that of the crown.¹⁹ At a stroke, the palatinate of Lancaster became a unique administrative structure within the Lancastrian kingdom with its only near parallel in neighbouring Cheshire, which had been in royal hands since 1237 and a palatinate since at least 1297.²⁰

It is the early efforts to integrate the palatinate and the Lancastrian inheritance into the governance of the realm that interest us here. Lancashire was a county in the fifteenth-century English polity, subject to the same forces and pressures as other counties. The great political events in the realm during these years had a significant impact on the organisation of society in the county. Lancashire may have been an anomaly in the Lancastrian polity, but a study of the county has much to say about the governance of the realm. Although the duchy of Lancaster was a

¹⁵ *Rotuli parliamentorum, 1278-1503* (6 vols, London, 1783-1832), II, 273; Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 50.

¹⁶ *Calendar of the patent rolls* (55 vols, London, 1891-1916), 1374-77, p. 433; Hardy, *Charters of the Duchy*, no. 14; Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Annual reports of the deputy keeper of the public records* (London, 1840-), 32 (1871), p. 348.

¹⁸ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 57.

¹⁹ Hardy, *Charters of the Duchy*, pp. 102-40.

²⁰ Dorothy Clayton, *The administration of the county palatine of Chester: 1442-1485* (Manchester, 1990); Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor state, 1480-1560* (London, 2000), pp. 48, 51.

source of private power for the public governance of England, this was a potentially dangerous method of ruling.²¹ In Lancashire, the king had control in his private person of a separate public entity. Lancashire could make important contributions to the realm if it was a well-governed county and was uniquely important as a locus of duchy lands.

Many of these issues have not been completely explored by scholars. Despite significant recent work on Cheshire, Lancashire's sister palatinate, little recent attention has been given to the history of Lancashire in the Lancastrian period.²² Accordingly, this article seeks to explore the effects of the seemingly enigmatic liberty on the county of Lancashire and its men. In particular, two questions are addressed here. How did the palatinate affect the career prospects of Lancashire men? How did the palatinate government affect justice and administration in the county?

Robert Somerville's *History of the Duchy of Lancaster* is a remarkably complete record of the duchy, its lands and its administration and by necessity gives some attention to Lancashire, the county at the centre of the Lancastrian inheritance.²³ In a separate article, 'The palatinate courts in Lancashire', Somerville also gives a brief history of the workings of the palatine courts, with emphasis on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁴ Still, Somerville's work predates more recent post-McFarlane county studies, and his works on the palatinate itself are quite limited in length. He sets out an outline of the administration in the county but, given his focus on the duchy, leaves many open questions as to the nature of the county and the palatinate.

The most recent work on the duchy of Lancaster comes from Helen Castor and Simon Walker. Walker has written on the

²¹ H. R. Castor, *The king, the crown and the Duchy of Lancaster* (Oxford, 2000), p. 312.

²² Clayton, *Administration of Cheshire*.

²³ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*.

²⁴ Robert Somerville, 'The palatinate courts in Lancashire', in Alan Harding, ed., *Law-making and law-makers in British history: papers presented to the Edinburgh legal history conference, 1977* (London, 1980), pp. 54-63.

duchy of Lancaster and Lancastrian men under John of Gaunt.²⁵ Castor has explored the role of the duchy in royal administration during the Lancastrian years.²⁶ She considers how the duchy of Lancaster was used in the rule of the localities, particularly in East Anglia, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. She tells of a duchy affinity that was particularly useful to the king during the strong rule of Henry IV and V in directly controlling the realm, but only when managed as part of the public administration of the kingdom.²⁷ She also considers the interplay between the duchy and the nobility, particularly under Henry VI, when some nobles were able to co-opt the resources of the duchy and the Lancastrian affinity to enhance their own lordship in the localities.²⁸

Lancashire cannot be studied without taking note of Castor's conclusions on the role of the duchy in the rule of the kingdom. Unfortunately, Michael Bennett's study of Lancashire and Cheshire careerism, the best study of Lancashire society in print, predates Castor's work.²⁹ Bennett's work, in any case, focuses primarily on the years before Henry IV came to the throne, though it does consider later events in moderate detail. Bennett's study is quite strong, but his conclusions sometimes seem to disregard the importance of the duchy of Lancaster in the North West, and in his examination of Lancashire little time is given to the county as a palatinate, rather than merely as a county of England.

The sources for Lancashire are, fortunately, quite good. The plea rolls for the palatinate courts from most of Henry VI's reign survive, along with some rolls from the reign of both Henry IV and V.³⁰ The palatinate chancery's patent and close rolls also survive and have mostly been published.³¹ Unfortunately, no records of palatinate chancery court cases exist before Henry VII

²⁵ Simon Walker, *The Lancastrian affinity, 1361-1399* (Oxford, 1990).

²⁶ Castor, *The king, the crown*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84 specifically tells of the earl of Suffolk in East Anglia, while p. 252 draws similar conclusions about the earl of Stafford in Staffordshire.

²⁹ M. J. Bennett, *Community, class and careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire society in the age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1982).

³⁰ *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 35 (1874), p. 57.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32 (1871), pp. 331-65; 33 (1872), pp. 1-42; 37 (1876), pp. 172-80.

but, as we shall see, certain indications of these cases do survive. Some Lancashire cases also reached the royal chancery, or even the parliament, and were recorded there. The records of the duchy in Lancashire, including duchy patent rolls, are also preserved.³² When combined with royal administrative records, this means that Lancashire men can easily be traced in their roles in the county, the duchy and the realm. Lancashire and royal *inquisitions post mortem*, when taken together, can also give a relatively complete picture of Lancashire landholding.³³

Officeholding

In county administration and justice, the peculiar status granted by Edward III to Lancashire deeply affected the possibilities and options open to Lancashire men. In the realm of patronage and office-holding, though, Lancashire men were generally unaffected by the palatinate; instead, palatinate offices were generally the realm of royal administrators and county offices remained in the hands of the local gentry. The effects of the royally-controlled palatinate inevitably depended on the state of the king and the crown and the administration of the greater realm, but certain effects were constant throughout the Lancastrian period.

Many of the realm's most prominent careerists were to be found in Lancashire, but few of them were local men. Instead, palatinate administration was dominated by royal careerists, very few of whom were actually from Lancashire. The palatinate was the most important source for career opportunities in Lancashire, yet it offered no advantage to Lancashire men with an interest in the royal career ladder, but rather was the domain of trained

³² *Ibid.*, 40 (1879), pp. 521-45.

³³ For Lancashire *inquisitions post mortem*, see *ibid.*, 39 (1878), pp. 532-62 and W. Langton, ed., *Abstracts of inquisitions post mortem*, Chetham Society, new ser. 95 (1875). For royal *inquisitions post mortem*, see J. Caley, ed., *Calendarium inquisitionum post mortem, sive escaetarum* (4 vols, London 1806-26); M. C. Carpenter and K. Parkin, eds, *Calendar of inquisitions post mortem and other analogous documents preserved in the Public Records Office, 1 to 5 Henry VI* (London, 2003), particularly p. 5 of the introduction, in which palatinate inquisitions are discussed; M. C. Carpenter and C. Noble, eds, *Calendar of inquisitions post mortem and other analogous documents preserved in the Public Records Office, 6 to 10 Henry VI* (London, 2004).

lawyers whose background and training could, and usually did, serve them well in the ranks of the Westminster courts.

As a palatine county, the administration of Lancashire relied on offices which had no equivalent in other counties in England apart from the Cheshire and Durham palatinates and, even in those two counties, the structures tended to be somewhat different.³⁴ The king had two justices at Lancaster, a chancellor, an attorney, a clerk of the common and crown pleas and often a vice-chancellor, and the county exchequer had its own barons.³⁵ This was in addition to the more typical county offices, which also existed in Lancashire; the county had a sheriff, an escheator, justices of the peace and the usual periodic commissions for array, defence or taxation, all operating in the county concurrently with the palatine officials. For the purposes of this article, this distinction between 'county offices', with an equivalent in virtually every county in England, and 'palatine offices', present only because of Lancashire's palatinate structure, is an important one.

In Lancashire, unlike in most other counties, the king retained a means of reaching directly into the county through the frequent, though not permanent, presence of the justices at Lancaster and of the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster and the palatinate of Lancashire. The holders of these offices tended to be extremely important national figures with close links to the king. A chief justice and a 'second' justice were appointed by letters patent of the duchy to sit at Lancaster.³⁶ The justices were typically not local men, and all the justices who sat after 1399 were professional lawyers.³⁷ Every justice of the Lancastrian period was concurrently a justice of the common pleas or king's bench. Most were appointed to sit at Lancashire first, and then granted a concurrent appointment at Westminster within a few years.³⁸ The

³⁴ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-91.

³⁶ Somerville, 'Palatinate courts', p. 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁸ For a complete list of the justices, see Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, pp. 467-75. For the commissions of array, see generally *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 40 (1879). For individual biographical information, see A. J. Martinez, Jnr, 'Palatinate administration and local society in Lancashire under

justices were outsiders, not active in county society; no justice (nor any other holder of a palatinate office) was ever called to a Lancashire commission of array, unlike the holders of county offices, particularly the sheriffs.³⁹ Not a single justice appears in the surviving *inquisitions post mortem* for Lancashire, which are generally quite complete.⁴⁰

All of the chief justices before 1439 were legal officers of the duchy of Lancaster before they served in Lancashire. Interestingly, after 1439, none held duchy office before taking office as a justice of the palatinate. Perhaps this is because of the ongoing integration of the duchy of Lancaster hierarchy with that of royal administration. In other facets of administration, though, this integration was well under way by the middle of Henry V's reign.⁴¹

The chief justices sat at the apex of the legal hierarchy in Lancashire, but their backgrounds were shared by the less important legal figures. There are no striking differences between the chief justices and the associate justices and, in fact, many of the associate justices went on to sit as chief justice.⁴² Similarly, more than half of the Lancaster attorneys went on to sit as justices at Lancaster.⁴³ Serving as the king's attorney at Lancaster was a clear step on the career ladder that could lead to service as one of the king's justices at Lancaster and, in turn, at Westminster.

The chancellors of the palatinate also tended to be careerists from the duchy and royal retinues.⁴⁴ Unlike the justices, though, they were not typically common lawyers and none were qualified in the canon or civil laws. As with the justices, not a single record exists of land held by the chancellors of the

the Lancastrian kings' (unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2005), pp. 12-15.

³⁹ For example, see generally *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 40 (1879), pp. 522, 526.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 39 (1878), pp. 532-62 and Langton, *Abstracts of inquisitions post mortem*.

⁴¹ Castor, *The king, the crown*, p. 37.

⁴² Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, pp. 467-75.

⁴³ Compare *ibid.*, pp. 481-84 (list of attorneys) to pp. 467-75 (justices).

⁴⁴ For a complete list of chancellors, see *ibid.*, pp. 475-76.

palatinate in the county of Lancashire.⁴⁵ No chancellor of this period ever held another post inside the county before his appointment as chancellor. Again, they are best seen as royal men and not local figures. Their backgrounds were varied, but many held positions in the Lancastrian retinue – for much of the Lancastrian period, one man served concurrently as chancellor of the duchy and of the palatinate.⁴⁶ The links between the palatinate chancery and the duchy were quite strong.

The lack of connection between the palatinate officers and the county is actually best illustrated by consideration of the few Lancashire men who did rise in the palatinate administration. These men had careers that took on a character more common to legal careerists than to Lancashire gentlemen and which often took them and their heirs permanently out of the county.

Sir Thomas Urswick is one of those Lancashire-born men who did rise through the palatinate. Urswick was a member of a prominent Lancashire family. His father, Thomas senior, served as receiver for Lancashire.⁴⁷ An uncle, Robert Urswick, served as sheriff for the county.⁴⁸ The younger Thomas Urswick chose a career in law and found a great deal of success as a legal servant of the duchy of Lancaster. He was trained at Gray's Inn and gave readings there in 1441 and 1448.⁴⁹ By 1449, he was an MP for Midhurst, in Sussex.⁵⁰ He was retained as an apprentice-at-law of the duchy of Lancaster in 1452, and became the king's attorney at Lancashire the same year.⁵¹ His career also progressed beyond the county. By 1453, he was common serjeant of London,

⁴⁵ *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 39 (1878), pp. 532-62 and Langton, *Abstracts of inquisitions post mortem*.

⁴⁶ Compare Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, pp. 388-96 to pp. 475-76.

⁴⁷ J. Wedgwood, *A history of parliament: biographies of the members of the Commons House, 1439-1509* (2 vols, London, 1936), II, 898; *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 40 (1879), p. 536.

⁴⁸ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 462.

⁴⁹ H. Summerson, 'Sir Thomas Urswick', *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (61 vols, Oxford, 2004), 55, 960; S. E. Thorne, *Readings and moots at the inns of court in the fifteenth century*, Selden Society, 71 (1954), p. xxxii.

⁵⁰ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 482; Wedgwood, *History of parliament*, II, 898.

⁵¹ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 482.

responsible for defending its interests in the court of common pleas.⁵² In 1454, he was recorder of London.⁵³ Urswick was an MP for London in 1461, 1462 and 1471. He was also chief baron of the exchequer in 1471.⁵⁴ Despite his father's position in a duchy of Lancaster office and although he sat in parliament in 1470 for Henry VI's readeption, he was knighted by Edward IV in 1471.⁵⁵

Urswick acquired lands in various counties, but there is no indication that he held any land in Lancashire at his death.⁵⁶ His move away from Lancashire is reflected in his marriages. His first was to a daughter of the Needham family, prominent in Lancashire, but his second marriage, by 1457, was to Isabel Rich, the daughter of a London mercer, with no Lancashire connection.⁵⁷ At his death, he held significant lands in Essex and was buried at Dagenham, in that county.⁵⁸

Urswick's career shows that a Lancashire man could become a successful careerist through the palatine administration. However, it is not clear that it was of any particular benefit to be a Lancashire man. Urswick's position in the palatinate was no help to him in establishing his fortunes in Lancashire and, in fact, it drew him away from the county to pursue his legal career. Bennett observes that, for military families, 'with the passage of time... expatriate careerists in their turn lost their regional identity' and this rings equally true with regard to Urswick's career.⁵⁹

We may also consider James Strangeways, the only Lancashire man who served as the king's justice at Lancaster during the Lancastrian period.⁶⁰ He was a figure in the duchy of Lancaster from early in his career. In 1401, he appeared as the

⁵² Wedgwood, *History of parliament*, II, 898.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Calendar of patent rolls, 1467-1477*, p. 259.

⁵⁵ Wedgwood, *History of parliament*, II, 898.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Summerson, 'Urswick', 55, 961.

⁵⁸ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 482.

⁵⁹ Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 250.

⁶⁰ J. Roskell, 'Sir James Strangeways of West Harlsey and Whorlton', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 39 (1956-58), p. 456; Martinez, 'Palatinate administration', pp. 12-14.

king's attorney at Lancaster.⁶¹ He was retained as an attorney for the duchy in 1426. In the same year he was second justice in the palatinate and by 1436 he was appointed chief justice.⁶² In the meantime, he was also becoming prominent at Westminster, where he was a serjeant-at-law from 1411.⁶³ In 1426, Strangeways became puisne justice of the common pleas at Westminster.⁶⁴ His legal career took him to Yorkshire, though, where he served as JP in 1412⁶⁵ and he established his line there, where his son was to serve as MP in later years.⁶⁶ His career, like that of Urswick, drew him away from the county.⁶⁷ Strangeways rose through palatinate office to national prominence, but this drew him away from the county; he ended his life as a prominent figure in the Yorkshire gentry.⁶⁸ His family remained in Yorkshire and his son served as an MP from that county in 1449.⁶⁹

Comparison of the careers of Strangeways and Urswick shows many similarities. Both took advantage of the palatine institutions in their legal careers. Neither Strangeways nor Urswick used their increased wealth to purchase Lancashire property and status in Lancashire society. Instead, both men's careers led them to London, where the opportunities for lawyers were much greater. Lancashire men did not appear in any exceptional numbers in the palatine offices; in fact, Strangeways and Urswick were the only two to do so.⁷⁰ The careers of these two men resemble those of the other legal servants of the duchy who were not from Lancashire much more than they resemble those of other Lancashire gentlemen.

The role of the palatinate administration in Lancashire was more analogous to that of the royal government in non-

⁶¹ J. Parker, ed., *Plea rolls of the county palatine of Lancaster*, Chetham Society, new ser. 87 (1928), p. 66.

⁶² Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 469.

⁶³ Roskell, 'Sir James Strangeways', p. 457.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Wedgwood, *History of parliament*, II, 820.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Roskell, 'Sir James Strangeways', p. 457.

⁶⁹ Wedgwood, *History of parliament*, II, 820.

⁷⁰ C. M. Carpenter, *Locality and polity: a study of Warwickshire landed society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 2.

palatine counties. All over England, by the fifteenth century, a great deal of administrative power had been devolved from the central administration to the county level, to be wielded by the local officers of the crown, usually drawn from the county gentry.⁷¹ The sheriff, escheator and justices of the peace wielded important authority inside the county.⁷² In Lancashire, the situation was not so different from elsewhere in the realm; because the palatinate did not exist throughout the fourteenth century, and was modelled on royal government in any case, fourteenth-century innovations in local government were not ignored in Lancashire. County offices were held in Lancashire by the same sorts of local figures who held them in other English counties. Across England, the leading gentry tended to hold these positions and undertake the regular administration of the county.⁷³ The same was true of Lancashire.

The Lancashire sheriffs during this period were all landholders in the palatinate. From 1399 to 1461, ten sheriffs served; all were drawn from prominent local gentry families.⁷⁴ Eight of the ten held the rank of knight when they were first appointed to the post and a ninth, Nicholas Byron, was knighted while serving as sheriff.⁷⁵ The tenth, Robert Urswick, was the son of a knight.⁷⁶ The primary link between the crown and the sheriffs was through the duchy of Lancaster rather than the palatinate. Several of the sheriffs held large annuities from the duchy.⁷⁷ In

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 263; E. Acheson, *A gentry community: Leicestershire in the fifteenth century, c.1422-c.1485* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 108.

⁷² Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, p. 263.

⁷³ Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 106.

⁷⁴ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, pp. 461-62. For details of the men's local connections, see Martinez, 'Palatinate administration', pp. 17-19.

⁷⁵ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 462.

⁷⁶ J. S. Roskell, *The knights of the shire for the county palatine of Lancaster (1377-1460)* (Manchester, 1937), p. 47.

⁷⁷ For example Sir Thomas Gerrard was granted an annuity of 20 marks p.a., J. S. Roskell, *A history of parliament: biographies of the members of the Commons House, 1386-1421* (4 vols, London, 1992), III, 176. Sir Robert Laurence was given £40 p.a., National Archives, DL 29/89 m.1631. For more detailed biographies of the sheriffs, see Martinez 'Palatinate administration', pp. 19-21.

Lancashire, as in other counties, the office of sheriff was attractive to the highest class of local gentlemen.⁷⁸

The local gentry were also important as a source of military power. As Bennett emphasises, the county was one of the most important sources of military power for the Lancastrian kings.⁷⁹ Henry IV depended on loyal men in Lancashire to put down rebellion in the county. In 1402, a commission of 14 local gentlemen was appointed in the county to arrest those who spread rumours of Richard II's return.⁸⁰ During his reign, Lancashire men were also called upon to raise forces against internal rebellion. For instance, in 1403 and 1405 Lancashire commissions, including the sheriff Sir Thomas Gerrard, were formed to raise men to meet the earl of Northumberland in battle.⁸¹ Under Henry V, Raph Staveley and Robert Laurence, both of whom would later serve as sheriff of Lancashire, fought alongside the king at Agincourt.⁸² The military service of the Lancashire gentry continued during the reign of Henry VI.⁸³ The Lancashire gentry were the king's primary means of accessing the military forces of the county. Thus, opportunities remained open for the military men of the palatinate to serve the king at home and abroad.

The Lancashire gentry were rewarded for their service with grants of land from the king rather than with offices. Through the duchy, the king retained direct control of a great deal of land which could be granted by the duchy chancery to encourage loyalty among men in the palatinate and reward them. For example, in 1447 long-term leases on duchy manors in the palatinate were granted to many of the important gentry families of the palatinate, many of them the same families that provided the county officers.⁸⁴ This was part of a pattern of large-scale alienation of crown lands during the personal rule of Henry VI. The pattern of grants recorded in the duchy chancery is notably

⁷⁸ For comparison, see Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 112 finding that the shrievalty in Leicestershire was nearly always held by wealthy knights.

⁷⁹ Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 244.

⁸⁰ *Calendar of patent rolls, 1401-05*, p. 130

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292; *ibid.*, 1405-08, p. 66.

⁸² Roskell, *Knights of the shire*, pp. 100, 111.

⁸³ *Calendar of patent rolls, 1422-29*, p. 405.

⁸⁴ *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 40 (1879), p. 539.

different from the grants elsewhere in the kingdom. Of 169 recipients of grants of crown lands made in the 1440s noted by Wolffe, only 29 were men whose interests were primarily local, while the rest were national figures.⁸⁵ By contrast, although only eleven duchy grants from Lancashire survive, none are to nobles and virtually all of the most prominent county families had grants of land in the same year.⁸⁶ Henry VI's grants were perhaps a bit too much, as they eventually led to the acts of resumption during the 1450s.⁸⁷ Whether or not these grants were the stuff of good governance, there is no doubt that they show that Henry VI (or whoever was acting for him) was willing to distribute largesse on a large scale in the county of Lancashire in a way that was materially different from the rest of the realm.

During our period, in Lancashire the most prominent example of a county family rising through local government and military service is that of the Stanleys of Lathom. Their story is well addressed in Bennett's work, but will be repeated here briefly for comparison with the legal careerists already discussed.⁸⁸ The Stanley family rose through military service without leaving Lancashire behind. By the end of the Lancastrian period, they were prominent figures in royal service, but still drew their power and wealth primarily from Lancashire and neighbouring Cheshire.

In the early Lancastrian period, the Stanleys were a significant gentry family, originally from Cheshire, but with major interests in Lancashire.⁸⁹ They rose through their service, primarily military, first to Richard II and later to the Lancastrian kings.⁹⁰ Sir John Stanley was steward of the household of Richard II. He also served as Richard's lieutenant in Ireland and originally gathered forces in Ireland to fight against Henry of Bolingbroke's return to

⁸⁵ B. P. Wolffe, *The royal demesne in English history: the crown estate in the governance of the realm from the Conquest to 1509* (London, 1971), p. 109.

⁸⁶ See *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 40 (1879), p. 539 for the actual grants; see Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 82 for the importance of these families.

⁸⁷ Wolffe, *The royal demesne*, p. 109.

⁸⁸ See Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, pp. 215-23.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

England.⁹¹ He survived Henry's triumph without great damage to his position and was soon on the rise again as a man with great value to the Lancastrian kings as a military leader for Lancashire and Cheshire.⁹² He was again appointed lieutenant in Ireland under Henry V,⁹³ which helped to secure his role as a major military leader in the North West, where he recruited local forces for his campaigns in the king's name.⁹⁴ His son, the second Sir John Stanley, also built his career in the military, but was highly focused on the acquisition of land and influence in Lancashire and Cheshire.⁹⁵ By the 1420s, the second Sir John Stanley was serving frequently as an arbitrator in Lancashire disputes.⁹⁶ The tradition of military leadership still remained with the family, for Sir Thomas Stanley, his son, also served as lieutenant of Ireland in the 1430s and similarly called Lancashire men to fight with him.⁹⁷ Finally, in 1455, Sir Thomas Stanley was ennobled.⁹⁸ No member of the Stanley family held a palatinate post in the fifteenth century; however, they took leadership in the county just as they might have in another county in England, by serving on the peace commissions, as county officers and by organising the local gentry for war, although with Cheshire's and Lancashire's strong contribution to the royal armies and the Stanleys' periodic role in Ireland, their military role was exceptionally marked. The rise in Stanley fortunes stands in contrast to success like that of Strangeways and Urswick, built on legal service, and the dynasty that resulted is appreciably different in character.

Bennett sees the rise of the Stanleys in Lancashire and Cheshire as necessary to provide intermediaries between county society and the crown once the royal earldom of Cheshire was drawn into national politics under Richard II and the duchy of

⁹¹ M. J. Bennett, 'Sir John Stanley', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, 52, 226.

⁹² Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 220.

⁹³ *Calendar of patent rolls*, 1413-16, p. 53.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 220.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁹⁷ *Calendar of patent rolls*, 1429-36, p. 133.

⁹⁸ M. J. Bennett, 'Thomas Stanley, first baron Stanley', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, 52, 236.

Lancaster became a royal property in 1399.⁹⁹ Even though Sir Thomas Stanley was not ennobled until 1455, the Stanley family, as the leading gentry family in Lancashire, clearly took on the major role in organising the county which was typical of noblemen in other parts of the realm.¹⁰⁰ He describes the Stanleys as taking on the burden of 'good lordship' in Cheshire from the time of Richard II and in Lancashire during the later Lancastrian period.¹⁰¹

Taken on the whole, most Lancashire gentry families, despite their importance in the county, are not to be found advancing to posts outside the county to serve the king directly or through the duchy of Lancaster and even fewer of them held legal offices. The Lancashire gentry were valuable to the king primarily for governing the county and for providing military service. Advancement in the royal administration from Lancashire appears to have been no easier than elsewhere in the realm. Nonetheless, the palatinate seems not to have disadvantaged Lancashire men either, in that the full spectrum of county offices were still available to the local gentry. Moreover, the grants made from the duchy to local gentlemen kept the county closely linked to the centre even without a clear path for advancement into royal service at the national level.

Governance

There was another area in which the palatinate could benefit the men of Lancashire and the king. It may have offered an effective local bureaucracy, administration and legal system. Through the palatinate institutions, royal administrators were close at hand in Lancashire to perform the tasks usually performed at Westminster. Justice in Lancashire was administered in a fundamentally different way from in the non-palatinate counties of England. The presence of the Lancaster justices in the county at least twice a year brought Lancashire much closer than most other counties to the central administration of the law. This was doubly true because the Lancaster justices tended to be judges

⁹⁹ Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 223.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

with appointments to either the court of king's bench or the court of common pleas at Westminster and so, in effect, a branch of the royal government.

During the time of Edward III and Richard II, the king's bench sat as a court in eyre at least once in every county of England except Durham and Cheshire, even though it was already much less itinerant than in the early thirteenth century.¹⁰² However, the king's bench sat in Lancashire only once during the fourteenth century, in 1334, before the palatinate was established.¹⁰³ At this time, then, the palatinate had less access to the royal justices than did the other counties of England. Instead, under Edward III and Richard II, Lancashire was subject to servants of the duchy of Lancaster, who sat as the palatine justices and were not part of the royal system of justice. When the palatinate was in private hands, the influence of royal administrators was necessarily at its nadir.

After Henry IV took the throne, the situation was completely reversed. The king's bench ceased almost entirely to be an itinerant court and held sessions almost exclusively at Westminster during the three Lancastrian reigns.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the other counties of England had reduced access to royal justice. This was not the case in Lancashire. When the Lancastrian kings took power, duchy careerists became the leading justices in the realm. Because they also remained the palatine justices and continued to sit at Lancaster, Lancashire was subject to a sort of itinerant royal court with no equivalent in other counties during the reigns of the Lancastrian kings.

The common law jurisdiction of the palatinate court was complete and exclusive, including all common law cases originating in the palatinate or brought by a resident of the palatinate.¹⁰⁵ All Lancashire men also had the right to force cases

¹⁰² B. H. Putnam, ed., *Proceedings before the justices of the peace in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Edward III to Richard III* (London, 1938), p. lix; A. Musson and W. M. Ormrod, *The evolution of English justice: law politics and society in the fourteenth century* (London, 1999), p. 19.

¹⁰³ Putnam, *Proceedings*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Putnam, *Proceedings*, p. lix; Musson and Ormrod, *Evolution of English justice*, p. 18; the exception here was in 2 Henry V, but was short lived.

¹⁰⁵ Somerville, 'Palatinate courts', p. 57.

into the palatinate courts if they were called to be defendants in another county.¹⁰⁶ Cases from the palatinate courts, whether from the crown side or the civil side of the jurisdiction, could be called before the king's bench at Westminster for correction of error or pardon of life and limb, but to no other court;¹⁰⁷ the court of common pleas at Westminster had no jurisdiction to hear cases originating in any of the palatine jurisdictions of England.¹⁰⁸ As in any part of England, cases heard in the palatinate were also subject to appeal at parliament, whose superior jurisdiction was unaffected by the palatine liberties. The procedure in the palatine common law courts mirrored that in the royal courts quite closely. Cases could begin in any one of several ways. Indictments from a grand jury of the last session of the court are commonly represented in the plea rolls. Many cases also begin with a writ, often of trespass. The justices were also empowered to hear commissions of assize and many cases begin with a personal appearance at the court, leading to the hearing of an assize of novel disseisin.¹⁰⁹ Cases commencing at the sheriff's tourn are also common in the years of Henry IV, largely replaced by cases presented before the justices of the peace by the time of Henry VI. This mirrored a change which took place in the entire realm, as JPs grew in importance.¹¹⁰ Cases for recognisance of debt began with a bill in the palatinate chancery, which was forwarded to the palatine justices with the endorsement of the chancellor in order to begin proceedings.¹¹¹ The justices had responsibility for supervision of all the lower courts in the county, and the palatine court made the final enrollment of all decisions.¹¹²

By the reign of Henry VI, the justices had also emerged in the role of arbitrator – in other counties, this role was often taken

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁸ M. Hastings, *Court of common pleas in fifteenth century England* (Ithaca, 1947); Paul Worthington, *Royal government in the counties palatine of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1460-1509* (Swansea, 1990), p. 176.

¹⁰⁹ See, for examples, Parker, *Plea rolls*.

¹¹⁰ J. B. Post, 'Local jurisdictions and judgment of death in later medieval England', *Criminal Justice History*, 4 (1983), p. 3.

¹¹¹ There are several examples under National Archives, PL 14/155/2.

¹¹² See National Archives, PL 15; all cases from lower county sessions were enrolled with a final decision from the Lancaster justices.

on by noblemen or prominent gentlemen. In Lancashire, those gentlemen tended to sit with the justices in arbitration.¹¹³ Arbitration was an extremely important form of conflict resolution; it was also deeply tied to local society.¹¹⁴ The appearance of the palatinate justices in this context shows their role in providing local governance. In 1424, Thomas Ureswick and Nicholas Botiller, prominent local esquires, sat with William Ambrose, the second justice at Lancaster, to hear an arbitration over land claimed by the abbot of Furness.¹¹⁵ Similarly, in 1435, William Chauntrell, associate justice, sat with Sir William Harrington, the sheriff, for an arbitration in the county, thereby joining together the county and palatinate branches of Lancashire administration.¹¹⁶ The justices at Lancaster were also the witnesses to every final concord made in the county, giving them a supervisory role in another important form of conflict resolution.¹¹⁷ Virtually no conflict in the county could be brought to a legal conclusion without at least some involvement of the palatinate justices.

It was thus the case that the justices at Lancaster played a major role in providing justice in the county. The need for noble mediators was lessened by the presence of men with significant knowledge of the county but without the local interests that could be expected to lead to bias. These justices were some of the pre-eminent legal figures in the realm; through the palatinate courts, they were involved in day-to-day disputes in Lancashire as they were unlikely to be involved in other counties. This was one of the major advantages to what Helen Cam, in her seminal work on the medieval franchise, called 'justice on the doorstep'¹¹⁸: even the

¹¹³ Castor, *The king, the crown*, p. 82; E. Powell, *Kingship, law and society: criminal justice in the reign of Henry V* (Oxford, 1989), p. 107.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 36 (1875), p. 170.

¹¹⁶ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 472; T. C. Porteus, ed., *Calendar of the Standish deeds, 1230-1575* (Wigan, 1933), no. 295.

¹¹⁷ For many examples, see W. Farrer, ed., *Final concords of the county of Lancaster*, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 39 (1899), 46 (1903), 50 (1905), 60 (1910).

¹¹⁸ H. M. Cam, 'The evolution of the medieval English franchise', *Speculum*, 32 (1957), pp. 427-42.

smallest case was guaranteed a hearing before the king's most trusted legal officials.

The constitutional structure of the palatinate also dictated that a great deal of royal influence should be administered through the chancellor of the palatinate. This also involved the duchy in administration, as the chancellor of the palatinate was often also the chancellor of the duchy.¹¹⁹ Writs from the royal chancery, which were issued to the sheriffs in most counties, were issued to the chancellor of the palatinate in Lancashire.¹²⁰ Even where writs were merely forwarded directly from the chancellor to the sheriff, this gave a royal official a dominant position relative to the local gentry officers of Lancashire. The chancellor of the county palatine also typically chose a deputy to sit permanently at Lancashire and this man was often local.¹²¹ Lancashire commissions of the peace were enrolled in the palatine chancery and not at Westminster. JPs were chosen by the duchy council, rather than by the royal government.¹²² The chancellor also had direct oversight of the escheator, inquisitions were returned to the chancellor and all actions on these inquisitions depended on his writ.¹²³

The palatine chancery, like the royal chancery, also began to develop an equity jurisdiction, to hear cases for which no viable remedy existed at common law, or cases where the common law remedy was ineffective because of exceptional circumstances.¹²⁴ The records of the chancery court do not begin until the early years of Henry VII.¹²⁵ However, traces of the earlier operation of an equitable jurisdiction during the Lancastrian period are present in other records.¹²⁶ Concurrent with the

¹¹⁹ Somerville, 'Palatinate courts', p. 60.

¹²⁰ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 44.

¹²¹ A list of deputy chancellors is to be found in *ibid.*, p. 477.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹²⁴ Somerville, 'Palatinate courts', p. 58.

¹²⁵ Chancery court records beginning in 1473 are held in the National Archives under the headings PL 6 and PL 7.

¹²⁶ As early as 1397, bills were sent addressed both to the duchy chancellor and the justices naming petitioners and instructing them to do 'droit et justice', National Archives, PL 3/1/15. By 1401, a cause was heard before the justices which had first been heard before the duchy chancellor, Parker, *Plea*

development of the palatine chancery, the duchy of Lancaster had another equity court, an outgrowth of the duchy chancery with jurisdiction in all duchy lands, in or out of Lancashire. This court, which would eventually sit at London, came to be called the court of duchy chamber; it is also not recorded until the early years of Henry VII,¹²⁷ but its pre-eminence over the palatinate chancery court seems never to have been in doubt.¹²⁸

During the Lancastrian years, some cases involving the county were being heard at the Westminster chancery court. Even in its later, fully developed form, the jurisdiction of the palatinate chancery court was never exclusive.¹²⁹ Cases brought to Westminster from Lancashire tended specifically to point to malfeasance by officials connected directly to the duchy.¹³⁰ Before 1461, the Westminster chancery recorded only three cases originating in Lancashire, all in the reign of Henry VI.¹³¹ Until an explosion in the number of cases during the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, the number of Lancashire cases heard in the Westminster chancery remained quite small.¹³² This was not typical of other counties; even though the equity jurisdiction of the royal chancery was relatively new in this period, thousands of cases were heard from all over the realm.¹³³ For example, between

rolls, p. 65; for a complete discussion of these and other early records of the chancery, see Martinez 'Palatinate administration', pp. 31-33.

¹²⁷ See H. Fishwick, ed., *Pleadings and depositions in the duchy court of Lancaster, volume I*, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 32 (1896), for duchy chancery records after 1473.

¹²⁸ Somerville, 'Palatinate courts', p. 61.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ For example, a 1436 bill in the royal chancery alleged that Richard Shyburn could not be tried at Lancaster because of his local power, National Archives, C 1/75/19; a 1445 bill alleged that sheriff John Byron of Lancashire was extorting the people of the parish of Rochdale, National Archives, C 1/43/41.

¹³¹ The cases are to be found in National Archives, C 1/43/41, C 1/75/19 and C 1/75/47.

¹³² Worthington, *Royal government*, p. 178.

¹³³ J. B. Post, 'Equitable resorts before 1450', in E. W. Ives, ed., *Law, litigants and the legal profession: papers presented to the fourth British legal history conference at the University of Birmingham, 10-13 July 1979* (London, 1983), p. 68.

1399 and 1461 over 100 cases were heard from Derbyshire.¹³⁴ Even Yorkshire, farther from Westminster than Lancashire, produced more than 50 cases in these years.¹³⁵ Cheshire and Durham, the other palatinates and also homes to their own courts of equity, are the only other English counties which produced so few cases in early chancery proceedings.¹³⁶ Lancashire men, along with those from the other palatinates, may have been content to undertake most equity proceedings in their local courts.

The palatinate common law and equity courts were less expensive and more convenient than the courts at Westminster. Not only did Lancashire men not have to travel nearly as far to courts in the county but the Lancaster courts were also faster and probably less expensive than their royal counterparts. In 1401, the average case found in the palatinate plea rolls was decided in just over one year from the time that an action was first brought.¹³⁷ In 1445, the wait averaged a bit more, about 18 months.¹³⁸ Completion of an action in the common pleas at Westminster required a minimum of more than two and a half years.¹³⁹

There are no direct indications of the cost of bringing cases in the Lancashire courts for the fifteenth century; the only available estimates are from the seventeenth century. However, there is no particular reason to believe that the relative costs of the two types of courts should have changed enormously even over such a long period of time. In the late seventeenth century, bringing a case at the common law in Lancashire cost 10s 3d, while bringing the same action in the common pleas or king's bench at Westminster would have cost £20 to £40.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, a chancery case in Lancashire cost £7 or £8, compared to £50 to £100 in the Westminster chancery.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ National Archives, C 1 Index.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Parker, *Plea rolls*; some cases were decided in as little as six months, while the longest wait was nearly five years.

¹³⁸ Compiled from National Archives, PL 15/7.

¹³⁹ Hastings, *Common pleas*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁰ Somerville, 'Palatinate courts', p. 62.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Whether the direct exercise of royal power in the county actually made justice more effective or reduced disorder is an open question and, given the scope of this article, it is only possible to discuss the issue impressionistically here. During the reign of Henry VI, some signs of disorder or corruption do appear in the palatinate. The coroner and sheriff were both accused of major wrongdoing by the middle of the reign of Henry VI.¹⁴² The resolution of these cases, however, came from the royal administrators in the county. The alleged false indictments of the sheriff, Sir John Byron, were corrected by a writ issued by the palatine chancellor on the orders of the duchy council.¹⁴³ An enquiry into the coroner's case was initiated by writ from the palatine chancery.¹⁴⁴ When Byron refused to show himself before the duchy council, the justices at Lancaster were directed to initiate processes against him.¹⁴⁵ Like corruption, disorder was met with action by the royal servants present in the county. In 1451, when disturbance was spreading across England after the fall of Guienne, the duchy council ordered the chancellor of the palatinate, the justices at Lancaster, the sheriff and the justices of the peace to 'make proclamation against insurrections, riots, assemblies, and disturbances of the peace' and to arrest rioters without special warrant.¹⁴⁶

Lancashire was not immune to the disturbances which shook England during the years of Henry VI.¹⁴⁷ It does seem clear, though, that the king or his handlers had at their disposal in Lancashire an effective infrastructure to take action against troubles when they did occur. Further study of the incidence of violence in Lancashire could yield interesting conclusions on the

¹⁴² The duchy council issued a writ of *supersedeas* dismissing a forged presentment against 29 men brought by the coroner Sir Edmund Trafford in 1439, National Archives, DL 37/16/88; National Archives, PL 25/2 m. 13; Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 223. A case was heard in the royal chancery alleging extortion by the sheriff Sir John Byron in 1445, National Archives, C 1/43/41.

¹⁴³ National Archives, DL 37/16/88; National Archives, PL 25/2 m. 13; Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 223.

¹⁴⁴ *Annual reports of the deputy keeper*, 40 (1879), p. 538.

¹⁴⁵ National Archives, DL 37/15/80.

¹⁴⁶ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 224; National Archives, DL 37/19/39.

¹⁴⁷ Somerville, *History of the Duchy*, p. 223.

effect of changes in judicial procedure on the level of disorder in fifteenth-century England. The Lancashire system was unique. Even neighbouring Cheshire, which had a palatine justice, was overseen by an absentee, and the real work of the courts was done by local men.¹⁴⁸ Because the Lancashire JPs were directly overseen by Lancaster justices, royal justice was potentially omnipresent.

The survival of the Lancashire palatinate under the Lancastrian kings seems at first to be something of an enigma. What we see from this study, though, is that the palatinate had the potential to provide significant benefits to both king and county. The men of Lancashire, though they did not benefit from increased officeholding, reaped the benefits of government in the county by the leading careerists of the realm in the palatinate offices, while still having access to local offices and grants from the duchy. The king was provided with a unique proving ground for royal servants and with stability in a county which was essential for Lancastrian wealth and power. The surprising result of the survival of the palatinate was *greater* royal control through apparent decentralization.

Conclusion

It has been emphasised throughout this article that Lancashire men did not have access to exceptional paths for career advancement because of the palatinate. The palatinate, as an appurtenance of the duchy of Lancaster, did have a great deal to offer careerists, but Lancashire men do not seem to have had any special access to the valuable palatinate posts. Those few Lancashire men who did rise through the palatinate administration were more representative of the class of legally trained administrators at Westminster than of the gentry of Lancashire. More often, the Lancashire gentry served the king as soldiers and as local administrators. Lancashire men also undoubtedly gained from their positions as overseers for duchy of Lancaster lands, but these offices were affected only by the enormous holdings of the duchy in Lancashire, not by the palatinate status of the county.

¹⁴⁸ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor state*, p. 144; Clayton, *Administration of Cheshire*, p. 143.

Instead of taxation or unique career paths, the major benefit of the palatinate in Lancashire to local men seems to have been direct access to royal justice in their own county. Their affairs were managed by some of England's most capable administrators sitting in the important posts of justices and chancellors at Lancaster. Helen Cam may have described 'justice at the doorstep' as one of the great benefits of any franchise but, for Lancashire, this phrase must be amended; what distinguished Lancashire administration was *royal* justice at the doorstep. Thus, the palatinate was not a force for fragmentation in the realm, but rather a way of linking Lancashire more closely with the centre.

This arrangement also had benefits for the king. For the crown, the palatinate offered a bevy of significant positions to grant to men of legal training whom it might wish to advance. The palatinate arrangement also allowed for direct administration of a county which was of great military importance and which remained an important base of power and source of private income for the Lancastrian kings. Lordship in Lancashire was dependent on the palatinate, giving the king an indirect, but powerful, hand in the operations of the county.

Lancashire was not exempt from the influences which shaped the rest of England during the Lancastrian years. The rise of the Stanleys in the county to fill some of the need for local lordship is a good example of Lancashire following patterns that already existed elsewhere in the realm. Still, the palatinate administration of the county did shape its character and affected the way that patronage and lordship in Lancashire could operate.

Lancashire men had a great deal to gain and little to lose from the presence of the palatinate administration. The palatinate administration was capable of being more efficient than other forms of justice when hearing cases. However, the weakness of the king meant that in Lancashire, just as in the realm as a whole, Henry VI's reign saw a breakdown in kingship, and hence, in lordship from the king. Even during this period, however, Lancashire had the benefit of justice from the highest judges in the realm. Lancashire men had every reason to be pleased with the administration which the palatinate provided in their county. Lancashire's relative stability, in turn, was of great value to the governance of the realm.

