A Regal Asset or a Right Royal Disaster?

King's Knights, Royal Influence and Local Administration in the Midlands, 1377-1399

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Abstract

This research is a prosopographical study of 24 *milites regis*, or king's knights, aiming to investigate royal retaining and its influence on local communities during the reign of Richard II. Numbering around 150, between 1377 and 1399, the knights were often paid annuities at the exchequer, and were described as being retained for service to the king. My selection of 24 knights has been made by limiting the study to eight midland counties stretching from Staffordshire to Lincolnshire.

First, the background, connections, and wealth, of the knights are detailed in order to determine their status in the social hierarchy. A high degree of variation is evident; however, many can be identified as substantial gentry landowners. Secondly, the activity of the knights is described. Although involvement in central politics is apparent, local affairs dominate. It is asserted that these local activities were generally separate from service to the king, being instead part of a normal involvement in society. Finally, an investigation of connections within the group is included. Again, associations between knights can be seen as part of normal societal networks not a result of the royal will. In most cases it is hard to find evidence linking rise in status to direct action from the crown.

This research demonstrates Richard's retaining policy was designed neither to raise men to positions above their standing, nor to hold the shires to ransom; rather, it was largely military in origin. This military function can be seen continuing in the 1390s. However, the continuing connection between king and knight was seemingly driven more by the competition within gentry communities and the absence of solid noble leadership, than positive royal policy.
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Abbreviations

CCR  Calendar of Close Rolls
CP   Complete Peerage
CFR  Calendar of Fine Rolls
CIPM Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem
CPR  Calendar of Patent Rolls
DNB  Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
EHR  English Historical Review
PR   The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England
TNA/PRO National Archives/Public Record Office
BPR  Register of Edward the Black Prince
TRHS Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
Chronology

1369 Hostilities restart in Hundred Years War.
1381 Peasants’ revolt, violence against officials of John of Gaunt. Continual council ends
1383 Beginning of growth of band of favourites around Richard
1387 Battle of Radcot Bridge: Richard’s favourites defeated.
1388 Merciless Parliament: Richard's household purged of evil counsellors.
1389 Richard confirmed in full adult sovereignty.
1394 First campaign in Ireland
1397 (September) Revenge Parliament Warwick exiled, Arundel beheaded, and Gloucester murdered in Calais.
1398 Mowbray and Bolingbroke exiled.
Introduction

'A factious Lord shall hardly do himself any good, much less us.
But he that hath the favour of a king may with one word advance us while we live.'
- Marlowe, Edward the Second.¹

With this quote Richard Gorski concludes his study of the rise to power of John James a notable Berkshire landowner during the second half of the fourteenth century. In two sentences this quotation highlights the two major strands of fourteenth century politics as it is understood by historians today: on the one hand, the interrelation and co-operation of the elites, lords and knights working within a framework of relationships for their own mutual benefit; and on the other, the overarching, singular, power and authority of the king to command and rule his realm. This is expressed most succinctly by John Watts in his recent discussion of the Lancastrian court where he argues that the master concepts and structures of the Lancastrian polity were not ‘court’ and ‘household’, but rather king and kingdom.² The milites regis, or king’s knights, who are the subject of this study, were men at the heart of the interplay between the powerful self interest of their fellow landowners and the controlling influence of the king. They were men seemingly in a position to profit from the mechanics of this relationship between king and kingdom. It was imperative that these two master concepts, as Watts puts it, worked in concert with each other to ensure the mutual prosperity of both. The crown must ensure that the desire for self-preservation and aggrandisement was harnessed in a way that benefited the common good, a common good which was also for contemporaries symbiotic with the growth and liberality of the king’s great name and favour. In 1399, this relationship between king and kingdom had completely failed. Opposition to the king within the political community, galvanised by Henry Bolingbroke, was so great that Richard had no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of his detractors and pass the crown to the head of his cousin. Whether his retaining policy was part of the breakdown of Richard’s kingship is another question altogether. In his article investigating the development of royal retaining policy in the fourteenth century, Given-Wilson suggests it was a breakdown in the relationship between king and magnates which contributed to the growth of gentry retaining.³ This was most certainly a cause of weakness for Richard, but the wider adoption of this policy

by the Tudors also demonstrates its potential.\(^4\) Gorski's work, which forms a short preview to his more recent book on the fourteenth century sheriff, is typical of the majority of recent research, in having as its main focus the powerful elites of the medieval county system, those men known as the county gentry.\(^5\) His prosopographical approach, piecing together the lives of many different minor figures to give insight into the overall structure of society, has a long pedigree. However, since Given-Wilson laid the foundations for study of the king's affinity in 1986, dedicated prosopographical work on the king's retainers has not been undertaken.\(^6\) Through a focus on the *milites regis*, this thesis brings together the two strands of late medieval local government, the relations between county elites and effect of kingly authority. It also begins filling the historiographical hole of the king's retainers.

Over the course of the last few decades a shift has occurred in the way historians have approached the study of late medieval politics. Moving away from the great administrative studies of central politics from the 1920s and 30s, modern historians have changed focus towards the relationship between the central workings of government and the local structures or communities within the shires.\(^7\) This change in outlook has its origins in the group of historians influenced and taught by Keith McFarlane. The legacy of his work searching for the personality of politics and building a picture of the network of relationships amongst the ruling elites has been well discussed.\(^8\) Some of the most recent research moves away from the traditional methodology of investigating interaction between local county communities and the central administration, preferring much more to look at local and central government as integrated parts of the same whole.\(^9\) This focus on local structures, builds on the work of earlier historians in the 1970s, which began to describe what is now generally accepted as the spread of responsibility and office-holding into the hands of the lesser noblemen throughout the counties. This distribution of power developed as the administrative burden on the large centrally controlled legal commissions like the General Eyre became too heavy, and more locally based, special

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\(^{\text{8}}\) R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane legacy : studies in late medieval politics and society* (Stroud, 1995)

commissions, peopled to a large extent by local landowners, grew in their place. This new historiographical focus has also been coupled with a transition away from studying the complex structures and procedures of government, the history of administration, towards detailed study of the individuals involved in these structures, much more the history of administrators. Harriss, in his 1993 article charting the growth of medieval government, states that the aspects of government should not be seen ‘as the emanations of royal authority but as a product of those involved in them.’ This assertion has relevance to this study in that it suggests the impetus which shaped the workings of the crown in the localities came not from a central search for control but much more from a local desire for order. Historians have in recent times seen power much more as shaped not by the systems which governed it, but by the people who held it. Indeed, Gorski notes that in order to disentangle the workings of the fourteenth century state, historians must be able to handle the hundreds of small biographies of the lives of men who were involved as administrators and officials; men of varying fortune and ability, but all of equal interest to the historian. This study is indeed a study of those involved in the emanations, or dissemination, of royal authority. However, the knights studied here are distinguished by their role and position amongst the king’s servants rather than by their belonging to any group or network which had meaning outside royal administration. In that sense it is similar to Gorski’s study of sheriffs, indeed many of these men were sheriffs. In this area also it differs from the staple, comprehensive, local gentry study which has dominated recent historiography, and which looks at society independently of, although connected to, royal service. It is also, much more concerned with the specifics of royal government and the king’s role than general studies of the political elite of the shires. These knights in their roles as sheriffs and commissioners were responsible for the maintenance of order in the localities; at the same time, as king’s knights they may be seen as part of the central desire for closer local control. They almost perfectly represent therefore, the interesting interplay between central desire for control, and a local desire to underpin order through the assimilation of kingly authority.

The knights discussed here find their position amongst the king's administration as part of his affinity. The history of the kingly affinity, a new development of the fourteenth century, is

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13 Saul, Knights and Esquires; Carpenter, Locality and Polity; E. Acheson, A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the fifteenth century, c1422-c.1495. (Cambridge, 1992); S. Wright, The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century, (Chesterfield, 1983); M. Bennett, Community, Class and Careerism. Cheshire and Lancashire society in the age of Sir Gawain the green knight, (Cambridge, 1983)
linked with the history of the royal household.\textsuperscript{14} The royal household, and the king's management of it, has often benefited from focused and detailed research, being as it was a hub of medieval political life and of great concern to contemporaries. Despite the problems brought by the changing and amorphous nature of the household over this period, it can be described in two sections, the \textit{domus} and the \textit{familia regis}.\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{domus}, or the permanent household, was essentially made up of servants who had closest personal contact with the king and were responsible for his everyday needs, including his chamber attendants, bodyguards, secretaries and so on. The \textit{familia regis}, or the expanded household, was the area which was involved in the king's role as head of state. This was where the administration of justice and outward defence was carried out, and as it grew, it naturally became grouped into departments, including the exchequer, the treasury and the council. These regulated and organised departments are the interest of administrative historians, chief among them T. F. Tout, and their workings have been researched at length.\textsuperscript{16} However, as the trends in historical thought have changed, research has come to investigate beyond these sections of the household. The clearest expression of this thought is the recent work of John Watts mentioned at the beginning of this research.\textsuperscript{17} Although his work focuses on the later Lancastrian period and he is specifically focussing on the ideal of court, there are still important conclusions to draw out from his work which affect this study. He argues that rather than being influenced by concepts such as 'household' and 'court' late medieval politics is best described solely by the relationship between king and kingdom. In essence contemporaries, rather than seeing the structures previously investigated by historians as independent entities, were much more interested in them as a means of communication between more fundamental concepts, namely the person of the king and the people of his kingdom.\textsuperscript{18} In this context attention naturally focuses on what is known as the king's affinity, a framework for the interaction of king and kingdom which has been largely un-investigated. Rather than fitting into clear departments and jurisdictions the king's affinity is better described by a series of concentric circles, or a network of complex and fluid relationships between associates and landowners.\textsuperscript{19} It is within this grouping that the \textit{milites regis}, or king's knights, are found. These knights are a new group around the beginning of the reign of Richard; they seem to develop in the context of changes to the structure of the household during the 1360s and 70s. As the \textit{domus} became less important in political terms and the knights of the chamber, a group which transferred from the domus to the \textit{familia regis}, began to settle in number and become a more

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Given-Wilson, \textit{Royal Household}, pp.203-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Brown, \textit{Governance}, pp.24-28; Given-Wilson, \textit{Royal Household}, pp.1-12.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} T. F. Tout, \textit{Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England}, 6 vols. (Manchester, 1920-33)
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Watts, ‘Was there a Lancastrian Court?’, pp.253-271.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Watts, ‘Was there a Lancastrian Court?’, p.267.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Given-Wilson, \textit{Royal Household}, pp.210-217.
\end{itemize}
elite group with closer connection to the king, so a wider grouping of knights, more abstracted from the king began to form. These men were not necessarily servants in the way those involved in the household were, they were not employed long-term for specific tasks, but they were granted annuities from the exchequer, yearly fees which essentially gave them status as the king's men. Despite this these men were extremely important for the critics of Richard’s rule. They drew controversy both because of the financial burden they created for the nation, but also because of the supposed link between lawlessness in the shires and noble and royal retaining. The numbers of knights involved as Richard's supporters varied, but over the course of the reign the number reached around 149, with the number of knights of the chamber being 49. Although Given-Wilson’s work stands as a basis for our understanding of this group, their particular role in royal interaction with the counties has never been researched in detail. While as a whole group they present too large a proposition for the study presented here, a selection of 24, roughly a sixth of the knights listed by Given-Wilson, confined to a geographical area around the Midlands, serve as an adequate sample with which to begin an in depth investigation of who these men were and what purpose they fulfilled during Richard's reign.

What is certainly agreed upon about the political community of the fourteenth century, as had been the case for several centuries previously, and would be for several following, was that it was centred on the politics of kingship. The potential impact and power of the king as understood by Marlowe was demonstrated in the opening quote. Arguably not until Cromwell and the puritan revolution would there be any constitutional challenge to the position of the king; England needed a king. It is this view of the English state that shapes the perspective of this study. Although it is possible in the context of the events of Richard's reign and the century which followed his rule, to lose sight of this fact, it has been the work of several modern historians to re-assert this ideal. The basis of this view is that the crown was not weak, what faltered was the king's handling of his own position. What this means then is that the character and ability of the king was very important. In this vein, Richard has attracted the interest of several biographers, many of whom have taken contrasting views of his abilities and failings. A considered personal view of the king as a man is outside the remit of this study, however, in

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20 Given-Wilson, Royal Household, p.7.
22 Given-Wilson, Royal Household, p.212.
24 Most recently, Saul, Richard II; other notable works include: M. McKisack, The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399 (Oxford, 1959); A. Tuck, Richard II and the English Nobility (London, 1973); A. Steel, Richard II (Cambridge, 1941)
pragmatic terms it is important to find a framework in the chronology of the reign. The interconnectedness of local and central government discussed by recent research reveals the wisdom that the more we know about the central goings on the more we may understand the context of what was happening in the localities.\textsuperscript{25} With this in mind this research begins with a short overview of the events of the reign, with the aim to highlight how the king's specific concerns changed over the years of his rule. At the heart of this research is the argument over the significance of these knights. They can be seen either as an expression of the king's faltering confidence and over zealous control of the crown's authority, as well as a lax handling of his financial resources; or alternatively as an expression of the strength of the crown being used in the localities, a further administrative extension of the king's government. Saul argues that Richard was ahead of his time, a proto renaissance monarch in the mould of Henry VII.\textsuperscript{26} His argument also uses cultural aspects of Richard's rule and a consolidation of the ideology of his supreme authority. However, as the rule of his grandfather Edward III shows, the stark authority of the crown and uncompromising support of his subjects were things that a medieval king should come to expect.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed in attracting these knights to his regime, Richard could be seen as following very similar policies as those shown by Edward in his management of the nobility and household. Having said this, perhaps by retaining knights from a much wider and less elite group Richard was diluting his own influence and weakening his hold on power. The reigns of Edward and Richard are very interesting in their comparison; both kings came to the throne early in their lives, both faced serious challenges during their reign; however, Edward is now seen as one of the most effective kings of the period, and Richard one of the least. The reasons for these differences are intriguing.

While England needed a king, the king needed England. The king most certainly held the monopoly of accepted authority, however, in the absence of a standing army, the monopoly of power rested with those who owned land, and so commanded military strength.\textsuperscript{28} While it is wrong to say the king ruled by the nobles' consent, as Richard's reign adequately demonstrates, he certainly needed their co-operation. It is a truism to say the king, as one man, could not personally oversee all his subjects, administer justice, and protect the realm; he needed loyal and trusted servants. The strength of medieval local government was essentially based on a compromise which satisfied both the needs of the subject for an independent authority to govern his relations with his neighbour, and the needs of the monarch to justify his own position by

\textsuperscript{25} Gorski, \textit{Fourteenth Century Sheriff}, pp.1-3; Musson, 'Sub keepers and constables', pp.1-24; for a recent discussion of the concepts of locality see: Holford, 'Pro patriots', pp.47-70.
\textsuperscript{26} Saul, \textit{Richard II}, p.128.
\textsuperscript{27} McKisack, \textit{Fourteenth Century}, pp.269-271.
\textsuperscript{28} Carpenter, \textit{Wars of the Roses}, p.35.
providing that peace. The involvement of the county elites, or the gentry, in the administration of royal rule and their subsequent rise in prominence as mentioned previously, is something which has held the interest of historians for some decades. It is in this context that Given-Wilson set his important 1986 article focussing more closely on the gentry retaining policy of fourteenth century kings, which in many ways follows from and develops the ideas presented in his book mentioned above. The growth in quantity and widening personnel of legal commissions; the rising importance of knights of shire as the commons in parliament show the beginnings of a distinct voice; even what was previously described as the decline of the sheriff through a gradual reduction of power and the lowering status of the men involved in the office; can all now be seen in the context of the tightening grip on the mechanisms of local government by the gentry themselves. It is debated amongst historians if this change represented a diluting in power away from the king, or a strengthening by a widening of the crown’s franchise. However, what is certain, as more local men came to hold royal administrative posts, so the possibility for ambitious men to use that power for their own personal good grew also. In order to ensure the effective administration of justice and avoid accusations of partiality, systems of regulation also needed to be developed. There was also a desire for regulation from the community in the shires themselves. In many ways regulation was built in through the competitive nature of the landowning class, the key concept was that men in office both had much to gain but also much to lose. If a royal servant had sufficient lands and was known by the community then similarly powerful men could check their power through their own; if he was corrupt when in office there was a good chance that soon the same office would be in the hands of his neighbours. These parameters put on officials, in terms of visibility and accountability, ensured the shires were governed to the liking of the community elite. However, the royal government also needed to develop ways of ensuring the administration functioned to the liking of the king. The most obvious example of this is the use of central justices on local peace commissions, something well discussed by historians. However, royal retaining of lesser noblemen was also an interesting part of this process. While its effectiveness for ensuring the

29 Jewell, Local Administration, pp.200-204.
30 Most substantial works: Brown, Governance; Carpenter, Locality and Polity; Saul, Knights and Esquires; Acheson, A Gentry Community; Wright, Derbyshire Gentry; Bennett, Community, Class and Careerism; Coss, Origins of Gentry
31 Given-Wilson, ‘The King and the Gentry’, p.87.
34 A. Gross, Adam Peshale, a study in gentry society of fourteenth century Staffordshire (London PhD, 1989); this is a useful study on the competition that existed between different gentry families, not least because it probably involves the ancestor of the king’s knight researched here.
35 Gorski, Fourteenth Century Sheriff, pp.69-78.
ability of the king to scrutinize the county community is clear, if these men were also seemingly more likely to gain royal office it destroyed the accountability described above. If they received their office by royal favour they could much more easily act with impunity. The contentious nature of these men is clear, not least due to the accusations levelled at Richard at his deposition for filling parliament and the shrievalty with his supporters. However, research as to the historical reality of their position does not correlate with contemporary concerns over retaining.

The purpose of this study is to produce a clearer and more individual idea of the who, what and why of the king’s knights in Richard’s reign. In this endeavour there are some passing comments that need to be made on the source material. In order to have a grasp of politics in Richard’s reign an educated observer must first have a good understanding and ability to use the material presented in the contemporary chronicles. The snares that can catch the historian in the use of chronicles, such as the bias of the author and the varying reliability of material they contain, have been well written about elsewhere. The knights researched here are for the majority not mentioned by name in the chronicles. Because of this, the value of chronicle evidence for this study lies largely in their presentation of the contemporary concerns of the wider body politic. Beyond the chronicles, the picture of these knights emerges predominantly in the administrative records preserved by the chancery, the bedrock of the medieval administrative historian. Again the various methodological problems encountered when trying to reconstruct the careers of men like the ones discussed here are well described elsewhere. The inherent central focus and problems of determining the effect in reality of writs issued in the chancery can be somewhat combated by the use of more local evidence. While this is attempted to some extent in the fourth chapter of this work, a detailed picture of the local situations of these knights has not been possible here. There is, as always, room for further research. Finally, Gorski notes that the broadness of the canvas can often betray its individual strokes. It is hoped the picture presented here, consisting of eight Midland counties, is broad enough to give weight to the conclusions, but not too broad to lose the interest of the individual strokes. As shall be seen, and as Gorski found in his study of fourteenth century sheriffs, there are complex answers to the deceptively simple questions of the who, what and why of the milites regis.

Chapter 1
Chronological Context: The development of Richard's kingship

The appearance of the king’s knights and the royal policy towards gentry retaining is obviously highly influenced by the historical context. Although this study is primarily concerned with the gentry and their involvement in the political community, one thing the existence of king’s knights makes clear is the connection gentry men had to the broader context of political relations in the wider realm. It is this broader picture which this chapter discusses. It will include a consideration of how the wider political context and the development of contemporary ideas on retaining affected royal policy. A key question here is how the insecurity of Richard’s early years in power affected the agenda for the later years of his rule.¹

a) Difficult beginnings

Much has been made of the great optimism and spirit of hope that hailed Richard to the throne and surrounded the young boy even from the beginning of his life. Given-Wilson traces these strands in the chronicles, noting that although Richard was a second son there was a great feeling amongst his contemporaries that he was destined for regal things, not least because it was reported there were three kings present at his birth.² Henry Knighton, the Leicestershire chronicler, observes that Richard at his coronation was the peoples’ choice.³ This great optimism that greeted Richard can be explained partly by the success of the reign of his grandfather. Edward III in his prime had been a strong and decisive king, who had been able to unite the nation under his crown and brought both internal peace and success abroad. It was specifically mentioned that Richard strongly resembled his heroic father, the Black Prince, Edwards’ eldest son, a figure closely associated with the victories of Edward’s reign.⁴ However, over and above his grandfather’s successes, the jubilant reception given to Richard was shaped much more by a realisation that the happiness of the 1350s and 60s had given way, in the 1370s, to the trouble and disgrace which had beset the end of the great king’s rule. This consciousness of what a king could achieve and a desire to recapture previous prosperity and restore the kingdom to its full glory can be seen as the defining force of Richard's reign. Crucially, however,

⁴ Bennett, Richard and the Revolution, p.15.
the king at the age of 10 was not in a position to fulfil the hopes of his subjects. This tension is touched upon by the chronicler John Harding when he describes the king as having the appearance of ‘tender innocence’. Richard throughout his reign seemed to carry the burden of emulating what had come before, a comparison which perhaps exacerbated his own insecurities. Although he began his reign in a state of innocence, buoyed by hope, as his reign progressed he would be forced to learn again and again that kingship at this time could just as easily be driven not by obedience but by dissension.

As Saul discusses in his article charting the reaction of the commons to livery and maintenance, parliamentary criticism of gentry retaining appeared as abruptly as did the appearance of king’s knights themselves. Both the first mention in royal records of *milites regis* and the first parliamentary petition against the distribution of livery came in quick succession during 1377. The immediacy of both these developments so soon after the coronation of the young king and during the period that the governance of the realm was overseen by the ‘continual council’ demonstrates that the genesis of royal retaining, specifically the king’s knights, was not connected to Richard’s personal policy but rather to the political context of his reign. This fact becomes clearer with closer consideration of the substance of parliamentary complaint on this issue. In 1377 and 1384 the commons had made their thoughts clear, but their growing concern reached a new level when in the parliament of 1388 the commons called for the complete abolition of livery through badges and signs. There are two key points which need to be discussed regarding these complaints, firstly their own judgement of the origin of the problem and secondly the specific object of their complaint. The complaints of 1388 make it clear that the commons did not see the abuse of retaining as a new problem of Richard’s reign. In fact, they charted the problems back to 1327, the beginning of the reign of Edward III. The debate then was not, as the timing may suggest, an immediate attack on the king’s knights, or even the king himself, but rather a response to long-term developments in the socio-political landscape. This is substantiated by the specific object of the criticism. As Saul discusses, the giving of livery was divided into several types, clothes or robes, hoods, and badges, of which the bulk of complaint in this period was reserved for the giving of badges. There is no hard evidence to determine which type of livery the king’s knight should be seen as representing. Given-Wilson mentions that some of the king’s knights were given robes when attending the king at Christmas, although

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7 Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, p.213.
9 *Westminster Chronicle*, p.357.
as discussion below of the central involvement of these knights demonstrates, these were probably exceptions that prove the rule.\textsuperscript{11} As to whether these men wore badges or hoods, or nothing at all, this is harder to ascertain. Given that Richard is not thought to have systematically distributed badges until 1390, it is unlikely these men were wearing them in the 1380s, although the explosion of king’s knights in the early 1390s may link them to Richard’s use of badges.\textsuperscript{12} What is most interesting about the complaints of the commons is that they were particularly worried about the distribution of badges to men below the knightly class, and were more generally focussed on the actions of the nobility rather than the king. Saul concludes his discussion of the commons attitude to badges by arguing that their criticism represented a united expression of class consciousness, protecting their position against the lower orders.\textsuperscript{13} This is certainly in line with the complaint made by Peter de la Mare in the first parliament of Richard’s reign, where he asserted that knighthood and knightly virtue were being slighted and left unrewarded.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, it could be argued that the appearance of the king’s knights was an attempt by central government to remedy this issue and to encourage the pursuit of knightly status by rewarding those who had already achieved it. Further to this it certainly seems safe to assert that the beginnings of royal retaining in Richard’s reign have much more to do with the wider context of politics at his coronation than direct policy from the king himself.

A question closely related to the development of the king’s knights, and central to an understanding of the early years of Richard’s reign, is the extent to which John of Gaunt, the duke of Lancaster, was able to influence the royal administration. To understand the wider context of politics in 1377 it serves here to mention the build up to Richard’s assumption, with some comment on why there was no formal declaration of a minority. With the demise of his father and elder brother, Gaunt had been left as the key lieutenant to the crown and was easily the most powerful subject to swear obedience to Richard in 1377. However, the previous decade had been less than smooth for the duke. As Richard’s eldest surviving uncle he had been in a critical position in the 1370s. Superficially, Gaunt was associated with the problems accompanying the new phase of the Hundred Years War, but the source of his problems ran much deeper than this. At its heart of the political difficulties of the 1370s was the English polity’s inability to function without the unifying focus of a decisive, competent king. Disarray amongst the higher nobility and disquiet amongst the lower orders can be seen merely as

\textsuperscript{11} Given-Wilson, \textit{Royal Household}, p.211; for the discussion of the central involvement of the knights see below pp.36-9.


\textsuperscript{13} Saul, ‘Abolition of Badges’, p.311.

symptoms of this lack of royal leadership. As the duke tried to appease differing factions, the disunity of the English polity took its toll. Particularly damaging were his relationships with the parliamentary commons and the powerful men of London. The weakness of the duke’s position in the 1370s can be underlined in comparison to the influence the young king was able to have immediately after his coronation. The chronicle of John Capgrave clearly demonstrates the picture of the king as the bringer of peace in the political community, noting that one immediate action of the new king was to oversee the reconciliation of his uncle to the merchants of London.\(^\text{15}\) In 1376, only a year before the death of Edward, the commons had mounted an attack in parliament on what they saw as ministerial corruption and mismanagement that was impoverishing both the king and the realm.\(^\text{16}\) Although the duke was not explicitly implicated, it was a serious attack on the household regime as it had developed around the ailing king in the 1370s. This was a regime in which Gaunt was highly influential. Several of the knights impeached in parliament that year were retainers of the duke, including Lord Neville, steward of the household.\(^\text{17}\) The imposition of ‘continual council’ to supervise the king in 1377 was in many ways a renewed expression of the remedies the commons had put in place in 1376, indeed when asked to be part of the 1377 council Gaunt immediately rose and demanded apology for the insults given him a year earlier.\(^\text{18}\) The appearance of the king’s knights in 1377, and the first phase of retaining policy under Richard, is closely linked to an administration in which Gaunt was most certainly the key figure. The duke is known to have been one of the widest retainers of men in the country at the time. Indeed, as Given-Wilson comments, he was the only member of the nobility to rival the level of retaining of the king himself, perhaps styling himself more as the ‘king of Castile and Leon’ than merely as the duke of Lancaster.\(^\text{19}\) Indeed when parliamentary criticism of unruly retainers was aired in 1384, it was Gant himself who fielded the reply.\(^\text{20}\) That the king’s knights came into being at the time the duke, such a renowned retainer of men, was so influential in royal policy must be recognised as a notable co-incidence.

That parliament in 1377 recognised the king was not ready himself to take the full reins of power is in itself unremarkable, but that they also felt that declaring a full protectorate was equally inappropriate is something of far more significance. As Tuck comments, there not a lack of precedent for a protectorate government in England, William Marshall at the beginning of the

\(^\text{19}\) Given-Wilson, ‘The King and the Gentry’, p.98.
\(^\text{20}\) *Westminster Chronicle*, pp.81-83.
reign of Henry III had held the reins of power for some time, but John of Gaunt, as the previous paragraph demonstrates, was a much different prospect to William Marshall. The duke must have been as happy about the coronation of the young king as were the rest the nation, but his problems were not at an end. Following the events of 1376, the possibility of administering royal government through a ‘continual council’, which to all intents and purposes acted as regent, was clear. The feeling among key sections of the political community was that this would be a way to avoid the abuses which were perceived to have developed in the 1370s. Within these councils the duke needed to exert his personal authority through his retainers to be able to ensure his influence within the administration. Indeed, it was within these councils that men such as the king's knight, Ralph Ferrers, found both prominence and reprisals. Ferrers was a man with connections to Lancaster through his military career and links to Lord Latimer, a known henchman of Gaunt; he is interesting here because, as old research by Norman Lewis shows, there is no record of wages paid for his attendance at council. His colleague John Knyvet is recorded as receiving a grant made by Edward III and confirmed in 1378, a situation very similar to that of Ferrers, the king’s knight. It could be argued then that the term ‘king’s knight’ developed as a result of the unusual situation of councillor government at the beginning of Richard’s reign, beginning as a way of rewarding and retaining the men who served in this administration. It could also have been away Gaunt extended an appearance of the king’s approval to his servants working within the central administration.

The weakness of these councils, although demanded by parliament, was that they did not solve the underlying problem: the absence of a decisive king. One clear expression of this weakness in the government was in the area of royal finances. Over the course of the preceding century the royal administration had gradually expanded as demands for the king's justice and patronage increased. This administrative growth had been born by the demands of the war effort. When the spoils of war began to prove less impressive and lucrative not only did the financial burden on the king’s subjects increase but also demands the country had tolerated in the previous stages of the war became increasing disliked. Tout notes that between the period 1377 and 1389 officers of Richard's household were paid so rarely that at the end of the account of William Packington, keeper of the wardrobe, many servants of Richard were happy to give up their claims to 1/3 of their wages as long as they were paid the remaining 2/3 immediately.

21 Tuck, English Nobility, p.33.
23 N. B. Lewis, 'The 'continual council' in the early years of Richard II, 1377-80' EHR, 41 (1926), pp.246-51
25 Tout, Chapters, iv, p.214.
The financial strength of the crown was extremely significant to its subjects, not least because they carried a major burden of taxation. Gaunt, although not in a position to remedy the administration’s problems was most certainly held responsible for its failings, rather than securing Gaunt's leadership the situation gave even more focus for his opposition. Discontent came to a head in 1381 with the Peasants’ Revolt. Again historians differ over the complex causes of the revolt, however, if attention is given to the target of the rebels, for example the burning of the Savoy and the execution of key officers of the duchy of Lancaster, we can see that Gaunt was a major focus of their discontent. This can not be due to his inaction, indeed in 1381, at the time of the revolt, the chronicles record that Gaunt was in fact in the north on a campaign trying to secure peace in the Scottish marches. While the rebels, largely from the counties near the south coast, may have been more worried by threats of naval attack by France, we can see that the duke certainly had been far from passive in the activities of government. What the nation wanted was action from the king

b) Confused transition and the departure of Gaunt

Richard’s personal actions to dissolve the uproar of the rebels once Watt Tyler was killed demonstrate he was now gaining the ability to make his mark on events. McKisack comments that not much had been known of Richard until the revolt.26 Indeed 1381 is the date at which the important Westminster Chronicle begins its narrative. Having said this, the reality of transition is much less clear. 1381 may have alerted and motivated the young king to his role in governing the country, but the problems that faced the country could not be resolved in one brave action. The 1380’s are years which are characterised by uncertainty at the centre. The picture presented by the chronicles is one certainly of tension between Lancaster and the king, but also confusion over who is in control of the reins of power. Northumberland in fact refused Gaunt hospitality in the north at the time of the 1381 revolt, because he was unsure if he had the support of the king. This incident obviously caused great tension later, tension which Richard was unable to alleviate.27 Another occasion which highlights the confusion and lack of singular authority at the centre is the trial, reported by the Westminster chronicler, of John Northampton, previously mayor of London. Northampton, refused to respect the authority of the court until the duke of Lancaster was present at the trial, obviously greatly angering the king who was presiding at the time.28 That a knight felt he could appeal to the duke almost as an alternative to the king himself is telling, not only of the influence of Lancaster, but also of a political community that was unsure of the source of authority. This is further substantiated by the fact that the period

26 McKisack, Fourteenth Century, p.424.
between 1381 and 1389 was particularly dry in terms of the recruitment of king’s knights. The final evidence to note here is found in the account given of Gaunt’s response to criticism of retaining in 1384. The chronicler notes that, ‘hearing this as a statement that no remedy was going to be provided in this manner (the representatives of the commons of the realm) fell silent.”

Here Gaunt is clearly seen as the final authority on this issue, that no other remedy could be provided highlights the absence of the king’s influence, an influence which was needed to regulate his most powerful subjects.

It is interesting to compare the actions of Gaunt and the king in the chronicles at this time. While Gaunt seems to be active in the affairs of state, interacting with the king and undertaking tasks, military and diplomatic, the king appears much less active in the actual work of state, indeed it seems there is little contact between him and the other nobles of the reign, he seems to be at best ineffective or at worst active in angry opposition to his nobles. The king’s lack of effectiveness in contrast to Gaunt’s authority, discussed above, is demonstrated by an occurrence recounted in the Westminster Chronicle, the writer of which was particularly well placed to understand the detailed workings at the centre.

In 1383 when news was received that the king of France was assembling a large army to invade England, the first men to respond were Gaunt and his brother Buckingham (later Gloucester). The chronicler states that they called the king to themselves at Kent not, as would be more expected, the other way around. After discussions with the council it was decided that the king could not array an army in time so peace should be pursued, the concluding comment of the chronicler is telling: ‘in this way the king’s purpose was thwarted.’ It seems the energy and decisiveness which the rebels witnessed in 1381 was not being exerted in the pursuit of governance but was in some way impeded. Conversely, the king’s force was increasingly demonstrated when directed angrily against those around him who he may have felt were responsible for his constraint.

What can also be seen are developments that suggest Richard was gaining the more independent control and will at the centre. These signs, however, appear not in the normal areas of the royal administration but in smaller ways, almost in competition to the normal running of the government. Much has been made of Richard's use of the signet seal and the wardrobe to try and create a household within a household. However, as Saul has argued more recently, this could be more due to changes in bureaucratic routine rather than a growth in the king’s personal influence. More importantly,
the young band of men described as his favourites also become much more prominent at this time. Key positions changed hands from men associated with Gaunt to those who could have been described as Richard's men. This is particularly clear with the position of chancellor when in 1382 Richard Scrope, a man particularly trusted by Lancaster, was replaced by Michael de la Pole, a man with close connections directly to the young king. Walsingham specifically mentions that it was opposition to the king’s policies which caused Scrope’s removal. This process may indeed have had the consent of Gaunt, but it can still be seen as a demonstration of the new trends in central government at this time. It seems the king's violent outbursts gradually increased over this period also. During the 1385 campaign in Scotland, Richard is recorded as intentionally and directly disregarding Lancaster's advice to continue the campaign, and when attending the king, Lancaster is often recorded as being accompanied by armed guards. Gaunt was in an impossible situation. Because by his control through council in the early 1380s he had to some extent alienated the king, and created a situation where his supporters represented an alternative source of power to his nephew. The king's knights in this context are interesting. As discussed in more detail later, there are a number of men who could be seen as Lancastrian amongst the group, or men with connections to the previous regime. Along with this, the military campaign of 1385 involved many men in the unusual feudal summons, but few were retained formally. It can also be mentioned that in this early stage Richard spent relatively little time in the Midlands, possibly accounting for the general lack of retainers in this area at this time. In any case, the position was becoming increasingly dangerous for Lancaster; various threats had already been made against him, the Carmelite friar incident of 1384, being one of the earliest and most investigated. In many ways these specific tensions were resolved when in 1386, Lancaster made the decision to leave England and pursue his dynastic ambitions in Spain. If you can't relate to a king, you do well to leave his kingdom.

c) First attempts at resolution

Both Goodman and McKisack note the departure of Gaunt as a significant juncture which prepared the ground for the later crisis of 1386-1388, but for differing reasons. Goodman argues that it was because he was completely against the ideals of the Appellants, who in Gaunt's view were acting entirely against the model of nobility and princely conduct, while McKisack argues that it was his withdrawal which left Richard open to his opponents. However, as we have seen the crisis was already forming before Gaunt sailed for Spain. The seeds of the crisis, the

36 Westminster Chronicle, pp.29, 37.
37 Walsingham, Chronica maiora, p.186.
38 Westminster Chronicle, pp.113, 131.
39 Saul, Richard II, Itinerary Appendix.
general distrust between the king and key figures amongst his subjects and the barrier which Richard’s favourites created for the other noblemen of his realm, had already been laid in the early 1380s. Having said this, the events of the latter half of the decade, the Appellant threat and the defeat of Robert de Vere at Radcot Bridge were to have a great effect on Richard’s kingship and must have had a profound influence on some of his later policies of retaining. The impeachment of the chancellor, Michael de la Pole, in 1386 could perhaps be seen as a repeat of the events ten years earlier when Gaunt had suffered constraint at the hands of parliament. However, what was distinct about this crisis were the developments which took place in November 1387 when the Appellants raised a force of fighting men outside London exerting direct pressure on the king. It is clear that the actions of these noblemen in many ways took the administration at Westminster by surprise and their response, a confusing mix of resistance and negotiation, was reminiscent of the panic that had ensued in the revolt of 1381. However, the gradual build up to this confrontation is a key part of the development of Richard’s ideas on retaining.

There is a marked difference between the two major parliaments at the end of the 1380's. The Wonderful Parliament, in 1386, was essentially an attempt to impose the formal council of his youth back on Richard and remove de la Pole as chancellor. However, the Merciless Parliament, two years later, had a much more wide ranging impact, removing almost all the confidants which Richard had built around him at the centre, effectively setting the slate clean. Saul discusses the motivations of the various Appellants at length. Gloucester and Warwick’s discontent arose essentially from their personal estrangement from the king which was undermining their position as powerful men in the counties. Gloucester in particular suffered from the lack of land granted to him by the king leaving him extremely dependent on exchequer grants and consequently vulnerable at times of financial pressure. Warwick too, although loyal to the king, had become increasingly isolated following the loss of key associates like the earls of Stafford and March. Arundel in contrast seems to have been secure in his position amongst the great magnates of Richard’s reign. His opposition appears to have been largely motivated by policy differences, as early as 1383 he had made a speech in parliament decrying the decay of the nation. Lancaster later attempted to gloss over these remarks but Arundel’s concerns were never directly addressed. Both Gloucester and Arundel were military men, and during the time after the Merciless Parliament, while they were attempting to put policy right, they engaged in various skirmishes in the lowlands and France. This activity suggests that a large part of their

43 Westminster Chronicle, p.69.
discontent rested with the nation’s relations with its enemies. These three, Gloucester, Warwick and Arundel, were later joined by two younger noblemen, Bolingbroke and Mowbray. Saul describes the younger pair as being motivated by nothing more than the opportunity for personal gain. Indeed, Thomas Mowbray had been made a king’s knight while he was part of the king’s closest friends in the early 1380s. Later in the 1380s, however, most likely due to jealousy of de Vere, he had drifted from the king’s intimate circle and joined allegiance with his critics. The transition of Mowbray, from close associate of the king in the very early 1380s to Appellant in 1386, demonstrates how much the king’s close association with a few notable men, particularly de Vere, had isolated him from the wider group of the nobility. It was this isolation which precipitated the crisis of 1387 and perhaps led the king to begin developing his policies of wider retaining in the 1390s.

While the Appellants could gain control of council following the Parliament of 1386, they still faced a similar problem as Gaunt: the monopoly of personal authority held by the king. We can clearly see over the course of 1387 a standoff between the Appellants trying to put straight the administrative and practical affairs of state and the king relying on his personal authority to enforce his will. Whilst the central apparatus of government was in the hands of his opponents the only way Richard could exert any kind of independence during this period was by being on the move. By leaving London Richard could emphasise the importance of his personal authority and seriously weaken the Appellant cause. It is interesting to note that a large amount of time in this gyration was spent in the area under investigation here. Indeed one of the first men Richard stayed with on leaving London was John Beaumont, later a king’s knight. It is clear that Richard’s personal ideas on retaining crystallised significantly during the crisis of 1386-1387, both Saul and Given-Wilson note that during his perambulation he sent agents into Essex and East Anglia in an attempt to recruit local men and distribute badges to his followers. This is one of the first instances of the king personally showing an interest in retaining. Despite the fact that his agent was promptly arrested, this is a significant development. There is an obvious connection between a reliance on his own personal authority and the attempt to attach followers directly to himself through gentry retaining and badge giving. In 1385, with Richard's declaration of the judges produced at Nottingham, the king’s attempt to assert his personal position against authority of the Appellants, parliament and council reached its height. While they are clearly a specific attack on the control of council and the parliament of the previous year, what is maybe most interesting is how it demonstrates the power of supreme kingly

46 Tout, Chapters, iii, p.418.
authority. This was a supreme authority on which the whole system of government was based; it
was an authority with which the Appellants could not contend. Saul is clear in his narrative that
this was the final step which produced the confrontation in November 1387 between the armed
Appellants outside London and the king and his cronies within the capital. The declaration of
the judges made clear the direct and extreme opposition of Richard to the Appellants. The
Appellants response and their appeal of treason against Richard’s favourites was in turn full
show of the tangible might they themselves could muster through their influence in the shires.
Their ultimate option if they could not bring Richard on side was to remove him. Indeed the
Westminster Chronicle records that the Appellants themselves discussed deposition at this time,
although on this occasion the crown prevailed with Warwick standing against the removal of the
king. What finally persuaded his fellow noblemen was Warwick’s assertion that their battle
was not with the king but with his favourites. The stage was set for the battle of Radcot Bridge.

The lasting significance in Richard’s reign of the battle of Radcot Bridge is huge. The
exile of De Vere and the subsequent removal of Burley in the following parliament were scares
which would stay with the king for the rest of his life. Following the swift gathering of power by
the Appellants, Richard had little choice but to accept their position. He promised to assign a
hearing in the next parliament. Several of Richard’s favourites, feeling the tide had turned,
fled, however, Robert de Vere, now the duke of Ireland, choose to stand and fight. This
decision to directly confront the forces of the Lords Appellant was not only disastrous in its
consequences, but also extremely revealing of the limitations of the king’s power. While the
king was emphasising his personal authority and the rights of his crown, the noble opposition
had no answers. As soon as it came to actual power in military confrontation Richard could not
compete. As discussed in the introduction to this work, the mechanics of fourteenth century
kingship demanded the king keep the support of his noblemen. Richard’s reaction to this
revealed weakness was perhaps most clearly seen in his later retaining policy. His aim, perhaps,
was never to repeat the defeat he had experienced in 1387.

Saul discusses the varying accounts of the duke’s confrontation with the Appellants,
piecing together the contrasting accounts in the chronicles. The duke had travelled north to the
king’s stronghold of Chester to raise his forces. It seems most likely that the Appellants had split
their forces to try and encircle the duke. His first confrontation was with Gloucester, but his men

48 Saul, Richard II, p.175.
52 Saul Richard II, pp.187-188.
lost their morale and many deserted. While retreating towards the Thames he encountered the forces of the duke of Arundel, losing more men in a further skirmish.\textsuperscript{53} His progress was finally halted as he approached the Thames, finding his path blocked at Radcot Bridge by the earl of Derby, a final skirmish ensued resulting in the defeat of the remainder of his men.\textsuperscript{54} The routing of the duke of Ireland not only left the king in the hands of the Appellants, it also removed the remaining opposing factions from amongst the nobility. With the favourites fled, removed or in hiding, the Appellants could harness the full power of the community of the realm. The involvement of York and Northumberland in the negotiations immediately before and during the Merciless Parliament is central to an understanding of these events.\textsuperscript{55} These were nobles who until this point had remained somewhat aloof from the factionalism of the previous years; their engagement with the king now demonstrates that the nobility, now without Richard’s favourites, were able to unite in a way not previously possible. When the united political community came together the king was unable to stand against it, but when this happened the intention was never to remove the king but to restore the foundational relationship between him and his noblemen who were so necessary for administering of his authority. Just as the king could not stand against the weight of united opposition, so the political community could not function without him. The intention of the parliament was to make a break with the relational differences of the previous decade and bring and opportunity for a fresh start between Richard and his most mighty subjects; the chronicles described it as a parliament that punished those who deserved it and those who did not.\textsuperscript{56} A new slate was what was required. In 1389 Richard was restored to his throne, arguably the first time he was an independent king. The chronicler Adam Usk notes that from this year the nation feared the king and his laws, suggesting that previously this may not have been the case.\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{d) Renewed direction from the king}

While the early 1390s did not match the previous five years in terms of major political events they do mark the beginning of growth in the number of king’s knights being retained by the king. The tension and turbulence of the 1380s settled to peace in the early 1390s. The reconciliation with Thomas Mowbray, the coming of age of John Beaumont and Thomas Stafford form a key part of this new beginning. Two key chronicles of the 1380s, those of the anonymous monk at Westminster and Henry Knighton, end in the early 1390s. In many ways this period has been overshadowed by the obvious interest and turbulence of the last years of

\textsuperscript{53} Westminster Chronicle, p.222.
\textsuperscript{54} Knighton’s Chronicle, pp.422-4.
\textsuperscript{55} Westminster Chronicle, p.225.
Richard's reign. Despite this, the period is probably the most interesting in the development of Richard's retaining. The context of a political community with an aging group of major noblemen, the return of peace with France allowing Richard to personally pursue campaigns in Ireland, and continued financial difficulty, all lay the seed bed for the development of the king's knights.

What is interesting to mention here for the context of the growth of the king’s knights in the early 1390s is the king’s personal role in the debate surrounding livery and maintenance during the parliament of 1390. Just as the events of 1387 must have been influential on the king’s ideas of retaining so Richard’s personal involvement in the debate of 1390 demonstrates his growing activity surrounding this issue. As Saul discusses, in a number of ways the Appellants had experienced as many hurdles in tackling the countries ills following the Merciless Parliament as the royal administration had encountered in the 1380s. The king’s decisive resumption of power in 1389, which as recorded by Knighton was unopposed, demonstrated that he was again able to take the political initiative. As is evidenced by the chancellor’s speech, this was clearly the setting for the parliament of 1390. One key issue which the lords had proved less than able to solve was that of law and order, an issue which in the eye’s of the commons was clearly linked to the distribution of badges in the shires. Saul discusses how Richard intervened at a key moment in the parliamentary discussion, even offering to stop distributing his own badges in order to achieve peace. Richard’s appreciation of the potential of this issue to help him assert his own personal position was not misplaced; the statute passed in 1390 was a serious attack on baronial power using the complaints of the commons to limit their personal followings and control of commissions. It formed part of a renewed commitment to bring peace which underscored the importance of the king as mediator in the political community. The nobles were soon restored to their positions on the commissions as the commons recognised they were essential for the enforcing of justice, but this does not reduce the significance of the king’s new confidence in his position. This incident shows, not only the rising social concern of the commons over livery and the king’s growing political maturity, but also his understanding that the issue of livery could be used as much to assert himself over his most powerful subject as the other way around.

59 Knighton’s Chronicle, pp.528-530.
It seems through this period that Richard was in full command of his most powerful subjects. After Gaunt's return from Spain, both he and Gloucester are prominent acting as royal servants, negotiating a truce with France in 1396 and being used to suppress disorder in the localities in the same year. However there are signs of a different agenda for Richard. This is clear with the statute of livery and maintenance mentioned above. Further to this, similar attitudes are shown in his relations with London. Caroline Barron has shown that Richard was developing his financial base by establishing closer control of the city. In 1392 Richard took all the revenues of the city for himself, this caused particular consternation within the capital, but Richard to a large extent was able to use his personal authority and mandate to bring peace to keep the city under close control. 63 Harvey, among others, argues that in fact the period of the 1390s mark for Richard a concerted and directed attempt to build up his power. 64 It would be beyond reason to suggest that the events of the previous decade had merely been forgotten and left behind by the king. How far he was driven by a personal desire to avenge the attack and executions of the Merciless Parliament is hard to say, the personal dislike of Arundel is clear to see through the 1390's, but with Gloucester and Warwick the events of 1397 seem much more out of the blue. What seems to be clear is that Richard was steadily following a number of policies which had their fulfilment in the crisis of the late 1390's. It seems as if Richard is following a similar course as in 1387, emphasising his personal, independent authority over the more subjective powers of those he was ruling, and its role in bringing peace. This is shown again by the enlargement of his household. This study will attempt to add to the research into how the country was ruled at this time. The effect of royal power in the counties of the Midlands where many of the Appellants, Warwick, Bolingbroke, Mowbray, and also Gaunt, were powerful, can be used as an interesting case study to investigate political relations at this time. This is necessary in the absence of the chronicles so useful before 1390.

One key aspect of Richard’s policy to discuss here is his use of a band of Cheshire archers as a bodyguard in the last years of his reign. James Gillespie’s now quite old research charts the growth of the group of men known as the king’s archers, from before the beginning of Richard’s reign. 65 In many ways they represent a very comparable group to the king’s knights. Gillespie argues, in line with those mentioned above, that the king’s policy was one of gradual growth and development rather than an unplanned unforeseen explosion in 1397. The transition

of these men from king’s archers to archers of the crown through Richard’s use of badges to link them more directly to his person is interesting to note here.\textsuperscript{66} However, despite this gradual growth it must be recognised, as Gillespie mentions, that there were still key developments following 1397. During the latter years of Richard’s reign his recruitment of archers from Cheshire, a region in which he was building a large personal following, rose to unprecedented levels. This group, as Gillespie points out, were distinguished from the archers of the crown who had been recruited before 1397 in that they were paid directly from the exchequer of Chester.\textsuperscript{67} They clearly mark a change in the retaining policy of the king at this time. The focus away from recruiting more broadly in the wider realm to intensive recruitment from Chester is very important.\textsuperscript{68} The king was changing focus from trying to infiltrate power structures around the country to merely bolstering his own personal retinue. Amongst the king’s knights only Henry Green and William Bagot are recruited in the period following 1397. These two men, as shall be seen later, were much less substantial men than the likes of Stafford and Beaumont who had both died by the mid 1390s. The king was arguably no longer trying to connect himself with the local power networks of the shires but rather influence the nation through his own subjective power. The most prominent use of his Cheshire archers was at the beginning of the parliament of September 1397 when he assembled a force of over two thousand men and used them to impress upon the assembled lords and knights the new extent of his own personal power.\textsuperscript{69} It was at this parliament, now known as the ‘Revenge Parliament’, when Richard infamously settled his old grudges from the troubles of 1387. The result, Arundel’s execution, Warwick’s banishment and Gloucester’s murder while waiting to sail from Calais, was a small revolution which opened the door for the character of the final three years of Richard’s reign, which known were as his ‘tyranny’. However, the fact that his Cheshire archers were so closely linked to this transition demonstrates that this was not a completely unforeseen set of events but rather part of Richard’s developing style of kingship.

Whether the events of 1397 were always in the mind of the king or merely a response to the immediate context, what is clear is that in 1397 Richard must have felt in a very strong position. A new marriage treaty with France, success in Ireland, all this gave him confidence that he was able to use his authority to bring peace and rule as he wished.\textsuperscript{70} But his subjects were by no means completely happy with his rule; the wounds of the earlier decade were still important factors on events. In parliament, although he had reduced the burden of tax on his

\textsuperscript{66} Gillespie, ‘Richard II’s Archers’, p.17.
\textsuperscript{67} Gillespie, ‘Richard II’s Archers’, p.21.
\textsuperscript{68} Given-Wilson, ‘The King and the Gentry’, pp.95-96.
\textsuperscript{69} Saul, Richard II, p.375.
\textsuperscript{70} McKisack, Fourteenth Century, p.473.
subjects, Richard was emphasising his own authority over the assembly, stressing it was by his mercy and favour that he heeded their advice, and only by his permission that they met.\textsuperscript{71} Richard was also seemingly building more connections to the gentry, previous servants of the nobility, rather than with the most powerful men of his realm. One of the purposes of this study is to investigate this process more closely. The same problems of 1386 were seemingly prevailing. But when Haxey presented his bill with demands to reform the household, unlike 1386, Richard felt he was in a stronger position to stand against this opposition. When Arundel and Gloucester also raised their complaints because, like in 1386, they must have been uneasy that the king was cutting them out of the administration of government, the king turned on his old critics. This was both an expression and a catalyst of the new sense of security and power which drove Richard through the final years of his reign.

The final period of Richard’s reign is a time when the king’s autocratic methods appear to be in their ascendancy. With the lands confiscated from the former Appellants Richard was able to build for himself the noble powerbase he lacked in 1387. His close followers were given large parcels of lands, becoming known as the ‘duketti’, Chester was raised to the level of palatine by amalgamating some of Arundel’s lands, and the acts of the Merciless Parliament were annulled.\textsuperscript{72} This was followed finally in 1399 when, after the death of Gaunt, Richard exiled his cousin, Gaunt’s heir, Bolingbroke, and took the Lancastrian inheritance for himself. Given-Wilson argues this had been his aim all along.\textsuperscript{73} However, Bolingbroke was not gone for long. While Richard was in Ireland he returned to England to reclaim his inheritance and in an almost unprecedented manoeuvre removed Richard and took the crown for himself. To explain the events of 1399 two differences need to be noted to the crisis of 1386-88. Firstly, Bolingbroke’s opposition was similar to that of the Appellants of 1386 not the parliament of 1388. He represented a small disenfranchised part of the political community rather than a concerted attempt to bring the king to heel. In this case extreme action like deposition was possible, and unlike in 1387, there were no older more cautious noblemen to dissuade him. Secondly in 1387, the defeat at Radcot Bridge had shown that in fact the king’s supporters could not match the power of the Appellants. In 1387 the duke of Ireland had been an obvious focus to the opposition, his removal, it was hoped, would allow the king to the act independently again. However, by 1399, Richard had tied himself personally to his landed powerbase; with no obvious favourites to remove it seemed deposition was the only option. In terms of king’s

\textsuperscript{72} R.R. Davies, ‘Richard II and the principality of Chester’ in Du Boulay and Barron (ed.), The Reign of Richard II, pp.149, 286.
knights, there are clear developments in the late 1390's both in the use and terms of retaining of Richard's men. In contrast to the subtle change in 1389 towards a more widespread and directed retaining policy, the changes in 1397 were much more radical. Richard's gentry men were now not only being used in significant central positions: the infamous 'continual councillors', Bussy, Bagot and Green, all from the Midlands. They were also being given much more substantial rewards from the wealth generated by the dispossessed Appellants. Indeed, Richard had been so successful in countering the nobles who apparently stood to limit his powers there were none to protect him from the real challenge of Bolingbroke.

So we are left with our assessment of Richard as a man and a king. McKisack portrays him as a king who became lost in the mystique of monarchy neglecting the necessary relations with his nobles. 74 Nigel Saul rather, takes the view of Richard as a Renaissance prince, the likes of whom the political community of England were not ready for. 75 Given-Wilson records the contemporary continental view that Richard was a king betrayed by the disloyalty of his subjects. 76 In the introduction it was argued that the key to governance and kingship was mutual co-operation. What is certain is that Richard's reign is characterised by the opposite. His reign highlights the potential problems that England faced if the king and his political community could not build a partnership to rule the realm effectively. As we turn to look at the workings of the king's knights and the idea of the royal affinity more closely, we must ask a key question: why was something which was an expression of the mutual partnership between the king and his subjects such a source of division in the wider polity?

74 McKisack, *Fourteenth Century*, p.497.
Chapter 2
Identity and Status: Who were the king's knights?

As mentioned above although this has many similarities with general studies of the late medieval gentry, it differs in the selection of those investigated. One advantage to this is there is no difficulty in identifying the men who should be encompassed by this work. The list of king's knights, identified by Given-Wilson in the appendix of his work on the Royal Household, produces twenty-four men who were active in the selected counties of Midlands.\(^1\) However, while there is no problem in identifying the group as a whole, when beginning to analyse the relevant knights we encounter the same problems discussed by historians of the political elite in general. The analysis of political society is one dominated by status, consequently identifying the status and position of men in their local communities has been a continual problem of the late medieval historian. Nigel Saul in his study of Gloucestershire gentry approaches the longstanding debate of how to define the gentry by looking at the terms which were used by contemporaries to describe different members of the nobility.\(^2\) He points out that in the fourteenth century the words nobility and gentility were almost synonymous, he argues that a much more helpful designation is between higher and lower nobility. The crux of the debate, from the foundations of McFarlane’s assertion that the emergence of lower nobility was linked to the development of the parliamentary peerage, is in how the higher and lower nobility should be identified and distinguished.\(^3\) Saul discusses the use of military terms to denote status; many of the men discussed here would have gained status through military service. However, he also points out that social status as defined by parliamentary summons could vary from the military status, instead becoming increasingly defined by wealth.\(^4\) Further to this, Wright and Bennett in their studies of local society, point to the need of the magnates of the shires to gain the support of their gentry neighbours and that it was this system of patronage and service which defined the lower nobility as a group.\(^5\) Gorski mentions three keys aspects which are useful in the identification of the gentry: landed wealth, military service and participation in the shire government.\(^6\) These differing aspects are extremely important in forming a picture of both the influence and contemporary perception of the men studied, essentially the basis of their status.

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1. Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, Appendix V
But they are by no means the complete picture, into this picture can be added other characteristics, family connections and connections to other noble households, as well as age, for example, all form a necessary part of how a specific man was perceived. Over the course of this chapter, the picture of who the king's knights were will begin to come into focus.

a) Personal connections

The first factor to consider when discussing the characteristics of the king's knights is their varied age. The consideration of the age of men involved in politics at this time is something that can give the political historian of the fourteenth century some interesting insight. It is clear that age in itself would not significantly determine the status of men in this period. Within a certain group though, and particularly when thinking about office-holding, age could have a significant impact on the influence of certain men. While it is rare to be able to pin point the birth date of specific men in this period, particularly when working with men lower down the social hierarchy, it is possible to do this with several of the king's knights. A group of knights, notably those with highest titled status, were of the same age as the king himself. Thomas Mowbray, Thomas Stafford and John Beaumont, who were all styled as 'king's kinsmen' were all born in the late 1360s a very similar date to Richard. The combination of their young age and inheritance of high social rank made them prime candidates for close associates of the king. It is also interesting that all these three men were retained by the king when they were very young, in their early twenties or even late teens, just on the cusp of adulthood in medieval perceptions. The fact that the king chose to formalise or advertise this connection is testimony to a political community which contained several different generations, and in which the king's most influential advisers were of a more mature age. There were however, also other men who were at the other end of their lives amongst Richard's knights. Thomas Latimer born in 1341 is most notable here. Men like Anthony Malorre, Ralph Ferrers, and William Clynton, were also all amongst the senior members of the king's knights. These final three all died during Richard's reign. And the fact that they were retained extremely early suggests they were men who were trusted members of the previous administration with ties to Edward III's men rather than the

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7 Gorski, 'Lordship, gentility and administration', pp.21-44; through his study of John James identifies the importance of service within noble households and also recognises that the lack of family connection, in this case marriage, as being unusual, part of James' distinctiveness as a shire powerbroker.
8 Gorski, Fourteenth Century Sheriff, chp.5.
young king himself. Between these two groups were men who must have formed the majority of the king's knights. Identifiable in this age bracket are William Thorpe, born 1350, Philip Darcy, born 1352, and Henry Retford, born 1354. These men were all of an age similar to that of the duke of Gloucester, himself born in 1355. The dates and ages when these men were retained vary but the norm seems to have been around their late 30s and early 40s, probably a similar age as when the older generation had begun to enjoy connection with the previous royal household. On balance then it seems that Richard's knights were a representative spread of the political community as a whole. While it is rare to be named as a king's knight as early as twenty, men who were at differing stages of their careers could have been found amongst the king's knights.

More influential in drawing a picture of status at this time were family connections. The families of these knights would have given them their easiest access to the mutually beneficial network of relationships that formed the fabric of the political community, discussed by Bennett in his study of Cheshire society. The men who have the most traceable family connections are again those styled as 'king's kinsmen'. Mowbray, Stafford and Beaumont all came from long standing influential families. The fact they were mentioned as 'king's kinsmen' shows they were part of the network of higher nobles who would have been able to trace links to the extended royal family. Both the Stafford and Beaumont families had received their baronage around the beginning of the fourteenth century and had been servants of the royal household since then.

There were also family connections to the royal household away from these notable young earls. Two of the knights came from the junior branches of families with royal service as their heritage. The Latimer family was an extraordinarily influential family under the early reign of Edward III with a longstanding pedigree of royal service, Thomas Latimer, the king's knight retained in 1385, was the great grandson of John Latimer the brother of William Latimer, important in Edward III's early regime. This was also a similar situation to Philip Darcy who came from a junior branch of the Darcy family in Ireland, and was probably related to John Darcy, who had been

13 Bennett, Community, Class, and Careerism, pp.30-6; Gorski, ‘Lordship, gentility and administration’, p.22.
14 CP, ii, p 61; xii, pt1 pp.179-80.
15 CP, vii, pp.454-56.
both a military commander and prominent councillor under Edward III. The fact that the king's kinsmen were retained so early in their lives suggests there must have been little more to recommend them as retainers than their noble heritage and the personal connection to the king this brought. However, the connections of Latimer and Darcy were not so personal, consequently we see them being retained later in their careers when they had been able to demonstrate their own personal merit. This is also interesting when we look at the connections of other knights in the group. Henry Green's father Henry, for example was both a councillor of the Black Prince and a royal justice. Robert Thorpe the uncle of William Thorpe, had served as chancellor for Edward III, and was also made one of the guardians of the estate of William Bohun, earl of Northampton. Both these men served together on the Black Prince’s Council, clearly a place their families could have built a common bond of trust and co-operation. The father of William Goderich was also described in the records as 'the king's esquire'. These two connections, like the king's kinsmen and unlike Darcy and Latimer, were much more immediate to the knights, uncles and fathers. The two knights in question were men for which it is hard to find much evidence of their service or status before they were retained. Perhaps, like the kinsmen, these knights owed much of their connection to the king's household from the previous generation of their immediate families. The status these men would have had in the local community is unclear, what is clear is that personal contacts of family were an important part of accessing the royal household, perhaps these connections even diluted the importance of status.

The overwhelming characteristic these knights shared, beyond their service to the king, is that they combined this royal service with service to other lords as well. Peter Coss, in his discussion of the emergence of the term ‘esquire’, mentions the importance of connection to those who were social superiors as an important way of defining status. This was certainly a key basis to the status of the king's knights. What is unsurprising is that amongst the knights there were a number who had previous connection to the king's father, Edward the Black Prince. This is even less surprising amongst the 'old guard' knights born and retained much before the majority of knights. Thomas Latimer, during his time in the armies of Edward III, fought in the

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17 CPR, 1389-1392, p.14; CCR, 1381-85, p.553; the dates of both Darcy and Thorpe's retaining is unclear, these entries refer to significant grants or commissions which suggest for the first time a special role played by the knights for the king.
19 CP, xii, pt2, pp.727-9.
20 CPR, 1382-85, p.585.
retinue of the Black Prince and had clear connections to the young king's family. Anthony Malorre also, as mentioned in the terms of his retaining by the king, was formerly a squire of the Prince of Wales. Beyond these old servants however, connections also existed with younger knights. John Annesley was recorded as being married to Isabella one of the heirs of John Chandos, who, like Latimer, fought alongside the Black Prince, and it seems was considered a very close associate; John Paveley, another knight, not retained until 1394, was in service as an attendant of the king's mother in 1385, a position which connects him with Latimer and several other royal servants. These links in themselves are unsurprising. It seems natural to assume the young king would come to trust the servants of his father. However, links to great households are certainly not the exception amongst these men; there are also a large number of knights who had connections to John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster. Amongst the older men, Ralph Ferrers may have been a political ally of Gaunt, himself being involved in the 'continual councils' and parliament of the late 1370s when Gaunt was in the ascendancy. This too can explain his prominence amongst the early servants, in contrast to Latimer and Malorre, servants of the Black Prince. Also amongst the younger knights connections to Gaunt prevail. John Bussy was most prominent in this group. Bussy first appears in the records as the duke's servant in 1378, and for some time he was steward of all the duke’s lands north of the Trent. He was still involved in the administration of the duchy right until 1397, even after his role in the king's service began in 1391. Henry de Retford was also recorded as serving with Gaunt in Spain, his Lancastrian links in many ways being demonstrated by his ease of transition between the regime of Richard and that of Henry Bolingbroke after him. Philip Darcy equally was recorded as having served in the army alongside the duke as early as 1369 and again travelled to Scotland in the expedition lead by the duke in 1381. Finally, the father of Thomas Mowbray and the uncle of William Thorpe appeared together on Gaunt’s council in the years immediately before Richard’s coronation. Despite tension between the duke and the king these connections are not surprising; service in the duchy of Lancaster was an unrivalled source of patronage at this

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22 Jurkowski ‘Latimer, Sir Thomas’, DNB.
23 CCR, 1385-89, p.581.
28 Lock, 'Retford, Sir Henry', DNB.
29 Verduyn, 'Darcy family', DNB.
time. It may be significant though that none of these men were retained before 1389. Beyond connections to Lancaster and the Black Prince, it is also certainly the norm for the knights found amongst the king's knights to have enjoyed other significant service connections to the mighty subjects of the kingdom. Hugh Despensener was recorded, in 1383, as having been in Ireland in the company of the earl of March.\textsuperscript{31} There is also evidence in the exchequer rolls of an indenture between, Philip Darcy, lord of Meinell, and the duke of Gloucester, for service in Ireland, interestingly after the time Darcy was noted as being one of Richard’s own retainers.\textsuperscript{32} One knight who excelled in the area of other connections to powerful men was William Bagot. Bagot was first linked to the earl of Warwick, later to Thomas Mowbray and John of Gaunt, before finally being used by the king during his tyranny.\textsuperscript{33} His career demonstrates the possibilities and power knightly service could bring. It is perhaps noteworthy that Bagot seems to have little in the way of family or landed wealth that would have commended himself to the king. In these circumstances his exploitation of his different connections is even more impressive. What is clear is that king's knights do not represent an isolated clique or faction but that they were widely linked to the political community as a whole. Indeed, the common experience of service was in many ways a key characteristic of the knightly class.\textsuperscript{34} Service of more powerful men was so much the norm that it makes sense to conclude that men who do not appear to have been in service to other lords enjoyed a status somewhat higher than their fellow knights. This seems far more likely than the alternative, which is that while being wealthy office holders they had no connections to powerful men in their community.

\textit{b) Occupation}

The connections and associates of the knights were extremely closely linked with their participation in administrative activities of the shire system. Recent study has argued that the office-holding community was not directly representative of the wider social context and consequently that office-holding was not a direct expression of the social status of the recipients.\textsuperscript{35} There were many activities, primarily the accumulation and administration of land, where powerful shire men could form contacts and prestige which affected and defined their social standing. Indeed, some men of substance from the counties may have chosen not to become involved in administration; some of the men of the office-holding community were, in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{CPR.} 1382-85, p.274.
\item \textsuperscript{32} TNA King’s Remembrancer: Accounts Various, E 101/74/1/23
\item \textsuperscript{34} Coss, ‘Knights, esquires’, pp.155-78.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Holford, ‘The Esh Family,’ pp.221-239: although this is a specific and explicitly unusual regional study, it reflects similar findings by other historians included Gorski, \textit{Fourteenth Century Sheriff}
\end{itemize}
Gorski's words, 'small fry' compared to their colleagues.\textsuperscript{36} As with personal connections, how far office-holding was an expression of existing status is hard to ascertain, however, both powerful associates and administrative office were social capital in this period. What is clear is that to complete the picture of who these men were we must consider what they spent their time doing.

Easily the most common employment for these men was on military campaigns fighting the enemies of the realm. This in itself is not surprising given the militarised nature of medieval society and politics. Military service is an obvious career choice which would engender connections between a knight and the king. This may be slightly more surprising given the criticism levelled at Richard for being a lover of peace rather than of war.\textsuperscript{37} As a starting point to a survey of the evidence it may serve to note that ten of the men in Given-Wilson's list appear on the list of those appointed in 1385 to gather together fighting men to supply Richard's army.\textsuperscript{38} Arguably, this commission does not demonstrate military ability but rather local influence and a command of men. Indeed there are some notable absences from this list, men with clear military experience who were not used to array men in 1385. While the commission alone does not prove special military expertise, there is enough evidence to recognise a number of men as professional soldiers. Ralph Ferrers is one man absent from the 1385 list, maybe disqualified because of his age. He, along with Philip Darcy and Thomas Latimer, served under Gaunt and others in the battles of the previous reign.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, Ferrers, although not very prominent in the 1380s being retained in 1378 probably as a hang-over of the previous regime or a Lancastrian stop-gap, seems to be a clear example of a professional soldier. This is shown by his defence against charges of treason in the 1380 parliament, where he specifically refers to his loyal service to the crown overseas, noting his military successes.\textsuperscript{40} Hugh Despenser is also missing from the 1385 list, but again clearly a career soldier. Indeed, it is likely that he was overseas at the time of the 1385 campaign, the records show he was in Ireland with the Earl of March in 1383 after which he travelled to Prussia probably not returning until after 1385.\textsuperscript{41} He was overseas again on the king's service in 1386 and 1394.\textsuperscript{42} The link between Despenser and Ferrers is also interesting. On the event of Ferrer's death in 1391 Despenser received the grant from the exchequer which Ferrers had previously enjoyed during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{43} John Annesley and John

\textsuperscript{36} Gorski, \textit{Fourteenth Century Sheriff}, pp.158-61.
\textsuperscript{37} W. M. Ormrod, 'Knights of Venus', \textit{Medium Aevum}, 73.2 (2004), pp.290-305.
\textsuperscript{38} CPR, 1382-85, pp.589-92.
\textsuperscript{39} C. Given Wilson (ed.), 'Parliament of November 1380', \textit{PR}, item 21; \textit{CP}, iv, pp 61-3; vii, 454-6
\textsuperscript{40} Given Wilson, 'Parliament of November 1380', \textit{PR}, item 21.
\textsuperscript{41} CPR, 1382-85, p.274.
\textsuperscript{42} CPR, 1385-89, p.52; 1389-91, p.49.
\textsuperscript{43} CPR, 1389-91, p.481.
Walsh stand out in this area also. Both these men are recorded as having fought duels in the king's presence to defend their honour, Annesley defending against a claim of treason regarding a loss of a castle in Normandy, and Walsh against a charge of treason by a Navaresse squire.\textsuperscript{44} Henry Knighton also records that a certain Lord Beaumont gained renown in a tournament in 1389.\textsuperscript{45} This coincides with the timing of the king's knight John Beaumont being confirmed in his estates and entering the circle of influence of the king. The selection of these men as king's knights could be seen as clear evidence of the link between recognised military skills, or at least accomplishment in feats of chivalry and service in the royal household. It could also reveal a young king who had his focus on tournaments rather than on real war, a criticism later levelled at Richard.\textsuperscript{46} It could be that the king's intentions for these knights were primarily military, although this is hard to confirm. What is clear is that a good way for county gentry to demonstrate their abilities in service was through military campaigns and feats of arms.

The second major area of expertise amongst these men was in the area of local law enforcement and the keeping of order in the shires. Most notable amongst these were those men who served as sheriffs in the shires. Three men, Anthony Malorre, John Bussy and Henry Retford, served as sheriff of Lincoln, in fact between them they cover most of Richard's reign.\textsuperscript{47} As well as these men, both Thomas Latimer and John Paveley were sheriff of Northamptonshire at various times, and William Bagot sheriff of Leicestershire and Warwickshire.\textsuperscript{48} What the role of sheriff demonstrates about these men is that they were trusted men who could be relied upon to carry out the duties of the office, but also that they were powerful men in their localities with enough standing to enforce the judgments and rulings of the authorities, be that the royal government or local landowners. What is interesting is that the terms of office for these men do not seem to bare relation to when they were retained. Both Bussy and Retford were active and influential in Lincolnshire long before their formal connection to the king which came for both quite late in the reign. There could be a number of explanations for this. It could be a gradual accumulation of power or change of policy on the part of Richard. More interestingly it could be that until this time connection to their local lord rather than to the king was much more important for these men. Certainly, in enforcing and exercising power, who they were supported by was of the utmost importance to these men. A local position with a slightly different role is that of knights of the shire. This parliamentary office, it could be argued, was not so much part of the

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Knighton's Chronicle}, p.433.
\textsuperscript{46} Ormrod, 'Knights of Venus', p.293.
\textsuperscript{47} CCR, 1382-85, p.74; Gillespie, 'Bussy, Sir John', \textit{DNB}; Lock, 'Retford, Sir Henry', \textit{DNB}.
royal administration as sheriff or commissioner of the peace, but it still combined the need for local knowledge and an ability to enforce the rulings of the centre. William Bagot as well as being a sheriff, was also summoned to parliament as a knight of the shire of Warwickshire regularly in the 1390s. Along with Bagot, four other men were summoned to parliament from their shires, John Annesley in Nottingham, Adam Peshale for Staffordshire, Henry Green in Northamptonshire and John Calveley in Rutland and Leicestershire. The lack of overlap of these two groups may be of significance, highlighting differing roles within the group rather than a common purpose. What seems very interesting is that these men who were influential through local office-holding were mostly retained later in Richard's reign while those with military capabilities seem to be more spread if not in the early part of the reign. This seems a significant issue to consider when looking at Richards policy and rule as a whole.

What does connect both office-holding and military endeavour is that of leadership qualities, and ability to command men. The offices of captains in the army and sheriffs were in some ways similar roles, demanding the ability and resources to command a following of men and use this force to accomplish the specific commissions. Arguably what was important about these men was not their qualities as individuals but the men they were able to command and harness. This moves us on then to consider both their status and their land-holdings.

c) Wealth

The final part of the picture of any figure in the fourteenth century is their wealth, primarily linked to their landed estates. One of the only explicit conditions that we can see contemporaries placed on status was wealth, demonstrated through the well documented sumptuary legislation of 1363 and Statute of Additions of 1413. Indeed one of the main conclusions arrived at by Peter Coss in his investigation of the development of the social term esquire is that it demonstrates an ultimate victory of a conception of status as determined by landed wealth. This is also important in reference to office-holding. A major requirement of contemporaries for suitable sheriffs was that they held a minimum of £40 of land within the county they were appointed to. However, Gorski argues that this was due to a concept of visibility, the need to be clearly accountable to the local community, rather than one of sheer

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51 Coss, 'Knights, esquires', pp.155-78.
wealth. This said a survey of the wealth of these knights is clearly important here, and influential in determining status.

Piecing together the various sources of evidence that can be used to calculate the wealth of differing knights is a complex process, it is often hard to gain a solid overview of the how differing estimates of wealth compared. Despite this several things can still be presented. Some of the more prominent men who have received attention from other historians have already had their wealth calculated. Thomas Mowbray, who finished his life in exile, but who is credited as having, at his height when his close connection to the king had allowed him to make serious landed gains and rise to be the duke of Norfolk, an annual income of £1800. Mowbray was clearly an exception from the norm of these knights. His wealth was more an expression of the events at the end of Richard's reign rather than representative of the king's knights themselves. Having said this there were also other men amongst the knights who had considerable landed wealth. Thomas, earl of Stafford, was clearly an extensive land owner, the wealth he inherited from his father was in excess of Mowbray, but periods of minority may have eaten into his families resources. The final man who could have been included in this grouping is John Beaumont. The inquisition taken at his death shows that he held at least seventeen complete manors and many other smaller parcels of land across a number of counties. Although simple manor counting can be problematic in calculating wealth, it is clear that Beaumont was above average for the rest of the king's knights. The evidence of his age, early retaining, involvement at the centre, and family pedigree, creates a picture of a man similar to the earls Mowbray and Stafford, making this judgement on his wealth more secure.

Outside of these three, however, there are other men who had substantial landed wealth. Philip Darcy is a good example here. The grandfather of Philip, John Darcy, was a very successful military commander and royal councillor during the first half of the fourteenth century; his wealth was estimated at being around £124, not an insignificant amount. It seems Philip's father John was not as prominent but none-the-less Philip inherited about seven manors in Yorkshire and the north from his grandfather and some interest in Lincolnshire also. It also seems likely that over the course of his career, which can be traced

54 Hugh Stafford wealth at death at least £2700: C. Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 1394–1521* (Cambridge, 1978), pp.8-10; Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford family MSS, D.641/2/1 
55 *CIPM*, iii, pp.284-291. (nos. 762-773) 
through this work, Philip added to these lands with several manors both in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire, holding, on his death, several of them directly from the king.\cite{57}

That he was able to gain a large amount of wealth over his life is testified to by his entry into the parliamentary peerage, previously unknown in his family.\cite{58} Darcy's last testament, preserved in the Bishop of Lincoln's register, shows a considerable wealth indeed; he allocated 40 marks each for his several children. The very fact that it is a separate document dealing with his movable goods as opposed to his landed estates emphasises his wealth.\cite{59} Another knight whose career could have been very similar to Darcy is that of William Thorpe. Thorpe, like Darcy, was the first generation of his family to be included in the peerage, but unlike Darcy no trace of him can be found in the inquisitions post mortem. However, his last testament was also preserved in the Lincoln register, and again it reveals considerable wealth. Again it is merely movable goods rather than lands, but through a sizeable number of donations made to religious institutions the total money dealt with exceeds 150 marks.\cite{60} Both Darcy and Thorpe must have been men who by the end of their lives enjoyed considerable wealth and influence in their communities. Beyond these men the picture of wealth and status becomes seemingly more blurred. Henry Green, for example, despite never being styled Lord, had considerable landed wealth at his death, owning around fourteen manors across a substantial number of southern and midland counties.\cite{61} This picture, it could be argued, like that of Mowbray, may be distorted because of the last years of Richard's rule. Having said this, Green inherited from his father, a notable legal adviser to the Black Prince, a wealth of around £400, before estates.\cite{62} Green is also notable because he was the only other knight, apart from Stafford, Mowbray, Beaumont and Darcy to own a large proportion, in fact in Green's case the majority, of his lands outside the area of this study. They were, if some of them at the lower reaches, nationally important landowners and enjoyed a wealth which made their involvement and interest in the direct actions of the king unsurprising.

There were also a similar number of king's knights who are identifiable as having been, though less wealthy than those mentioned, wealthy enough to give them recognised influence on a local level. Thomas Latimer, whose estates clustered around Braybrooke, Northamptonshire,
but who also held a small amount of land in Somerset and Shropshire, was estimated to have a wealth of £120 at his death. While Latimer's wealth in a county context could have been quite substantial, in a national context he is unlikely to have had wide personal influence. Also recognisable in this set is John Bussy. Due to his prominence at the end of the reign Bussy has received much attention of historians, the evidence surrounding his estates and personal wealth have been helpfully collated by various biographers. The majority of Bussy's lands were in the Kesteven region of Lincolnshire, however, he also inherited various lands in Yorkshire through his wife, and held lands in some townships in Nottinghamshire. His holdings probably gave him a similar standing to Latimer, the inquisition at the death of his second wife records around four complete manors. John Bussy may represent here an interesting case in the limitations of equating land-holding to wealth, and wealth to status. Obviously, different lands were worth differing values, indeed evidence suggests that Bussy was able to make a large amount of money from his land through sheep rearing and wool production. A record at the exchequer shows two Lincolnshire merchants paying Bussy 400 marks for an amount of wool; it may have been that Bussy was more of a businessman than landowner per se. Further to this, through his administrative roles especially in the duchy of Lancaster, Bussy would have been able to command a much greater influence than through his wealth or land-holdings. Roskell remarks that Bussy would have been a much more prominent figure than his fellow king's knight Henry Retford. Records of Retford's estate are hard to find, but his wealth at death has been estimated at a considerable £200, likely to be more than that of Bussy. Other knights whose wealth put them in the category of prominent county landowners are Hugh Despenser who held around four complete manors, Anthony Malorre who held three, and finally William Clynton who is only recorded as having one manor in Northamptonshire.

As was mentioned earlier, wealth was particularly important when relating to office-holding because it ensured that not only did the officers have enough resources to accomplish their duties, they also had reason to dispatch their office with integrity because they could be punished through dispossession. So while it is interesting to chart who amongst the king’s knights were rich it is also significant to mention who was potentially poor. John Walsh presents an interesting case here. The records mention that Walsh had been knighted by the king’s own

65 CIPM, Henry IV, i, pp.45-46. (no.138)
66 Roskell, 'Two medieval Lincolnshire speakers', p.120.
67 Roskell, 'Two medieval Lincolnshire speakers', p.119.
68 Gillespie, ‘Bussy, Sir John’, DNB.
69 CIPM, ii, p.379. (no. 968)
hands, maybe following the duel mentioned in the previous section. However, in the same grant it is mentioned that this grant was given to him specifically because he did not have enough to support his rank.\footnote{CPR, 1382-1384, p.485.} There is no problem with the king creating titles and using them to reward his servants, this was a tool used by Edward III in his creation of the earls of Northampton, Huntingdon and Salisbury. However, to do this the king must use some considerable financial resources and grants of land. It could be suggested that Richard was trying to appoint people much more widely. The appearance of Walsh and Thorpe from relative obscurity shows the breadth of Richards recruiting. The growing expenditure of the household also lends weight to this argument. Men who were raised to positions without the resources to fulfil their roles would no doubt prove very concerning to contemporaries, and inevitably hamper the royal government. It also raises the question of what Richard received in return for these gifts. Regarding the debate mentioned at the beginning of this section, the evidence here would tend to bolster the view point of Bennett and Wright that the gentry were defined best by their connections to the social network of patronage. While the wealth and the service of these men varied, what seems to be an overwhelming characteristic is their service and connections to the more powerful men of their shires.

d) The Status Picture

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the aim here is to identify the status of the knights. The tangible aspects of the identity of the knights discussed above, come together to form a picture of the intangible ideal of status. One final way in which ideas of status became tangible is through the language and labels contemporaries use to describe it. The precise reality and origin of these terms are complex and well debated by Saul and Coss amongst others.\footnote{Saul, Knights and Esquires, pp.1-10; Coss, 'Knights, esquires', pp.155-78.} One key factor which determined contemporary labels was service. All these men, by virtue of their being retained were mentioned as knights, this was for all of them the nature of their service to the king. Indeed the term knight is routinely connected to almost all of the men mentioned in this study, even before their involvement as royal servants. This again emphasises that these men were involved in service outside the royal household, and that their status was more complex than simply their connection to the king.

Perhaps this would be a good place to discuss more directly the mechanics of knighting, and how this adds to an understanding of the term ‘king’s knight’ and its possible significance in Richard’s reign. The procedure of dubbing and the process of becoming a knight was one which
is often overlooked by historians of political society. What can be said is that the process of becoming a knight did not necessitate the inclusion of the king. Roskell in his biographical work on John Bussy notes that it was probably through the support of Gaunt that he was knighted.\textsuperscript{72} Tout also mentions the duke knighting various esquires on the battlefield in Castille.\textsuperscript{73} Roskell’s comment does not rule out royal involvement and the evidence from Tout may represent Gaunt taking on the royal mantel of ‘King of Castile and Leon’, however, it is interesting to note that there were potentially other routes to becoming a knight than through royal ceremony; dubbing was by no means a purely royal pursuit. This is substantiated by Fionn Pilbrow in recent work on the term ‘knight of bath’ in the early fifteenth century. Pilbrow mentions that one key variable in the knighting ceremony was the individual knight who conferred the order of knighthood on the chosen squire, the higher the status of the dubber, the higher the status of the knight.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, one key aspect of dubbing was the relationship of honour which was established between the knight conferring knighthood and the esquire receiving it. Pilbrow proposes that it may have been respect for his dubbing at the hands of Richard that motivated Henry V in his attempt to restore the dead king’s honour and attended to his burial as he had directed in his will.\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, if as Roskell may suggest, John Bussy was knighted by John of Gaunt, this would add extra insight into the dishonour which surrounded Bussy in 1399 following the royal interference with the Lancastrian inheritance. With this in mind, the term king’s knight could be seen as a means of expressing some special connection and relationship of honour between the king and the men it referred to. How far the position of king’s knight was seen as some special chivalric honour has never been considered, nor can it be discussed at length here.

The retaining of Walsh and Annesley, linked to feats of arms as discussed above, places the early development of the term within a chivalric context, although this is less clear in the later years of Richard’s reign. Pilbrow mentions with regard to the later knights of bath that men selected for this process were summoned individually in contrast to a more general dubbing ceremony for other candidates.\textsuperscript{76} How these men came to be selected is not discussed. The decision most obviously rested with the king and his officers. However, if the possibility of being honoured in this way was widely known about it seems just as obvious that ambitious men would have pursued it as directly as they could.

\textsuperscript{72} Roskell, ‘Two medieval Lincolnshire Speakers’, p.48.
\textsuperscript{73} Tout, Chapters, iv, p.157.
\textsuperscript{75} Pilbrow, ‘Knights of Bath’, p.199.
\textsuperscript{76} Pilbrow, ‘Knights of Bath’, p.201.
One key difference between the later ‘knights of bath’ and the king’s knights of Richard’s reign was that most of the men connected to Richard can be classified as knights prior to their connection to the king. The process described by Pilbrow is clearly a substitute for the normal dubbing process. There is no evidence that the process of becoming a king’s knight should be viewed in this way. Having said this, some men did gain their knightly status directly from the king, both the grants made to Malorre and Walsh, mention they had been knighted by the king himself. Two further examples are those of Nicolas Hauberk and William Goderich, both not being retained until the mid 1390s. Before this date both these men are mentioned as esquires, not being mentioned as knights until they are granted a subsidy as part of the royal household.\(^{77}\) Their mention as esquires before their inclusion amongst the king’s knights, however, does suggest a background of service which prepared them for royal service, simply not at a knightly level; interestingly, Goderich received his grant from the king on the surrender of a similar one made to his father.\(^{78}\) At the other end of the spectrum, as has already been mentioned, other men in this group of knights, for example Beaumont, Stafford and Mowbray, enjoyed labels above the level of knight, being styled as Lords.\(^{79}\) While the original grants had been made by previous kings, their personal position in society during Richard’s reign was certainly not a consequence of their office in the royal household. It could be argued that the fact that these men with considerable established status were still found among the ranks of the king’s knights disproves the view that these positions were primarily about social advancement.

Indeed, these men were serving in the royal household at a level below the status they enjoyed outside of the household context. However, it could also be argued that this demonstrates how valuable royal connection was. That men styled as lords outside the household still desired to be linked to the royal household as knights shows there must have been benefit to them. The tangible results of this personal bond can be seen by Mowbray’s receipt of the title of earl and then duke, titles not previously enjoyed by his family. Clearly there were still benefits when involved in royal service no matter how high the subject started.

Without wishing to impinge on the discussion of the following chapter it is interesting to continue what we have just seen, that these men’s status was not static. There are those who found, like Goderich and Hauberk, that connection to the royal household brought with it a direct change in status. Some, however, perhaps owed less to their specific role as king’s knight and more to a general context of royal service. Maybe the most interesting figure in this context is William Thorpe. Previous to William there is no record of his family amongst the peerage,

\(^{77}\) CPR, 1388-92, pp.397, 421, 487; 1391-96 pp.371, 205.
\(^{78}\) CPR, 1388-92, p.397.
\(^{79}\) CP, ix, pp.601-4.
although his uncle had been a trusted royal servant. However, in 1390, he was summoned to parliament as part of the peerage, becoming the first Lord Thorpe recorded. In Thorpe's case though his development in status did not come directly from his role in the household his connection to the king may well have contributed to his suitability for the peerage. The ramifications of this were lessened due to the untimely death of William a year later, but the rise from relative obscurity to the parliamentary peerage is an extremely significant and noteworthy development. Philip Darcy in this context is also as noteworthy as Thorpe. Although his background was not necessarily so obscure, being from a minor branch of the relatively established Darcy family, he was consistently summoned to parliament during Richard's reign along with Thorpe. As well as Darcy and Thorpe, Thomas Latimer was one of the few men in this group who were referred to as a lord. Where these men received these titles from is, as commented, hard to pin point. It may be due to their holding of a caput honoris or an ancestral home. One thing Thorpe gained from the king is the stewardship of various castles, and royal forests. This may have been a key step in his becoming a lord. What is clear is that labels of status were, as well as being the focus of their connections, wealth and service, also just another piece in the puzzle of who these knights were.

As with their personal connections, occupations and wealth then, it can be seen that the king's knights were of a large spectrum of status. From those who enjoyed the upper reaches of the wealthy elite down to those knights who were relatively obscure in their personal prominence. Richard was certainly not building a homogenous group of men to act as generic servants. The picture presented here confirms that identifying and distinguishing the lower nobility in the fourteenth century is a difficult task. As Saul discusses there were some links to military service and status, however, increasingly social position was becoming detached from military service. The differing wealth of the knights demonstrates the problems of associating wealth so closely with status. This could be caused, as Wright points out, by differing social realities and fabrics in the various regions covered by this study. Overwhelmingly, as mentioned above, the characteristic that seems to define these men as members of the lower nobility was their connection to the mutually beneficial network of relationships described by Bennett. The variance of the king's knights shows the complexity of his retaining policy and the specificity of each knight's relationship with the king. All of these men had different experiences, expertise, backgrounds and careers. Having said this there are some clear

80 CP, xii, pt2, pp.727-9.
81 Saul, Knights and Esquires, pp.7-8.
82 Wright, Derbyshire Gentry, p.6.
83 Bennett, Community, Class and Careerism, p.209-216.
characteristics that unite the majority of the group. A majority of men appear to have been substantial local landowners, men of around £40 per annum who would have inhabited the higher reaches of the country gentry in this period. Further to this, it is clear that Richard was looking for men who were skilled in military and local leadership roles. Indeed, amongst this group we also see men who in general could enforce decisions made by their superiors, men who were experienced in service. There is also similarity when considering how these men came to the attention of the royal administration. Family links were an important part of some men's link to the royal administration. Links to other noble families were also something that did not disqualify them from gaining royal favour. In fact in many cases their connection with the mighty subjects of the shires was a major way to demonstrate the calibre of their service, and bring them to the attention of the king. It seems safe to assert that the king wished to retain men who were trusted and known servants. However, beyond this it seems certain that there was no general specification that every knight needed to fulfil. A discussion therefore, of the purposes these men were used for in the royal administration, the mandate by which the king recruited them, and the service on which they were employed, seems to flow naturally from these conclusions.
Chapter 3
Service and Reward: What did it mean to be a king's knight?

Building on the base of a survey of the characteristics and nature of the men mentioned as king's knights under Richard, it follows that a reconstruction of their activity as royal servants would further our understanding. Again, rather than approaching on an individual case by case basis, a thematic approach seems more appropriate, so as to look generally at the nature of work and service with which a king's knight would be involved. Harriss, in his important article quoted in the introduction, charts the transition away from the study of offices, towards a study of officials. As the previous chapter shows this is certainly a study of officials, but this would most certainly be incomplete without an understanding of what occupied them as royal servants. The connection between status and office-holding is a long debated one. Indeed most recent studies recognise, as the previous section suggested, that low status was not a disqualification from certain office. The debate about the role of office holding runs deep amongst the historians of local gentry society. Carpenter first began describing the noble affinity in detail in 1980. For her the offices of local governance were the key arena in which a lord tested the strength of his affinity. Carpenter argued that a man’s position in a particular affinity was identified not only by the frequency of appearances in the financial records of local magnates but also the number of times they appeared in local office. However, as Wright found in her study of Derbyshire society, office-holding was not necessarily the strongest indication of local power networks. Her research found that a high degree of gentry families did not participate in local government which instead was dominated by a small section of the social elite. These assertions are substantiated by much more recent research by Mathew Holford into the structures of office holding in county Durham. His work demonstrates that many prominent leaders of local society were outside the group of gentry families who held local government offices. Although both Wright and Holford are explicit about the individuality of the regions'
conclusions are based upon, they demonstrate the dangers in equating local office holding directly to social status.

This section is focused on the knights' role in royal endeavours rather than any personal affairs, although interestingly this involvement often spans further than the time of their retaining. As Given-Wilson states, for the majority of the king's affinity the service the king required of them was not easily defined. Some knights had already been very active in the exercise of government at the time of their retaining, some had not; again the individual circumstances of each man can be stressed here. Similarly the benefits of being a king's knight span much further than direct royal generosity. In this context and when considering how the terms of retaining were set out for the knights some recent research by Watts on the visible images of the state in the fourteenth century is particularly interesting. Watts finds that outside the written records of governance there was very little to distinguish royal officials from their fellow subjects either at the centre or in the localities. He suggest that in the localities this was the case firstly because the reliance on private power gave no need to bolster officials positions through outward distinction, and secondly that their identities would have been common knowledge in the locality leaving no need for uniforms or badges. The overall conclusion of his research is that the fourteenth century state was to a large extent still merely a written affair. This is particularly interesting when considering the king’s knights whose position and status relied primarily on letters patent from the king. When considering the service and reward of these men a reliance on documented rewards rather than the invisible impact royal connection had on their personal affairs is unavoidable. Although, historians have recently moved to see the system as part of one whole, rather than locally or centrally split, for the sake of description here generally the knights' activity can be easily split between central involvement and locally focused responsibility. Finally, a consideration of career development and the benefits or payments they received for their work rounds off this section.

a) Central Positions

When considering the central involvement of this group of knights, several things need to be taken into account. There are two strands in this section which need to be addressed. Firstly, there is the issue of the involvement of these men in the workings of the central administration and the court, and secondly their involvement in parliament. For the first section several

8 Given-Wilson, ‘The King and the Gentry’, p.98.
questions can be asked: How much contact did these men have with the king himself? Were they a group of loyal followers whom the king confided in and who he personally directed, his eyes, ears and fist in the localities? Or were they merely connected to the crown by status and symbol, almost as representatives not servants? The fact that Given-Wilson identified over 150 knights who were styled king's knights during the reign may lead us to assume that the majority would not involve personal contact with the king, indeed the much smaller group of chamber knights identified by Given-Wilson, merely by their name itself, would be more likely to have the closeness of relationship described above. However, this does not mean that some of the men studied here would not have met the king. Indeed it is interesting here to mention briefly the terms of their retaining. Over half the knights studied here were specifically mentioned as being retained to stay with the king.\textsuperscript{12} It is clear then that involvement at the centre, in direct relation to the king, was a key part of the knight's duties, though, whether this was long term or at specific times, say military campaigns, adds nuances to this picture. Parliament in many ways needs its own separate section. It could be argued that parliamentary office falls more into the category of local rather than central involvement. Parliament was obviously a central body, but its function, in bringing the concerns of the shires to the king, presenting petitions and granting tax were certainly highly linked to the life of the counties. It is natural then that men, who were active in the shires, would be chosen to represent their peers and subordinates at Westminster. Their specific roles and involvement in parliament, again, add shade to the picture. Rather than mere labels what was the practical involvement of a king's knight?

i. Royal Council and Household

With regards the personal connection these knights had with the king, two interesting pieces of detail are worth mentioning here. They relate to the knights John Walsh and Anthony Malorre, both retained early in Richard's reign. In the grant given to Malorre in 1378, there is mention that it is a confirmation of a grant made to the knight by Edward III while he had been the late king's esquire. It is also mentioned that, as a prince before his coronation, Richard had previously confirmed this grant at Kennington Manor.\textsuperscript{13} This is interesting because it shows a personal connection between Malorre and Richard, something which was over and above his official connections as monarch. The inference is even more direct with that of John Walsh. In the grant made to Walsh in 1384, it specifically mentions that the king had knighted him with his own hands.\textsuperscript{14} This is interesting because its inclusion shows it to be an important and possibly unusual fact; it may in some way have been intended to give weight to the grant. Of course

\textsuperscript{12} William Clynton, John Walsh, John Annesley, Philip Darcy, Thomas Stafford, Adam Peshale, Hugh Despenser, John Bussy, John Littilbury, Nicholas Hauber, John Calveley, Henry Green, William Bagot.
\textsuperscript{13} CPR 1377-81, p.172.
\textsuperscript{14} CPR 1381-85, p.485.
caution must be maintained, the impersonal nature of the administrative documents allow us only
glimpses of the personal relations at court, but it should be a reminder that, despite the strength
of hierarchy, it was by no means impossible or unheard of for men of the shires to come face to
face with the monarch. Indeed the itinerant nature of the king's court underlines the importance
placed on the person of the king and his individual will.

When investigating further the role of the knights in the central administration it is rare to
find these men holding positions that are focused on the centre. Thomas Mowbray was indeed
appointed Earl Marshall in 1385, demonstrating his status and connection to the king, but this
position was largely a hereditary role focused on military matters rather than central
administration. John Beaumont is also another good exception to the general picture, himself
being a member of the Privy Council, a role that would clearly involve regular contact with
Richard. There is evidence in exchequer records of Beaumont giving account for his custody
of the western march of Scotland, an important and powerful position demonstrating his role
outside the area of the Midlands. Both Beaumont and Mowbray were wealthy and powerful
men, and would have naturally commanded the attention and proximity of the king. However,
other knights too seem to have enjoyed central roles. At the beginning and the end of Richard's
reign continual councils were established and several of the knights were included in these.
Ralph Ferrers is indeed notably among the continual councillors appointed to oversee the
government of the young king from 1377 to 1380. His central role is again confirmed by
another entry recording a pardon given to Henry, Ralph’s son, for attacking a servant in the great
hall of pleas in Westminster. The almost comic glimpse of this incident is quite interesting.
The fact that Ferrers' son was present in that location, not only shows
the importance of family
connections discussed previously, but could lead us to believe that in many ways Ferrers' focus
was on the central administration rather than the local role.

At the other end of Richard's reign, three knights were prominent in the king's councils,
Henry Green, John Bussy, and William Bagot. The involvement of these men is more
infamous and well documented than Ferrers. Much could be said about these three, while they
are in many ways individuals with differing backgrounds and careers they have been consistently
grouped together into the particularly undesirable evil councillors blamed for the corruption and
downfall of the king in 1399. However, for the purposes of this discussion two points can be

15 CP, ii, p.61.
16 TNA King’s Remembrancer: Accounts various, E 101/41/35
17 CCR, 1382-85, p.95.
18 CPR, 1377-81, p.496.
19 CPR, 1397-99
made generally about these men. Firstly, it appears that all three of these men had a background and a career of being councillors for major noblemen. As has been mentioned previously Bussy was prominent in the administration of the duke of Lancaster being his chief steward in 1394, he was also linked to the earl of Suffolk. Bagot also was linked to various lords, most notably Henry Derby, of whose household he was steward. Finally the father of Henry Green was noted in the Black Prince’s register as being part of the prince’s council, indeed he was recompensed for his travel expenses from his home to Chester were the council met. In fact, even Ferrers, like the later councillors, had a background in this area, being linked to the council of Edward Lord Despenser during the reign of Edward III. The reasons for certain men being selected to be present at council sessions are often invisible to the historian, but it seems safe to suggest that these men would have had expertise, administrative, legal or otherwise, which would have made them useful to their superiors. In Green's father's case it seems his legal expertise was of particular interest. In general though it is not remarkable that these men were selected to be involved in royal councils, indeed it seems a secure argument that it was their expertise and a natural expression of their career that they found themselves in this position, not because of any special or specific action of the king related to their retaining. The second generalisation may almost seem in opposition to the first, but while their natural selection as councillors is clear, so too appears to have been the unpopularity of the knights who found themselves at the centre of politics in Richard's reign.

All the knights mentioned in this section of the study, as well as being involved in central politics also found themselves at one point or other in their career, to be victims of faction and disgrace. The one notable exception to this was John Beaumont. This seems to be easily explained because the date of his retaining came after the purges of the late 1380s and his death before the trouble of the late 1390s. The turbulent career of Thomas Mowbray and the disgrace of Bussy, Bagot and Green are well documented. Maybe less well known is the intrigue which accompanies the events of Ferrers' public life. In the 1380 parliament Ferrers was indicted for treason on the discovery of a letter to the French and Scottish, divulging damaging military secrets. This set of events, the accusations later being found to be based on forgeries, seem to be a classic example of factional plays during this early period of the 1380s. It is interesting then that it seems to be the rule that the connection of these knights to the king's council brought with

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22 *BPR*, ii, pp41, 88, 90; iii, pp.94, 136.
24 *BPR*, ii, pp41, 88, 90; iii, pp.94, 136.
it opposition from amongst the political community. The most apparent explanation could be to
do with their status. While these men were natural and competent councillors in the sphere of
the county magnate, the men who were traditionally called upon to shoulder the burden of
advising the king were those same magnates themselves. Richard's personal problems with the
most powerful men of his kingdom are well documented, particularly in the late 1390s.26 This
lack of communication and cooperation would then leave a vacuum which it seems safe to
assume these men were drawn to fill. However, this should maybe not be taken at face value.
Indeed the actions of Edward III in raising up new lords as his close supporters would seem to
suggest that the principle was not the fault. Richard unlike his grandfather lacked the benefits of
a dynamic war with which to infuse his new men with honour and status. Ferrers, to a certain
extent, had this calibre; this was also his defence to the accusations of 1380.27 Bussy, Bagot and
Green, however, were most certainly not renowned for their military prowess, having grown
careers centred on competent administration and local influence. What is clear is that as an
emerging group the role these knights played was developing. And what is interesting, is that for
some of these men, but only really a select few, close involvement in the manoeuvring of court
and even close contact with the king himself was a definite part of their life in the political
community.

ii. Parliament

Parliament at this time was indeed a complex institution and its role in the royal
governance and effect in the shires was complex. Many of the men in this group were among
those summoned as lords temporal, Mowbray, Stafford and Beaumont as established members of
the nobility were unsurprising names in this group. However, more surprising are the inclusion
of Philip Darcy and William Thorpe, who by the end of their careers were also being summoned
to parliament as Lords.28 This role in the assembly as Lords temporal rather than as knights
demonstrates not only a more individual authority but also a more personal connection to the
king. These men aside, the majority of the king's knights were involved as representatives of
their shires. Many were summoned as knights of the shire very early into Richard's reign; John
Annesley, Thomas Latimer, Ralph Ferrers and Philip Darcy were all involved in the parliaments
in the late 1370s. This may demonstrate links between these men and Gaunt who was firmly in
control of the central administration during these early years of the young king, maybe
particularly the case for Annesley who was summoned for Nottinghamshire, a shire where the

26 Tuck, English Nobility, p.86.
28 CP, iv, pp.61-3; xii, pp.727-9.
duke of Lancaster exerted a large amount of influence.\textsuperscript{29} It is not sound to assert that any involvement in parliament shows a connection to the controlling faction. What can be said is that Richard did not attempt to build connections and then influence the composition of parliament, for his knights their involvement in parliament came before any formal connection to the king’s administration. Those knights who were involved in parliament were all active considerably before their retaining by the king. What is also interesting to note is the extent of the king’s specific influence on the composition of parliament. In the shires falling under the scrutiny of this study, after the year 1381, there were never more than three king’s knights serving as knights of the shire concurrently in the same parliament. The most significant influence of the knights was that of John Bussy and William Bagot, who represented Lincolnshire and Warwickshire respectively through the majority of parliaments between 1388 and 1399. These men were clearly well established in their respective counties, both also being sheriffs in the same counties. The driving force clearly came from the localities rather than the centre, these two men’s connections to other local landowners, John of Gaunt and the earl of Warwick, for example, is equally striking. Indeed Bagot himself was only retained by Richard extremely late in his reign. It is clear from this then that these knights were retained because of their county influence rather than developing influence after their retaining.

Attendance in parliament was not the same as influence. How these men functioned in parliament, how they used their position, and how it fits into the larger picture of their role in government and the shires is much harder to trace. Indeed most of the evidence creates the picture that, even if they had formal connections to the king, the knights of the shire maintained a significant element of independence when it came to their specific actions in parliament.\textsuperscript{30} A few of the men were more prominent than others, John Bussy is a good example of this, being appointed speaker of the House in the 1390’s. Ralph Ferrers was also appointed as one of the Trier of petitions in the 1378 parliament.\textsuperscript{31} In this area, work done on the retainers of magnates is helpful. Indeed it has been argued that a parliament could indeed be controlled by a small number of knights, as during the Good Parliament, or the Merciless Parliament. In 1380, when parliament issued a tax to further the military campaign of Thomas Woodstock, it is interesting that the speaker at the time was one of his henchmen, John Gildesburgh.\textsuperscript{32} These facts may reveal the general ascendancy of certain magnates at the time of the parliaments. It is clear here,

and from other research, that retainers were certainly not elected as members of parliament without genuine merit. However, what can be said is that men who had parliamentary experience and particularly those in a position to influence their fellow members were of value both to magnates, and also it seems to Richard.

b) Local Commissions

As we move from the central administration to the local, we can see much more evidence of activity. Just as it was with attendance at parliament it seems overwhelmingly the norm for these men to be involved heavily in the localities. Only a handful of men have little or no mention of local commissions such as, oyer and terminer, or peace commissions, and over half seem to be regulars in these kinds of posts. The use of local landowners on these commissions had been developing over the course of the fourteenth century, and by Richard's reign they were coming to be used alongside royal justices as a matter of habit, so the appearance of these men is in itself unsurprising. Having said this, as with Parliament, the mere mention of these men on commissions does not tell us much about their role there. Indeed even before influence is taken in consideration, it must be recognised that these were records of summons not attendance, they regularly state that not all men named were needed for the commission to operate. Again these knights’ involvement in the workings of royal governance went hand in hand with their relationship with the local community, an arena with much more complexity and detail, not exhaustively researched here.

The pattern of commissions is interesting to consider here. In many ways this was determined by central considerations. These commissions were essentially the king’s way of establishing the rule of law in the counties. Their concentration demonstrate both a need for royal justice in the shires but also the strength of the central administration. For example, there is a notable lack of commissions issued in the years between 1386 and 1389, a time when criticism of Richard and disunity at the centre was growing and destabilising royal control. What is interesting is that the appearance of the knights on these commissions seems to be a constant rather than something changeable on royal or even noble connection. While the knights were retained at differing times, and had differing and changing connections to nobles and the crown, their appointment on commissions remains constant. Indeed amongst the knights, only John Paveley is featured in the commissions of the 1390s when not previously mentioned in the

33 see Appendix A
36 CPR, 1385-89
Conversely, only a handful of knights, John Beaumont, John Walsh and Hugh Despenser, are not involved in the commissions of the 1390s having previously been prominent. With Despenser, and also arguably Beaumont, this change is explainable, as both began moving much more to focus on military commissions which took them away from their county responsibilities. With Walsh the reason is harder to discern, but the overwhelming evidence of the other knights leaves this as a very minor problem. Indeed, this pattern of constancy, not a connection to the changes of central politics, is also continued when looking at the knights’ appointments as sheriff. As has been mentioned previously eight of the knights were sheriffs, as well as this both William Thorpe and Thomas Latimer while not being appointed as sheriffs show a close link to the work of the sheriff by named commissions. All these eight men, with the exception of John Littlebury, were either sheriff equally before and after their connection to the king, or else were less likely to be sheriff after. It is interesting that these men may in fact have had less formal posts after their links to the king, maybe suggesting they no longer had a need to exercise influence in that way, or they were no longer desirable to the community. What is true is that the evidence suggests that these men were in these positions due to their status and not in fact due to their royal connection. If we look at the men involved in commissions in Richard's reign, we can see two groups. Firstly, those such as Thorpe, Darcy, Latimer and Mowbray, who, as shown also by their involvement in Parliament, were probably in the position of nobility or major landowners in their localities. And secondly those, such as Paveley and Littlebury, who, although being perhaps of lower status, if not wealth, were amongst the group regularly, entrusted with major roles in local administration such as sheriff.

This evidence is also substantiated by the knight's involvements as commissioners of peace. Eleven, almost half of the knights in the set researched here, were appointed at one time in the career as commissioners of peace. Considering that the group included other wealthy landowners and lords who despite not being appointed commissioners would have been able to exert significant influence in this area, the number of commissioners is considerable. The majority of knights only appear on commissions in one county, with the exception of Ralph Ferrers, who is a commissioner both in Staffordshire and neighbouring Leicestershire. Further to this the knights themselves do not appear in blocks on commissions, even in Kesteven, Lincolnshire, where there is a cluster of men linked to Richard's household, the knights appear on separate commissions. John Bussy being appointed in 1382, and Anthony Malorre on three other occasions, although, at this time Bussy was probably more involved in upholding and

37 CPR, 1391-96, pp.90, 292, 293.  
39 CPR, 1377-81, pp.39, 254.
administering the influence of Gaunt rather than the king.\textsuperscript{40} If the order of names listed is taken as an expression of precedence it can be seen that Malorre grew in importance through his life, on his final commission he was probably the most important member. Similarly with Bussy, by the time he was retained he had been appointed as steward of the duchy of Lancaster, an appointment as commissioner of peace was probably unfeasible and unnecessary. Only in Northamptonshire do we see William Thorpe, Thomas Latimer and Henry Green being summoned to the same commission in 1382.\textsuperscript{41} At this occasion none of them had been formally retained. What is interesting on this issue, however, is the appearance of both Thomas Mowbray and Hugh Despenser on a commission in Bedfordshire in 1384.\textsuperscript{42} At this point Mowbray had been very much involved in the central workings of court, although he may have been more in the Appellant camp at this time, while it would be another seven years before Despenser had any formal commitment to the king. Despite this, connection between the two men is interesting. Just as with evidence of service amongst these knights, as knights of the shire and sheriffs, it appears that the majority of involvement came before their connection to the king. Only the men who developed links to the household very early in the reign appear on commissions of peace while they had the status of king's knight. There is certainly no evidence of the king attempting to fill these commissions with his own knights, in some respects almost the opposite is true.

Apart from this general commission involvement, what is easier to interpret from the evidence is a number of knight's receiving specific posts or commissions which are linked to the crown but which have a much more local than central focus. The most obvious of these are stewards of castles and forests. William Thorpe is a good example, as steward of Rockingham forest, which stretched across parts of Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire, and also constable of Rockingham castle, he received a number of commissions and benefits from the crown.\textsuperscript{43} Adam de Peshale is also worthy of mention here, he was steward of the forest of Morfe, in south Staffordshire and Worcester.\textsuperscript{44} John Littlebury and John Paveley were also prominent in holding castles for the crown. Littlebury was appointed as keeper of various castles during his career, including Richmond and Colchester, as part of his role as keeper of Richmond castle he was also appointed as chief forester of the New Forest.\textsuperscript{45} Paveley was keeper of Northampton castle in 1379.\textsuperscript{46} As well as these posts several of the more powerful knights, enjoyed more important and wider ranging posts. For example Thomas Mowbray as well as being appointed keeper of

\textsuperscript{40} CPR, 1377-81, p.514; 1382-85, pp.254, 502; 1389-1392 p.136.
\textsuperscript{41} CPR, 1382-85, p.251.
\textsuperscript{42} CPR, 1382-85, p.502.
\textsuperscript{43} CCR, 1382-85, p.182; CPR, 1382-85, p.184; CFR, 1377-83, p.109.
\textsuperscript{44} CPR, 1382-85, p.482.
\textsuperscript{45} CPR, 1391-96, pp.563 609.
\textsuperscript{46} CFR, 1379-83, p.171.
Berwick and Roxbrough castle in 1389 was also warden of the East March, and captain of Calais. Both Philip Darcy and John Beaumont were Admirals of the North, Darcy in 1386 and Beaumont in 1389, while Beaumont was also during his career warden of the west march of Scotland and captain of Dover and the Cinque Ports.47

What is clear so far from this chapter is that; while it is hard to determine how much these men's careers and influence was from their own innate position or from their royal connection; Richard seems to be interested in attracting, and to a certain extent establishing men who were much more settled on the local stage rather than the central. This also links in with their general military background discussed in the previous chapter. There was obviously a pattern here of using these men in specific military posts which had a local focus. This is continued if we consider that several of the knights were employed by Richard to go on specific military campaigns, in fact in some cases it seems that there is a correlation between these men's use as military commanders and their connection to the crown. Although many of these men had backgrounds in the military, as you would expect in this period, under Richard, compared to his grandfather, the number of military campaigns slowed and presumably with it the demand for military commanders. Ralph Ferrers is clearly active in the wars of the previous reign, the records of the exchequer show his giving account for campaigns fought at sea including detail of his retinue, as well as details of journeys made to Scotland and Plymouth.48 This was a role then that was not new in Richard’s reign, but followed from the precedent of previous administrative developments. Philip Darcy and Hugh Despenser are good examples of men from amongst the king's knights who were clearly used during Richard's reign as commanders. With the exception of the feudal summons of 1385, military commissions were more specific personal appointments rather than a general call to arms. Darcy was retained formally in 1389, although he had been used by the king previous to this date he had not been sent any personal military commissions. In 1389, however, he was mentioned as retained by the king, with the specific purpose of accompanying the king on his expedition to Scotland.49 The king would later use Darcy in a similar way during his expedition to Ireland.50 Similar stories are those of Hugh Despenser and John Littlebury. Both men were retained in the early 1390s and used by the king during his expeditions to Ireland, Despenser like Darcy had lands in Ireland, although he had been used by Richard before he was mentioned as retained there is still a strong link between the two.51 The use of these knights along with the large number of positions like keeper of castles mentioned

47 CP, iv, pp.61-3; CPR, 1385-89, pp.255, 266.
48 TNA King’s Remembrancer: Accounts various, E 101/31/35; E 101/316/11
50 CPR, 1391-1396, pp.188, 195, 231.
51 CPR, 1391-1396, pp.482, 486, 494.
above builds a strong picture of the king using these men for their military commanding expertise, both abroad and domestically. Although not complete, this picture is one of the knights as men who were in the main concerned with the running of government in the localities rather than at the centre.

c) Benefits

As we turn to look at the benefits the knights received for this service, it is interesting to consider here that this area was in many ways the most contentious to contemporaries. As has been mentioned above the general attitude of contemporaries was one of loyalty to the sovereign.\textsuperscript{52} The inhabitants of the shires were not in opposition to the king exercising his power, and bringing order. In fact their concern was aroused when he didn't. The problem was control.\textsuperscript{53} As with today the key questions were who exercised the power, and who paid for it. In order to achieve his aims the king had to use men already involved in the society; he had to involve the subjective power of the local landowners, self interest, as always, was the complicating factor. The idea of a common purse was only recently developing at this time, and it was still quite connected to defence issues. One key responsibility of the king was to finance the keeping of order essentially out of his own pocket, or more accurately to effectively manage the financial resources the crown accrued. Contemporary opinion of Richard's financial acumen was a keynote of the reign. As the royal administration expanded, its resources inevitably became more stretched. Crucially it did not have the financial strength to support a large locally based bureaucracy. Consequently, the majority of men involved in the running of government were not paid.\textsuperscript{54} Instead, similarly to the king, they were expected to meet the financial needs of their position from their own resources. Also similarly to the king this involved the exploitation of any financial benefits the exercising of their responsibilities created. The strength of the system was founded on the mutual desire of the locals for a secure society, the ideal of good lordship, and the pragmatic ideal that those who had a lot stood to lose a lot if convicted of corruption.\textsuperscript{55} This is the major reason why a discussion of the knight's wealth and status in the previous chapter is so interesting. Essentially, those who had the resources to get involved in government not only stood to gain a lot by attracting respect, support, and benefits, they also stood to lose a lot by engendering mistrust, opposition and dispossession. The lives of the

\textsuperscript{52} Brown, Governance, p.141.
\textsuperscript{53} Jewell, Local administration, p.32.
\textsuperscript{54} Jewell, Local administration, p.25.
\textsuperscript{55} For a discussion of the idea of good lordship in this period see various works including: Goodman, John of Gaunt, pp.327-54; Bennett, Career Class and Community, pp.67-89; also for discussion of the importance of the wealth of royal servants see: Gorski, The Fourteenth Century Sheriff, pp.65-66.
knights presented here illustrate that powerfully. The system was obviously open to abuse, particularly because of the weakness of regulation. Men could secure their own positions at the expense of others, or officials overcompensate for their lack of wage and pass the burden on to their weaker countrymen. This only increased the possible gains and losses for the participants. The obvious alternative to this problem was to secure a regular wage for various royal officials and servants. Indeed, in many ways this group of king's knights was an expression of this. Their very existence is known by the various annuities that were granted to them. However, this new development was in many ways contentious to contemporaries as it brought a larger burden to support the king's household and channelled funds away from other areas to achieve things often thought to be possible at the expense of the king and the great men of the shire. The political community who had become used to the heavy burden of taxation during war time now found that a similar burden was being demanded to run the king's household in peace time, a situation which brought disquiet throughout the shires. How and why the king was maintaining these knights was at the heart of this problem.

In terms of the material benefits the most obvious is the fee itself which was given them on their retaining by the king. The roll evidence shows that these grants varied quite significantly. The most common value being given was around forty marks. It may have been that the royal administration graded the grants by the wealth of the recipient, for example, John Walsh was given forty marks in 1384 specifically to support him because of his unfavourable financial position, while in contrast Thomas Mowbray, already a wealthy earl, was given one of the smallest fees, only twenty pounds in 1383. This is also continued by the grants made to John Paveley. Paveley originally received 100 marks from the exchequer in 1386, but as was mentioned this figure was only continued during the life of his father, after which the grant was reduced to forty pounds. It seems hard to assume that Paveley would have been more use to the king before his father's death. In fact he is not apparently active in the royal administration of the shires until much later in the reign when he became sheriff of Lincolnshire. It seems more likely then that the larger grant was given as a means of support until he was able to support himself using his family's lands. Another interesting grant is that of the one given to Nicholas Hauber in 1392, again as with Paveley, 100 marks. This grant, in contrast to Paveley was an increase from 40 pounds issued the year before. It is hard to find a reason as to why Hauberk

57 CPR, 1382-1385, p.485; CCR, 1382-1385, p.331.
58 CPR, 1385-1389, p.352.
59 CPR, 1391-1396, pp.352, 659.
60 CPR, 1391-1396, p.205.
was allowed such a large sum of money; indeed he is conspicuous only for his absence from the records and apparent lack of involvement in the affairs of government. It may be that both Paveley and Hauberker were in contact with the king’s household from a young age and were being groomed as potential lieutenants of the future. It would seem more politically safe and less likely to attract claims of bias to support younger knights rather than important sheriffs as Paveley became. But on the face of it, it often seems hard to find pattern or reason to the king's recruiting and grants, indeed this lack of direction may have been one of the things which most concerned contemporaries. The grants made to John Beaumont, one of the more wealthy knights, furthers this argument. Beaumont was given an annuity of 100 marks in 1389. This grant to Beaumont is clearly a development from earlier grants, within the roll it specifically mentioned that this was not to be a precedent for others to follow, what is hard to see is what is new about his grant. As we can see grants of this value had been made previously, it may have been this grant came after 1389 and so the king was keen to reassure his subjects of his frugal government, or it could have been that this grant was given for life. There had been some grants made before 1389 which had been for life, notably the grant made to John Annesley in 1385. However, there is a clear trend after 1389 for grants to be made for life as a matter of course. Indeed this point raises the question as to how secure these monies were to the knights, this is an area in which further research is needed.

Having discussed the specific grants given to these knights, let us turn to the other benefits they received. What is interesting is the general lack of other benefits these men received. For example, there is very little record of grants of land made to these men, unusual perhaps because land was not only a great source of wealth but also of power. If Richard's aim was to establish his men firmly in the localities he did not do this by developing their holdings as he might have done to loyal noblemen. There are a few exceptions to this, John Calveley, for example, was given the manor of Stowyk as part of his retaining fee, and both Anthony Malorre then John Bussy were given the king's manor of Someton in Lincolnshire. However, having said this, from the evidence mentioned above of the land-holdings of these knights it is clear that some key men held a number of lands from the king in chief, maybe an expression of grants from the king, or gains they were able to make by being in royal office. As mentioned before it is hard from the inquisitions made at the death of the knights to be certain as to when or how these lands came into the deceased's hands, even so a few things can be said. Philip Darcy is interesting here. The inquisition taken at Darcy's death shows that he held a number of lands in Yorkshire; these were likely to be inherited from his grandfather, John, who had been prominent

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61 CPR, 1389-1392, p.165.
62 CPR, 1389-1392, p.21; 1391-1396, p.219.
in the reign of Edward III. However, further to this inheritance Darcy also shows as having five manors spread throughout the region of this study, while they come from some non-regal sources, namely the duke of Lancaster and the bishop of Lincoln, three of these manors where held of the king in chief. It seems possible that, as substantiated by his involvement in the governance of this region and royal commissions given to him, that he was able to secure these lands as a result of his direct connection to Richard, a benefit for his royal service. Also to mention here is Thomas Latimer. While it is clear from the inquisition taken at his death that the majority of his lands were focused on the Northamptonshire-Leicestershire border, there is also record of one manor in Somerset which he held from the king in chief. It is hard to see this manor as anything else except the benefits of his royal service, particularly considering his connection to the royal mother and her connections with the area. In order to feature in the royal records these knights all had to have at least one manor held in chief from the king, while in some cases this is not surprising it is also clear that small additions to comparatively modest holdings were also something which the king's knight could enjoy.

Apart from the material benefits of being a king's knight, as was hinted in the introduction, it is also important to mention the unseen benefits which came from having the king's favour. Just involvement in local administration, even before connection and formal patronage was of value to the gentry community. Even more so connections and influence in the royal administration could certainly be used to smooth over the general problems that could meet men trying to make social advancement. There are good examples of pardons being issued for unlawful marriages, as in the case of John Bussy's marriage to his first wife Maud, and relief being given for legal fees relating to the exchange of land. One interesting example here is John Annesley. His claim for compensation for the loss of inheritance of St Savuer in France against Thomas Caterton, which was settled by duel, demonstrates the benefits of connections. There is a feeling that some of the protection which Caterton enjoyed and some of the problems which Annesley encountered in this process were due to the connections and manoeuvres of John of Gaunt who had reason to want to minimise the entire affair. However in the end the king's intervention in the duel in favour of Annesley no doubt speeded and secured the following

63 CP, iv, pp.60-3.
64 CIPM, iii, pp.414-417. (nos. 1146-1154)
65 CIPM, Henry IV, 18 (nos. 435–9)
66 Gorski, 'Lordship, gentility and administration', p.31.
67 Gross, Adam Peshale: discusses how those involved in local administration, notably the county court and the knights of the shire could uphold the interests of their class against their poorer tenants.
68 Roskell, 'Two medieval Lincolnshire Speakers’, p.119.
69 Bellamy, 'Sir John de Annesley', pp.94-105.
grant, which indeed came directly from the king. Perhaps this can also be due to Annesley's connections to John Chandos, a close associate of the Black Prince. The value of favour from more powerful men is clearly seen then. This is also seen in the process of knighthood. In order to become a knight, as well as meeting the specific requirements, a man had to go through a specific process; John Bussy, for example, was able to be knighted because of the support he received from Gaunt. This was also probably the significance of the grant given to John Walsh, in 1386, mentioned previously; this was no doubt Richard, sponsoring Walsh's knighthood. So then, as has clearly been demonstrated and argued by many historians, indeed as is almost self evident, the favour of those in power was beneficial and as the king was the greatest Lord so too he brought the greatest benefits.

d) Career development

To complete the discussion of the effect royal patronage had on these knights, it is interesting to comment on how their connection to the king related to the wider context of their public careers. In the first appendix to this work I have collected together all the major appointments and positions these knights are recorded as holding during Richard's reign. With some of the knights the availability of evidence makes tracing their careers difficult, hence the information presented in the appendix is inconclusive. However, for a significant number of the knights, notably those who were either commissioners of the peace or sheriffs, a general idea of the progression of their lives can be seen. There is also sometimes some confusion over the date of retaining, something obviously important when considering the career progression of these men. This is most interesting with Hugh Despenser. Despenser is noted by Given-Wilson as being retained in 1389, and it is true that he was very active in the king’s service in the military campaigns of the second half of the reign. It can be seen from the evidence of local commissions that Hugh is active up to 1385, though after this date he becomes completely absent from those men being called to attend commissions. This disappearance coincides with evidence in exchequer records which shows the indenture in 1386 of both Hugh and William Drayton, himself a king’s knight, for the war in Scotland. It seems likely that Despenser’s service for the king developed before 1389, even if he wasn’t formally recognised as a king’s

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70 CPR, 1382-85, p.571.
71 Roskell, 'Two medieval Lincolnshire Speakers', p.121.
72 CPR, 1382-85, p.485.
73 Commissioners of Peace include: Ralph Ferrers, Anthony Malorre, Thomas Mowbray, Thomas Latimer, William Thorpe, Philip Darcy, Hugh Despenser, John Bussy, John Calveley, Henry Green, William Bagot; Sheriffs not appearing as Commissioners: Adam Peshale, John Littlebury, John Paveley.
74 CPR, 1385-89
75 TNA King’s Remembrancer: Accounts Various, E 101/73/2/31; No detailed research has been done here on Drayton so it is impossible to tell if it is the same man but the likelihood is very strong, according to Given-Wilson Drayton was retained for life in 1379, very unusual compared to the knights studied here.
knight until that date. Despenser also serves to demonstrate another element of the career progression of these knights, namely how their positions changed following the arrival of Henry IV. As can be seen from appendix A, a number of knights continued in the administration of the new king. Despenser himself is shown in Henry’s reign, again in the records of the exchequer, being sent on an embassy to Aquitaine. It seems likely that several of these men were part of a group of men who could be involved in the administration of government while remaining separate from the personal politics of the king. This is particularly important when considering if the king’s knights researched here represented anything approaching a royal affinity. Having said this, the example of William Thorpe adds contrast to this picture. Although it is true, as mentioned above, that Thorpe’s position was to a certain extent independent of the king, it must be recognised that following the reign there is no record of his descendants playing anything like the same role in local society which he enjoyed during his lifetime. This abrupt end to his line strongly suggests that he was more personally reliant on the king’s support than might be suggested by other evidence. As we will see now though, Thorpe is very much an exception amongst these knights.

Before a direct consideration of the career progression of the knights researched here it is perhaps wise to first pass comment on the chronology of recruitment throughout the period of Richard’s reign. Although this has been discussed in passing in other sections it seems wise to return to this question more systematically here. The pattern of recruitment was by no means steady over the course of the reign, what is immediately clear is that the use of the office, or honour, of ‘king’s knight’, was most certainly in its formative stages under Richard II. There was, however, amongst the group of knights researched here, some continuity, of the 24 men mentioned in this work, there were 12 recruited before 1389 and 12 after. This is in some ways unusual when looking at the king’s knights as a whole. In his 1986 article, Given-Wilson charts the development of the king’s affinity and notes an explosion in recruitment following Richard resumption in 1389. The reason for this, as argued by Given-Wilson, was political necessity, evidenced by periods of heavy recruitment firstly following Richard’s regaining of control in 1389, and secondly following his coup in 1397. That these periods were developments in Richard’s policy there is no doubt. Before 1389, Given-Wilson comments, Richard’s affinity must have looked particularly old fashioned. We have seen in this research that many of the early men recruited to Richard’s affinity were men more connected with the previous regime than the current one. Men like Ralph Ferrers and Anketil Malorre, with their connections to the

76 TNA King’s Remembrancer: Account various, E 101/320/21; E 101/320/22
77 CP, xii, pt2, pp.727-9.
79 Given-Wilson, ‘The King and the Gentry’, p.94.
Duke of Lancaster and Black Prince certainly fit into this category. There is also a feeling that in
the 1380s the term ‘king’s knight’ could have been more linked to social status and chivalric
concerns than political control.\textsuperscript{80} Having said all this, to return to the original assertion, what is
clear is that the king’s knights in Richard’s reign were a group of the king’s servants in their
formative stages. This becomes clearer as we look at the individual career progressions of the
knights researched specifically here.

So let us take consideration of career progression of the group in general. Although it
can be seen that each knight's career was unique, this group of men present some interesting
patterns that demonstrate some general points about the dynamics of royal retaining and public
service in the reign. In order to find some semblance of progression within the lives of the men
selected, distinction has been made between those positions which were primarily locally
focused and those which were nationally focused. A focus has also been given to those
commissions which were personal to the knight as opposed to those which were generally given
to a larger group of suitable individuals; this way it is easier to chart the specific progress of each
subject. In this context there are some good general principles which play out in these men's
careers. Those knights who developed specific individual commissions on the national stage,
such as those men who were involved in councils, or men such as Philip Darcy who became
Admiral for the north, were all very much established on a county level previous to their national
role, being either commissioners of peace, or sheriffs early in their public life. Similarly, the
knights whose influence remained largely on the local stage were seemingly experienced in
general responsibilities before they were given personal charges relating to the king, such as
custody of forests or castles. There are of course exceptions to this pattern, such as John
Beaumont, or Thomas Mowbray, both men of large status who became involved in national
matters very early in their lives. As previously mentioned Williams Thorpe’s career appears
quite different from the majority of his fellow knights. He appears on the public scene with a
personal commission as steward of Rockingham forest and by the end of his career he has clearly
developed a much wider degree of influence, being summoned to Parliament as a peer of the
realm. However, despite this, his positions of responsibility remain seemingly localised and
minor. The details of Thorpe’s career are hard to unravel. What he does demonstrate is that it
was possible to develop an influential position in the local administration from relatively humble
beginnings. More than likely he was a man who was either highly able in administration, or
merely took the opportunities presented to him. What is certain is that he stands as an exception

\textsuperscript{80} For both these points see discussion in Chapter 3 above.
which brings the lack of effect of royal service on the lives of the other knights into clearer focus.

A pattern of progression in the careers of these men's lives is not only extremely logical, but also clear from this evidence. One significant point connected to the fact these men's careers followed similar patterns of development, is that it demonstrates that a successful retaining policy must not only recruit men but it must also invest in them. When applying the evidence discussed above to the career of William Thorpe some interesting questions begin to be raised. As I mentioned previously, in many ways Thorpe's career looks quite strange, he was a commissioner of the peace early in his public life, and also enjoyed some significant personal local commissions, however despite this and also despite being rewarded with a peerage he never seemed to fulfil this position on a national stage. Perhaps what this situation reveals is a knight who Richard regarded as a key member of his retinue but whose death in 1391 was an unforeseen set back which hampered the king's design for his hold on the localities. In fact the situation with William Thorpe may highlight a wider aspect of these men's connections to the king. The major benefit both for retainer and Lord was a long-term relationship of trust and cooperation; this had to be built over time and was naturally vulnerable to the vagaries of life. In this context it is essential that links to key men were managed extremely effectively. Much more significance in the progression of these men’s careers can be seen when placing this evidence alongside the pattern of retaining. It seems that the majority of these men's development came from a more normal involvement in public affairs, rather than from any special blessing from the king. In contrast to the clear patterns these men's public lives followed in general there is a lack of pattern in the times of their retaining. While some knights, such as John Littlebury, were first given a grant by the king very early in their public life, some men develop the status king's knight in the middle of their public influence, the majority are given grants and a formal connection to the king almost at the end of their public career, with most of their most important commissions behind them. While many of these men have seemingly similar careers their relationship and treatment by the crown vary quite considerably. Indeed this may substantiate the evidence of the previous section which discussed the lack of benefits for the men involved as king's knights during Richard's reign. These two aspects of these men's interaction with the king perhaps reveal that two key benefits which retainers sought, development and reward, may have been lacking somewhat in the administration of Richard.
Following from the first chapter there is more feeling here of commonality in the experience these men had as king’s knights, although, again, there is a high degree of individuality in the relationship these men had to the royal administration. Indeed, some of these knights were allowed powerful, independent commissions which were individual to them, in this context normally functioning at a very national level. Indeed some recent studies of office-holding have suggested the new administrative burden led individual, lower level officials to exercise their own initiative in the fulfilment of their duties.\(^{81}\) This puts more emphasis on the role of the knights themselves in defining their role in royal administration, rather than clear guidance from above, something the evidence of this chapter in some ways supports. Any involvement by these men in central roles may be surprising given their distinction from household knights. As Given-Wilson discusses the king’s knights were part of the *familia regis*, or wider household, rather than the permanent household, or *domus*, as the household knights were. Supposedly those in the extended household had less personal contact with the king.\(^{82}\) However, with the king’s knights it can be seen their duties did not preclude them being involved centrally. That men as influential as Thomas Mowbray and Thomas Beaumont were given the title king’s knight perhaps characterises a new policy of Richard in his retaining in 1389. Also that knights like Philip Darcy and Hugh Despenser were allowed important independent military commissions after this time, adds to a picture of the king developing his power through use of these knights after his resumption. However, beyond these notable examples, the majority of service these knights fulfilled was characterised by an absence from the central administration with a preference for practical roles away from the household, ranging from keeping castles to leading military campaigns. This seems to be much more the norm for the majority of the king’s knights. These posts were certainly not substantial on a national stage but together they may represent a powerbase of territory and fortifications which the king was building for himself in the counties. With regards to the debate surrounding the importance of office holding in local society there are a few things to say. It could be argued that it would have been through office holding that the king would have been able to assert himself the most. As discussed above the office holding community was not necessarily as linked to the social hierarchy as previously thought.\(^{83}\) This would have made it much easier for royal favourites to infiltrate into these positions. However, the fact that these men were not seen more frequently on local commissions adds some renewed credence to Carpenter’s assertions that local government was the arena of local affinities.\(^{84}\) Perhaps the strongest conclusion from this section is in reveal the limitations of

\(^{81}\) Musson, 'Sub keepers and constables', pp.1-24.

\(^{82}\) Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household*, p.2.


\(^{84}\) Wright, *Derbyshire gentry*, pp.93-110; Holford, 'The Esh family', pp.221-223.
the king’s ability to infiltrate local society with his own affinity. Following this assertion more closely and moving away from a specific focus on these knights as individuals it seems important now to turn to the context these men experienced in their respective counties. While there is some commonality of role, was there any co-operation in achieving their task? Were these men anywhere approaching a unit, or perhaps, as Given-Wilson suggested, an affinity?
Chapter 4
Local Context: How influential were the king's knights?

The previous sections of this research have focused on the individuals who were known as king's knights and what that status meant in terms of their connection, interaction and relationship with the royal administration and the person of the king. Having investigated these characteristics, we now turn to consider if these men represented a cohesive group within the counties and how far their administrative grouping expressed itself in actuality. The connection of office holding to local communities is again an important debate amongst historians. Gorski emphasises the importance of the visibility of men chosen to be sheriff; that is that they were locally known men with direct accountability to the community. It has been seen that while there was indeed variation amongst the group, there was a trend pointing towards the preference of military experience and commissions, and also a focus on the local role of these men, although with some potential for national positions. Did these apparent similarities run deeper? Was there any direct association between these men in the counties, and, crucially, did this come from the king? By considering these questions we can address one of the central issues of Richard's reign: Was the king, in a similar way to a nobleman, developing an affinity; that is trying to create a linked network of supporters to secure his rule, and deepen his direct influence in the counties? Were these knights organised together or into specific groups? And did their retaining mark a concerted attempt to counter the other major noblemen in the region at this time? In this discussion the focus will come firmly on the specific Midland counties in which these knights were involved. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Carpenter began setting out the importance of the affinity in local society with her study of the Beauchamp affinity in Warwickshire. For her the noble affinity was a natural and integral part of the local social structure. As well as Carpenter, Wright also asserts that the network of connections was not permanent but fluid. She argues that the affinities between the lesser landowners were defined by, and not defining of, the system of power which arose from the pattern of landownership within the county. Bennett in his study of Cheshire and Lancashire society begin by discussing the sense of regional distinctiveness amongst the community he is investigating. He argues for a

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1 Musson, 'Sub keepers and constables', pp.1-24; Holford, 'The Esh family', pp.221-39; both these two studies present differing evidence of structures of office-holding being either, unconnected, or directly connected to local society, suggesting differences both at differing levels of the hierarchy and in differing geographical areas.
2 Gorski, Fourteenth Century Sheriff, p.78.
3 Carpenter, 'Beauchamp affinity', pp.516.
4 Wright, Derbyshire Gentry, pp.64-65.
higher degree of regional identity in these north western counties than in the rest of the country. However, Acheson, in his discussion of Leicestershire, finds less regional solidarity. Feelings of regionalism obviously varied across the country, how far they influenced the king’s knights studied here is important to consider. With this in mind it seems right to begin with a geographic and administrative survey of the region in consideration. After this survey focus will again turn to the knight's themselves and the interaction they would have experienced through their families, estates, and office holding.

*a) Structure of society in the Midlands*

The region on which this study has focused consists of the eight counties which make up what could be described as the extended East Midlands: Derbyshire Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. This large tract of the middle of England by no means represents a coherent unit or community, indeed the political, topological and economic geography varied greatly throughout the region. This in many ways brings strength to the study because this area was certainly not small enough to run the danger of assuming it to be a distinct recognisable unit to contemporaries and connections outside of this region were in many ways as interesting as those within. For some of the men who find their way into this study it may be by virtue of the periphery of their influence rather than the main focus of their attention. In the second appendix of this work there is a map detailing the knights with lands outside the compass of this region. The connections between the northern reaches of Lincolnshire and the gentry of south Yorkshire may be, for example, what brings Philip Darcy under the investigation of this study. Indeed even John Bussy who was so heavily involved and linked to Lincolnshire, was also drawn to the north by virtue of his role as steward for the duchy of Lancaster, north of the Trent, and also land inherited from his wife. Equally the connections to the south between the gentry of Staffordshire, Shropshire and Worcester, may mask the real influence of Adam Peshale and Hugh de Wrottesley. Having said this, there were also some shared characteristics which make this region historically interesting and our central attention must be given to relations within this area rather than connections without. The region in the national context traditionally belongs to the area between the southern counties, close to London and the king, where communication and control was

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5 Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, pp.5-20.
7 For Gorski's critique of gentry study methods see: Gorski, *Fourteenth Century Sheriff*, pp.4-6.
10 Walker, *Lancastrian Affinity*, pp.212, 228; *CIPM*, i, pp.183-184. (no.446)
aided by proximity, and the large northern counties, where more powerful men were able to establish themselves with more independent influence away from the hold of the crown. What characterised the consciousness of this region was maybe the special meeting place of the north with its large expansive areas of jurisdiction and the more intensely governed south. It could even be argued that this has its roots as far back as the time of the five boroughs in the Anglo-Saxon period.  

A survey of the geography of this region leads to some interesting insights. With the exception of the peaks in the north of Derbyshire and the Trent, which runs to the south and east of these hills, the region is not divided by many major geographical features. In the middle of this region, and having a border with every other county bar Staffordshire, is Leicestershire. However, in many ways rather than bringing unity the geography of Leicestershire adds a degree of division to the region. With the combination of the minor hills and forest in the north west of Leicestershire and the chase area in the north of Warwickshire, the region could be seen as dividing into two areas. The first section includes the swath of land from south Lincolnshire, through east Leicestershire, towards Northamptonshire, and south Warwickshire, and the second, including northwest Staffordshire and Derbyshire, seems characteristically more insular and disconnected from the other counties. This is also expressed by the connection formed by the old Roman route, the Fosse Way, which snakes through north Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, dissecting Leicestershire before heading on to Bath via south Warwickshire. Acheson, in his survey of Leicestershire notes the contrast in the features of the east of the county, largely flat agricultural land, well populated and consequently wealthier, with the west side of the Soar valley, with less lucrative forest and hill land. This wealthy eastern area must have been more connected with its rich southern neighbour, Northamptonshire, and the southern reaches of Lincolnshire, through Rutland and Peterborough. In contrast, the less populated, north-western area of Leicestershire provides a buffer to the more isolated Derbyshire.

These physical features must have affected the political interaction of the various communities of this region, particularly through the flow of trade from the south to the North Sea, via Coventry, Northampton and Leicester. Indeed, the administrative units of this region add another level of connection, and strengthen this picture of the pattern of relations in the region. Firstly in church administration, the diocese of Lincoln covers almost the entire region, apart from the areas of Staffordshire and Derbyshire mentioned above. This administrative unit

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11 Acheson, A Gentry Community, p.10.
12 Acheson, A Gentry Community, p.11.
13 Wright, Derbyshire Gentry, p.6.
again emphasises the boundaries and divisions in the region and adds to the southern aspect of these counties. In many ways the bishop's seat being situated in Lincoln gave a wrong impression of this diocese, which was naturally much more focused around Bedfordshire or Peterborough.\textsuperscript{14} Within the secular administration, Gorski investigated a number of joint shrievalties, several of which are in this area. The connections of Warwickshire and Leicestershire and the distinction from Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire, were increased by the fact that these counties shared a sheriff. This last connection again demonstrates the links outside of the sphere of this study, but also with Derbyshire. The predominance of Nottinghamshire men in the shrievalty again develops the idea of its isolation.\textsuperscript{15}

As Gorski most recently argued, there is a need by historians when analysing gentry communities to look beyond the individual counties and look to the wider structures.\textsuperscript{16} There were several large contemporary structures in this region which went beyond the county model. They served to augment our understanding of the structure of the various communities in this region, and the cohesion they experienced. As mentioned above the diocese of Lincoln was one of these. Secondly, and more influentially, is the pattern of royal forests through this region. As has been mentioned above, the presence of forests and hunting areas in the region, like the Charnwood forest of north Leicestershire, and Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, affected the pattern of the land-holding communities. Royal forests in this period were administered as a separate entity, a royal franchise, which affected the pattern of land-holding and service in the area they governed.\textsuperscript{17} However, it is generally agreed that the significance of royal forests in this period was waning considerably. The forests in Leicestershire had officially lost their special administrative status in the previous century.\textsuperscript{18} The most important areas of royal forest in this region during the fourteenth century were Rockingham Forest in the southern part of Northamptonshire, Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, and the collection of forests including Morfe on the Staffordshire-Shropshire border. These are particularly important as a number of the knights considered here were specifically linked to administration of royal forests, William Thorpe in Rockingham and Adam Peshale at Morfe and towards the south west of Staffordshire.\textsuperscript{19} The use of forests in this period, however, was not only for financial and military purposes through the production of wood as it had been in the thirteenth century. They were also becoming increasingly used as a way for the king to reward his followers

\textsuperscript{14} S. Bennett, \textit{A History of Lincolnshire} (Chichester, 1999), p.38.
\textsuperscript{15} Gorski, \textit{Fourteenth Century Sheriff}, Appendix 2; Wright, \textit{Derbyshire Gentry}, p.66.
\textsuperscript{16} Gorski, \textit{Fourteenth Century Sheriff}, pp.4-6.
\textsuperscript{17} Jewell, \textit{Local Administration}, pp.28, 80.
\textsuperscript{18} C. R. Young, \textit{The Royal Forests of Medieval England} (Leicester, 1979), p.150.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{CPR} 1377-1381 p.56; 1381-1385 pp.184, 482; 1388-1392 pp.394, 413 cf. \textit{CP}, xii, p.728
Forests represented areas where his supporters could enjoy any hunting privileges given them, and where the king could be seen to be directly ruling his realm, providing good Lordship. They often also represented areas where the corruption of officials went unchecked and outlaws were allowed safe haven. The men who administered these areas, as several king's knights did, were in many ways separate from the normal patterns of landed society, being governed by differing means than the normal tenurial ties. Finally, and perhaps most influentially for bringing unity in the networks of this region, was the duchy of Lancaster. As Wright points out, parts of the Midlands during the following reign’s of the Henrys were seen as royal, Lancastrian strongholds. Indeed the connection of the duchy and the crown in 1399 cannot be underestimated in its significance for the politics of this region. However, in the period before 1399, the holdings of the duke, by far the most powerful subject in this region, can be seen almost as the overarching network, and a profound influence on the pattern the king's policy took in this area. In many ways these areas can be seen as the periphery of the duchy. The duke held the titles, earl of Derby, earl of Lincoln and earl of Leicester. The duke’s power was probably the most solid in the west, with his son holding the earldom of Derby which centred on the honour of Tutbury and interwove with the honour of Stafford, held by Thomas earl of Stafford, another of Richard’s retainers. The remainder of the region represents an area where the duke’s power vied with other networks, not least those produced by the royal administration.

Mention of the duchy of Lancaster leads us to finish this section with a wider consideration of the major noblemen of this region, a fundamental factor in an understanding of the pattern of power in this region. Firstly the influence of the church is important here. In this context more influential than the secular clergy are the religious houses and foundations which existed in this region. In Lincolnshire, for example, while there were no large establishments, the sheer quantity of foundations combined with their localised well-established nature had a big impact on the political community. The accumulation of land by religious houses in many ways contributed to the comparative poverty of the knightly class in Lincolnshire, something which distinguished it from its southern neighbours. With regards to the secular leaders of these shires, as mentioned above, Gaunt, being both earl of Lincoln and Leicester, having given the earldom of Derby to his son, was clearly the major influence. However, as with Thomas Mowbray, earl of Nottingham, the size and spread of his estates drew his direct attention away from these areas, often leaving the administration to deputies like John Bussy, who was later

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20 Young, *Royal Forests*, p.158.
retained by Richard while still steward of Gaunt's lands north of the Trent.\textsuperscript{24} The earl of Warwick also, over this period, was extremely active in central events and so left the administration of his lands to deputies like William Bagot.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly in Staffordshire, the earls of Stafford following the death of Hugh, went through an extended period of minorities and as a result saw their influence ebb, leaving room for lesser land owners like Ralph, Lord Basset of Drayton.\textsuperscript{26} Equally in Northamptonshire, following the death of William Bohun in the reign of Edward III, the political leadership of the county had become much more fragmented, demonstrated by the fact that one of the main influences in the county, Lord Zouch of Harringworth, had the majority of his holdings outside the borders of the county.\textsuperscript{27} All these factors combined to create a climate where power vacuums and changes in the patterns of influence were common; a climate where the king could find room for manoeuvre, and where local gentry members could capitalise on the king's need for men who could exercise his authority effectively. As Acheson points out in his study of Leicestershire, the absence of overlords makes the region, while not entirely representative, a good area to investigate the role of the gentry. However, this overview of the structures of the region also demonstrates the complexity and range of the networks which existed at this time. In this context, the men studied here appear quite insignificant.

\textit{b) Family interaction}

From some of the largest units in medieval society we now turn to the smallest, the family. Families were obviously extremely important connections for late medieval landowners; through marriages, wardships, and heirs a landowner could extend and secure his estates. The connections brought through the family were perhaps the best links by which the historian can uncover the contacts and networks within a particular community. Following a marriage the interested parties would obviously be motivated to support and protect one another. This was a natural way connections producing an affinity came about. Less solid connections of service and land tenure, discussed later, may be underlined by the later marriage of one of the parties to a family member of the other. While this was largely outside the influence of the king, in some cases the need to secure a marriage licence or a pardon of a fine for unlawful marriage, or even receive the granting of the rite to determine the marriage of a ward, were all benefits the king

\textsuperscript{25} Clark, ‘Bagot, Sir William’, \textit{DNB}.
\textsuperscript{26} Rawcliffe, \textit{The Staffords}, pp.8-10.
\textsuperscript{27} Acheson, \textit{A Gentry Community}, p.13.
could bestow. This is also the case for those individuals who went through a period of minority, such as John Beaumont and Thomas Stafford. In this state their guardian, in these cases the king, could determine and secure the marriage of the ward themselves. However, any connections of family between the retainers demonstrate that the king was retaining on the whole through natural networks rather than trying to create rival structures of power by other means. They demonstrate these men's connections to each other over and above their common connection to the king.

There are indeed a few family connections to mention. Two of the earlier retainers were uncles of men later retained by the king. Firstly Ralph Ferrers is specifically mentioned in the will of Hugh Despenser as being his uncle. This is particularly interesting as Despenser also seemingly inherited the role Ferrers played in the king's retinue, receiving the same annuity as Ferrers on his uncle's death. This perhaps suggests that these grants made by the king were coming to be seen as hereditary. It may also suggest that Despenser was in fact the heir to his uncle's influence in the county and so equally important to the king's power there. This is then seemingly confirmed by evidence in the exchequer records which mentions the grant of the manor of Rotheley, Leicestershire, to Ralph, with the remainder both to his son Henry and also in fee to Despenser. It seems that connection to the king could be something that was expected to pass to successors in a similar way to land. Secondly there seems to be some connection between Anthony Malorre, the Lincolnshire knight retained early in Richard's reign, and the family of Bagot in Warwickshire. Although it is hard to confirm and understand the effect and significance of this connection it is interesting that men with such separate spheres of influence in Richard's retinue would be linked in this way. Beyond these there are also a few other interesting connections. While not a family connection it is interesting to note here that Henry Retford served as supervisor of the will of Philip Darcy, demonstrating an amount of trust and connection between the two men. Also most interestingly is the connection in Staffordshire between Adam de Peshale and Hugh de Wrottesley, who were in fact brothers-in-law. This last connection is of note because as we will see later the other evidence seems to present these men as rivals in their polity. In contrast to Despenser and Ferrers, it seems from the example of these Staffordshire knights, that it was also possible for rival families to take over the interest of the

28 This is seen in the case of John Bussy: Gillespie, ‘Bussy, Sir John’, DNB.
29 Gibbons, Early Lincoln Wills, p.99.
30 CPR, 1385-89, p.481.
31 TNA King’s Remembrancer: Ancient Deeds, E 210/521.
33 Gibbons, Early Lincoln Wills, p.98.
34 CIPM, i, pp.183-184. (no. 446)
king after the demise of another retainer. This dilutes the sense that the king was building a coherent and established affinity rather than more broad connections to gentry families. It also perhaps demonstrates a wider point, that these family ties tell us more about the position and involvement of these knights in the normal land-owning networks rather than membership to any sort of royal affinity. As demonstrated by Mowbray and Stafford, who were linked by marriage to the families of Arundel and Woodstock respectively, these ties were probably more an expression of the general membership of the ruling classes not connections formed by Richard's retaining policy.\textsuperscript{35} They do underline the point that royal retaining extended through personal links, but there is certainly not enough evidence to suggest the king was systematically creating a network over and above the existing links within the local communities themselves.

c) Estate interaction

The pattern of land holding was the most important aspect which determined the structure of power in this period. In the second appendix to this work several maps have been produced to give an idea of the spread of these knight’s lands. If the king was attempting to create a coherent affinity we would expect to see a considerable amount of landed influence on the part of his retainers and connections which would be able to rival the holdings of the noblemen mentioned in the first section.\textsuperscript{36} There were several men who could be singled out from amongst the knights because of the extent of their landed estates, both in terms of sheer volume and the area over which they spread. These included: Thomas, earl of Stafford, Thomas, earl of Nottingham, and John, Lord Beaumont. From these men, a number of individuals also known to be king’s knights held knight’s fees. These included, John Bushy, William Thorpe, Anthony Mallore and William Bagot. There is here a suggestion of some degree of stratification amongst the king's retainers. When analysing the wealth of the knights, we can find two levels, those men whose per annum income was above £1000, such as Mowbray and Stafford. These men’s estates were large and they would not necessarily have had close contact with their administration.\textsuperscript{37} They are contrasted to a second level of lesser landowners and professional administrators with incomes of between £100 and £200 per annum, men such as Philip Darcy, John Bussy and Thomas Latimer, whose estates were much more localised and were probably able to take a more proactive role in their administration.\textsuperscript{38} It is interesting that it may be possible to see links between these two groups and that the second level of men may have been used by the first as

\textsuperscript{35} Given-Wilson, ‘Mowbray, Thomas (I)’, DNB.
\textsuperscript{36} For all the following evidence see: CIPM vols.10-16
\textsuperscript{37} Given-Wilson, ‘Mowbray, Thomas (I)’, DNB.
\textsuperscript{38} Jurkowski, ‘Latimer, Sir Thomas ’, DNB.
trusted deputies to manage their lands, as with Thomas Mowbray and William Bagot.\footnote{Given-Wilson, ‘Mowbray, Thomas (I)’, DNB.} This could be used as a basis for an assertion that Richard was creating an independent affinity in the localities. However, these connections in themselves are not enough to suggest such a dramatic conclusion. Within the landed class it would be expected to have some amount of interaction and holding of lands from other lords. This does not necessarily suggest strong links or even any degree of co-operation. It does, however, again show that these men were at least known to each other, and were from a similar pool of landed gentry. Indeed, this is a much more acceptable conclusion to reach. These connections did not in fact arise from their connection to the king, but instead were a natural consequence of these knights’ involvement in the communities of power surveyed earlier. This is furthered by common links with other influential landowners in the county. Ralph, Lord Basset, the powerful Staffordshire and Leicestershire landholder, was linked to both Thomas Stafford and Thomas Mowbray, who received large holdings from his estates after his death.\footnote{CIPM, iv, pp.78-98. (nos. 264-308)} Further to this many of the knights mentioned above also held fees from the same Lord Basset.\footnote{CIPM, ii, pp.382-389. (nos.963-975)} Similarly in Northamptonshire, several of the knights were linked to Lord Zouch of Harringworth, another local powerbroker. It is clear that these connections were not brought about by the king’s influence, instead they were merely an expression of the fact that these knights were part of the local networks of landed power

As well as personal connection another important factor to consider with landed estates is the geographical correlation of each knight’s lands; some interesting patterns can be seen when the lands held by these men are mapped. The first noticeable feature of the maps is the absence of lands recorded in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Indeed this is confirmed by the fact that Given-Wilson does not assign Derbyshire as a sphere of influence for any of the knights he identified in his research.\footnote{Given-Wilson, Royal Household, Appendix V} This is extremely interesting, the few lands which are within these two counties seem to confirm that this is not a problem with the evidence, however, this should not be ruled out, particularly with the case of Thomas Mowbray, earl of Nottingham. It is possible to draw the conclusion that either Richard was unconcerned to attract any of the powerful men of these two counties, or he was unable - most likely the latter given the extent of his connections in the other counties studied. It seems obvious to mention that the remaining spread of contacts Richard built over the course of his reign were by no means focused on one particular county but rather spread across the range of the counties. As obvious as this seems, it substantiates the assertion of Gorski that historians need to go beyond the traditional county

\[\text{\footnote{Given-Wilson, ‘Mowbray, Thomas (I)’, DNB.}}\]
model.\textsuperscript{43} In balance to this, it is possible to see a majority of men whose landed influence was confined to only one or two close knit clusters, John Bussy and Henry Green are good examples, the majority of their influence seemingly being confined to Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire respectively. Thomas Latimer is also a knight with localised holdings centred around Braybrooke, on the Leicestershire-Northampton border. However, it should not be ruled out that these men had larger influence and horizons than the picture of their land-holdings suggest. John Bussy, as has already been mentioned was extremely influential in the administration of the duchy of Lancaster, and Henry Green's grandfather also, in the previous reign, was called as far as Chester to advise the Black Prince, the king's father.\textsuperscript{44} These men despite being smaller landholders would clearly have associated themselves with a larger national picture of power rather than confining their concerns to their home counties.

The area of the map where the king's influence seems to be greatest, however, is the rich eastern region described in the previous section, running from southern Lincolnshire through eastern Leicestershire, into Northamptonshire. Four knights seem to form a cluster of connections circling around Rutland. Thomas Latimer, the Northamptonshire knight mentioned above may need to be discounted from these considerations as he is known to have taken a back seat in politics from around the mid-1380s, Thomas Stafford also, died in 1392, a year before Thomas Beaumont was retained. But having said this, there still seemed to be a clear ability on behalf of the king to make connections in this affluent area to the east of the region. The key man in this potential web was Thomas Beaumont. Beaumont was retained in 1393, two years after John Bussy and a year after the deaths of William Thorpe, Ralph Lord Basset and Thomas Stafford, all key men towards the south of the region. His lands and fees stretch from the north of Lincolnshire down to the border of Leicestershire and Warwickshire. The major part of the Beaumont inheritance centred on Folkingham, in southern Lincolnshire, and had been secured by Henry Beaumont in 1311 after the extinction of the ancient Gant family.\textsuperscript{45} Beaumont, as we have seen, is a prominent man in central administration and Parliament but his family is relatively new in its prominence. It seems likely that Thomas would have attempted to secure and develop his position through his royal connection, and would have been particularly attractive to Richard for his influence in a key part of the country. It is not too far a stretch of the evidence to say that in the early 1390s with John Bussy, lieutenant to Gaunt in north Lincolnshire, Philip Darcy, landholder in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, Thomas Mowbray, and John Beaumont towards the south; Richard had a good control of the eastern and southern parts

\textsuperscript{43} Gorski, \textit{Fourteenth Century Sheriff}, pp.4-6.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{BPR}, ii, pp.41, 88, 90; iii, pp.94, 136.
\textsuperscript{45} Platts, \textit{Lands and People}, p.27.
of this region. But caution needs to be remembered, and the lack of direct links still severely hampers an assertion towards a royal affinity.

How and why this situation arose and what conclusions can be drawn from it is perhaps a more interesting question. One idea, which stems from the strange lack of connections in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, is that rather than trying to create a coherent group, the king was utilising the opportunities to attract supporters in any areas of the region he could. We have seen that these men did not owe everything they had to the king's patronage. Their mutual connections and patronage stemmed from their membership of the wider land-holding community. In areas where there were large numbers of gentry and a need to secure position within the shire, connections with the king were attractive. By contrast, in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, where the polity was far more isolated and settled, there were fewer opportunities for advancement amongst the gentry and subsequently less motivation to form links with the king.\footnote{Wright, Derbysire Gentry, p.66.} Indeed, it could be that the king's strategy was based more on competition than coherence. This is in some ways supported by evidence of the land disputes, between Adam Peshale and Hugh Wrottesley in the Staffordshire region. As mentioned above, there is interesting evidence to suggest these men were rivals within the polity, not associates. In petitions made to the king it is clear that these knights, both retained by Richard, were at various times in the reign in protracted and violent struggles for influence in the counties to the southwest of the Midlands.\footnote{TNA Ancient Petitions: SC 8/146/7282; SC 8/146/7269} Rather than representing a unified affinity these men were in fact competing landowners. It is not too far a stretch of the imagination to suggest that Mowbray, Beaumont and Bussy would have been in competition too. Just as lower knights could exploit the need for supporters by having many masters, so the king could capitalise on the pressure to secure position and attract many servants.

d) Interaction through office-holding

Cohesion or competition, status and influence in county society were also determined and developed through service in the local administration. Some have argued that the patterns of office-holding most clearly demonstrate the power networks of the shires.\footnote{An argument especially forwarded by Carpenter, Locality and Polity; Carpenter, ‘Beauchamp affinity’, pp.524-26. see also discussion, Gorski Fourteenth Century Sheriff, pp.78-84.} A survey of office-holding in this region is particularly important alongside the analysis of the previous section as it can be used to substantiate or dilute the assertions presented above. Generally, connections between these men through office-holding were limited. Only two counties had more than one
retainer serving as a sheriff over the period of Richard's reign. Similarly only two had more than one man serving as knight of the shire. In Warwickshire and Leicestershire respectively, William Bagot and John Calveley served as both sheriff and knight of the shire. Similarly, in Lincolnshire, only two men, Henry Retford and John Bussy, served as both sheriff and knight of the shire. It is interesting that the men who appear prominently in the list of major county officials are by no means as prominent when considering the previous evidence of land-holding. While Bussy and Bagot both appear in the Inquisitions Post Mortem, neither Calveley nor Retford appear as major landowners in their respective counties. It seems unlikely that Calveley and Retford would not have been significant landowners. It is much more likely though that these men, while being retained and serving Richard in various ways, were not given or did not seek direct landed rewards in the same way as Bagot and Bussy. This would allow for their absence from the Inquisitions Post Mortem. If this is true it is a good indication of Richard's standing. It also proved a prudent decision given the fate of the latter two. Indeed the height of Retford's influence was arguably in the reign of Henry IV when he became speaker of the House of Commons.

Overall, there is by no means the same dominance of office-holding as could be suggested by the map of the knight's land-holdings. The majority of knights who appear as sheriff were only appointed once, with the exception of Bussy and Retford. With the knights of the shire similarly, these men appear an average of once and a maximum twice, excepting Bussy and Bagot. Only in Lincolnshire does one knight appear in the office of sheriff while another retainer of the king is returned for parliament. There seems to be nothing more than a normal amount of service for Richard's retainers in this period. It is almost impossible to see any effect the policy of the king and his influence had in this aspect of county administration across this region and certainly no attempt to monopolise offices as you would expect if the king’s policy was to hold the shires to ransom through a local affinity. There is, however, evidence to comment upon which adds to the arguments of the previous chapter. As with the previous chapter, Lincolnshire stands out amongst the other counties, as having an unusually high concentration of king’s knights involved in office-holding. Five of the men appointed as sheriffs in Lincolnshire during the reign have connections to the king at some point in their career. Between them they span ten years of the reign, almost half of the terms between 1377 and 1399. This contrast to the other counties is quite staggering. One possible conclusion relates to the interpretation given in the last section. It could be that in Lincoln, the absence of strong

49 List of Sheriffs, PRO Lists and Indexes, 9, p.79
50 Lock, ‘Retford, Sir Henry’, DNB.
51 List of Sheriffs, PRO Lists and Indexes, 9, p.79; CCR, 1388-89, p.656.
52 List of Sheriffs, PRO Lists and Indexes, 9, p.79.
established magnates, room for manoeuvre amongst the gentry was greater, and indeed the reward for connection to the king was more profitable. It is also possible that the situation made for more competition between the gentry, giving the king more chance to capitalise and assert his influence through the granting of annuities. The information is more complex and varied when looking at local commissions. Again, however, there is a large degree of overlap in the attendance of king's knights on commissions of oyer and terminer in both Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, whereas in Leicestershire and the other counties there are not only less commissions, but no more than one man with connections to Richard appointed at any one time. The large number of knights who were appointed to law commissions in Lincolnshire again points to a climate where gentry members were able to take more leadership in the political running of the county, while in other counties in the region the commissions were dominated by more powerful magnates.53

A final consideration in this section is the loyalty of the king’s knights as a group. If these men were intended by Richard to be an independent royal affinity then their support of the king at key junctures would have been particularly important. One way of testing this in particular is by looking at the involvement of the knights at key moments of political crisis, most notably their attendance at the Merciless Parliament, and also any role they may have played in the army raised by York in 1399. Both these two junctures, however, leave more questions than answers as to the effectiveness of the king’s knights at times of political crisis. In 1388, at the Merciless Parliament, the development of the king’s knights and their role in the royal administration was still in process. Three men researched here were present in 1388: John Bussy, William Bagot and John Annesley, of these men only Annesley had been mentioned as a king’s knights before this time. It may seem promising that the parliament in which the king suffered such strong restraint did not have many supporters, however, when compared with previous parliaments of the reign this is by no means unusual. In fact the only two parliaments which Annesley participated in during the 1380s were the Wonderful Parliament and the Merciless Parliament.54 The same problems arise when looking at York’s retinue in 1399. Only Bussy Bagot and Green are mentioned as being among the army which was assembled to face Bolingbroke.55 This in itself is not unsurprising, as discussed above several key men from amongst Richard’s men had died in the mid 1390s, Bussy, Bagot and Green represented the major part of Richard’s remaining supporters. However, this in itself was a problem; these three were not able to attract the same amount of support as men like Stafford and Beaumont. While

54 CCR 1385-89, pp.119, 298.
55 Given-Wilson, Chronicles of the revolution, Appendix
loyalty may not have been the problem, wider support was. While this consideration of the loyalty of the king’s knights is less than conclusive, it does substantiate the overall feeling of this chapter that these men were not acting in the way one would expect an affinity to act.

We can see then that there is indeed some interaction and interconnection within this group of knights, through family ties, land transactions and patterns of service. This is in line with Wright’s assertion, mentioned at the beginning of this section, that the connections amongst the gentry followed social realities based on the distribution of land in the region.\textsuperscript{56} The extent this stemmed from a distinct sense of community in the Midlands is hard to ascertain. However, it seems clear that this did not stem from a concerted policy on the part of the king. Rather it was a natural expression of the fact that the majority of these men belonged to the collection of landowners and administrators who were involved in the workings of the state. This is shown equally through military commitments and local administration. Indeed in terms of social advancement Holford’s study of Durham suggests that for establishing social position, connection to neighbours and the mutual networks of support were more important than connection to higher authority through office holding.\textsuperscript{57} The majority of these men did not have the individual resources or capability to command their county communities in a connected way that would have allowed the king to assert himself across the entire region. There is little evidence of the king trying to rectify this.

\textsuperscript{56} Wright, \textit{Derbyshire Gentry}, pp.64-65.

\textsuperscript{57} Holford, ‘The Esh family’ pp.221-39; Bennett, \textit{Community, Class and Careerism}, pp.5-20.
Conclusions

“The king, an undisciplined boy, neglects the moral behaviour by which a man might grow up from a boy. Indeed, youthful company so guides the boy that he has taste for nothing useful, unless it be his whim” – John Gower, *Vox Clamantis*.1

Richard’s reign drew sharp criticism from onlookers. These conclusions merely come as another voice in the old discussion of the king’s rule. Even so, there are a number of interesting observations which can be drawn from the bulk of the evidence discussed above. This is the first direct prosopographical study of king’s retainers known to the author and as such it raises some interesting new ideas. The aim of the study was to create a more detailed and clear picture of who the *milites regis* were, and what it meant to be a king’s knight. The conclusions here naturally build upon and develop the conclusions of other historians who have studied king’s retainers and men of this ilk in the fourteenth century. What this study adds is a more individual and personal look at the lives of these men. It brings a different perspective on life amongst the political community under Richard.

How this study chimes with, and amplifies the work of previous historians seems a good place to begin considering the significance of this work. Given-Wilson gives several answers to the question of why the king would have a gentry retaining policy. They can be summarised as personal, military, and territorial reasons.2 He also charts the chronological development of Richard’s retinue.3 In general there is no need for radical revision of these assertions. In the chronological context, this research shows a very similar picture to the one presented by Given-Wilson. The transition in 1389 to a more direct and pro-active retaining policy is clear. This is bolstered by the chronological reading of Richard’s reign discussed in Chapter 2. The development of Richard’s ideas following the confrontation with the Appellants and the battle of Radcot Bridge is clearly demonstrated in his retaining policy. Before 1389 there is clearly a lack of clarity and direction in royal policy, potentially produced by relations with Gaunt. However, Richard’s negotiation between the commons and lords in 1390 over the Statute of Liveries started a period of the king building his own personal authority against that of his most powerful subjects. The transition, in 1397, to a much more closely focussed retaining policy was also seen

amongst the king’s knights. What is interesting here is that more detail can be added to the chronology of the late 1390s. We can see amongst this group that there is a significant loss of key men, men such as Thorpe, Darcy, Beaumont, and Stafford, which left a large hole in the landed power the group represented in 1397. This gives new insight into the rise to prominence of men such as Bussy, Bagot and Green, who would later become so infamous. With regards the wider reasons for gentry retaining, Given-Wilson’s assertions again hold largely true. The majority of these men did have connection to the court. Whether through family connection, other noble retinues, or central roles such as knight of the shire, they all would have come into the sphere of the king’s personal influence. It is also clear in the early 1390s and from the backgrounds of many of the men that the need for professional soldiers was a large part of royal retaining policy. Despite the summons of 1385, which almost all of these men were involved in, the use of professional men in English armies is something which has been well researched. In the area of territorial following, it can be seen there were some significant holdings in similar areas amongst this group of men, specifically after 1389. However, in the overall context of the Midlands, and when considering the connections between these men in the localities, it is hard to assert any picture of a local affinity rivalling that of any significant nobleman.

With regards the wider historiography of office holding a few aspects of this study prove significant. What is clear is that these men did not represent a systematic collection of the most influential men in the shires. Some of the men studied here were of significantly lower status than their fellow king’s knights. This again emphasises the personal nature of politics in this period. This was a retinue which developed through relational networks rather than systematic selection. Gorski’s observation that many influential men served alongside what he calls ‘small fry’ is certainly upheld here. This follows the discussions of Wright and Holford, mentioned above, who argue that many of the leaders of gentry society were not involved in office holding. The discussion of status in Chapter 3, demonstrates some of the elements of arguments which have punctuated the study of fourteenth century local society. The dissipating link between status terminology and military realities discussed by Saul is clear amongst these men, who despite being involved in military endeavour owe their status much more to their domestic positions. The problem of using wealth as an indicator of status is also clear. Many of these men were of varying wealth but all were at some point known as knights. This adds weight to

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4 Given-Wilson, ‘The King and the Gentry’, p.94.
8 Saul, Knights and Esquires, p.8.
the arguments of Peter Coss, whose recent work raised the importance of service to other lords as a fundamental determiner of status in society.\(^9\) These assertions build on the ideas presented by Bennett in his study of Cheshire society, that the most important aspect of gentry’ identity was membership of the network of mutually beneficial relationships.\(^{10}\) An idea which is similar, but somewhat broader, than the description of the inherent nature of affinities in fourteenth century society which Carpenter gave when studying Beauchamp influence in Warwickshire.\(^{11}\) Overall this study chimes with the dictum of Harriss, that government is not to be seen ‘as emanations of royal authority but as a product of those involved in them.’\(^{12}\) We find, particularly in Chapter 4, a royal policy which did not influence, but was influenced by, local realities. Indeed it is important to state that Richard’s retaining policy was neither effective nor systematic in raising men from low positions to places of honour or holding the shires to ransom. In fact, seeing the driving force for retaining as being from the king may be a misconception. In the place of Given-Wilson’s question, why a gentry retaining policy? Perhaps we should ask, why be a king’s knight?

On the whole the king’s knights were knights of influence; men who were responsible and involved in keeping the cogs of their local communities oiled. Some were sheriffs, the old bulwark of the shire system; some knights of the shire, an increasingly important position in the working of the crown; some justices, commissioners, wardens and custodians, those who protected and asserted the rites of their countrymen and aimed at upholding peace; and even some other significant landowners whose assets formed the major substance of county society. For a large majority, their involvement was also in affairs beyond their county borders. Whether due to the size of their estates, through specific roles within the national administration, or merely by their involvement as leaders and captains in the king's campaigns, these men's lives were not constrained to the shire in which they were born. A few, quite surprisingly, were from long established noble families, while others, maybe less surprisingly, developed a level of influence much beyond the majority of their ancestors. They came from diverse backgrounds, had diverse expertise, and varying wealth; some rather than being amongst the landed powerbrokers of the country, were more from the legal administrative fraternity, their careers based on managing the affairs of others rather than asserting their own personal positions. What seems as clear, as the lack of overall cohesion within the group was that these men were not in these positions because of the patronage of Richard, but rather as a natural expression of their position within the community of the realm. Having said this they were distinct due to their

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10 Bennett, Community, Class and Careerism, pp.5-20.
12 Harriss, ‘Political society’, p.34.
common involvement in the workings of royal governance. In real terms this expresses itself primarily in these men's links to those who held the power in medieval society, ultimately in their link to the king, but also more significantly for the overwhelming majority, in their service of other notable lords of the realm. They were first of all, as well as holding power themselves, men under authority, experienced in service.

At the heart of the interplay in these men’s lives is this assertion that service was influence and status, perception. The Statute of Liveries in 1390 demonstrates the power and effect retaining could have on local communities and by way of extension the benefit and demand that must have come from the gentry. Central administrative records perhaps tend to hide the pro-activity of the gentry themselves. That many of these men were previously connected to large magnates demonstrates their understanding of the importance of patronage. Essentially a man’s status was determined by how others perceived him. If he was associated with a powerful man he would be treated with more respect and so his influence would increase, he also gained access to a network of associates with a common interest to uphold and support one another. The work of Pilbrow, mentioned above, emphasises the relationship of honour which was formed between an esquire receiving knighthood and his fellow knight who conferred the order upon him. It could be that the genesis of the king’s knights was chivalric means of showing honour to specific knights, and by association the knightly class as a whole. The knightly class were certainly aware of the social changes which were happening in the late fourteenth century. As the first parliament of Richard’s reign demonstrated they were keen to protect their position in whatever ways were possible, and they looked to the king to help them do this. The ideal of creating king’s knights could have come as much from the knightly class themselves as from the king. It is interesting to consider that many of these men became connected to Richard at times when their noble patrons were waning. Immediately following the death of John of Gaunt we find Henry Retford and Henry Green, both with previous Lancastrian connections, amongst the ranks of the king’s retinue. William Bagot, with previous links to the earl of Warwick, became Richard’s retainer around the time of Warwick’s demise. One element of this research which demonstrates this mechanics of retaining clearly is the geographical spread of these men. It is seen that in the areas where there was an established and relatively closed community the king found it very hard to attract retainers or perhaps more accurately, there was little demand for royal annuities. Whereas in the more widely connected areas, where there were generally more gentry and less dominant noblemen, Richard was able to attract a

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13 See Gorski’s analysis of status: Gorski, *Fourteenth Century Sheriff*, p.66.
15 Pilbrow, ‘Knights of Bath’, p.199.
large number of men of substantial influence. In these areas there was patently more demand and more potential benefit from developing a direct connection to the king. In Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire, the concept of *milites regis* can be seen to flourish. Perhaps a most important assertion of this research is that royal retaining developed from a lack of noble leadership and from gentry demand.

It seems the second most important part of medieval local administration was that regulation came from the fact that men in positions of responsibility had much to gain but also had much to lose. We can see from the picture of king’s knights presented here, in balance to the assertion that retaining was in high demand, that there were perhaps less gains for Richard’s retainers than might be expected. It is true that there were opportunities for men to make careers as military captains, or gain grants and custody of royal forests, castles and lands. But as we have seen there is little evidence to suggest that Richard’s retaining policy was effective in raising men of low means to positions above their status. There are examples of men bettering themselves in life; William Thorpe seems to stand a good example of this, even if his rise is a hard to tie down. But these examples do not seem to suggest any direct action on the part of the king, merely men taking the opportunities presented to them. Indeed this adds to the picture that the driving force was the retainers themselves. However, from this lack of direction from above came also great weaknesses. In 1399, with John Bussy facing his execution, Thomas Mowbray in exile, and others saved only by the fortune of dying before this time, it is not hard to highlight the difficulties these knights could get into during Richard’s reign. Even earlier the career of Ralph Ferrers demonstrates the turbulence of being involved in the royal administration during this period. This insecurity is also part of a wider lack of impetus throughout Richard’s retaining policy. Recent research on the household knights of Edward II concluded that much of Edward’s failure had been not building on the strength of his retinue earlier in his reign, instead increasingly spreading his patronage either to too wide group of men from the north or too small a group of centrally-based favourites. Richard too may have failed to find this middle ground.

As the quote from John Gower at the beginning of this section illustrates, much contemporary criticism of Richard focused on his lack of interest in the affairs of state. Tout followed this judgement, presenting Richard as an uninterested incompetent king. Recent work has been done to dilute this image somewhat, demonstrating that much of this contemporary rhetoric was more the use of cultural stereotypes in legitimisation of the Lancastrian regime

17 A. Tebbitt, 'The household knights of Edward II' (PhD. Bristol, 2006), Conc.
18 Tout, Chapters, iv, pp.31-2, 52.
than objective political analysis.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, the chronicles do not necessarily show an uninterested king. Richard is even recorded assembling an army to attack France as early as 1385.\textsuperscript{20} However the argument that it was the gentry themselves that provided the impetus for the king’s retaining policy, as a way of protecting their position in society, strengthens the picture of the king as somewhat passive in his leadership. It seems that over the course of the reign of Edward III and in the context of the Hundred Years War the king developed direct links to men of the knightly class for the purpose of commanding his armies. Not only did this bring benefits for the king, it also created significant opportunities for ambitious men to build successful and lucrative careers.\textsuperscript{21} This found expression in the royal household of Richard with the emergence of the \textit{milites regis}.\textsuperscript{22} Under Richard this group needed to find meaning and purpose in the context of the new reign. While under Edward vitality came from the king’s proactive military policies, with Richard the king’s knights lost this vitality. The situation was only worsened by the confusion of his early years. Under Henry IV perhaps, in the context of the establishment of his regime, these men again gained some of this vitality. However, this only serves to sharpen the problems in Richard’s kingship which the lives of these men demonstrate. The military function of the knights can clearly be seen continuing in the 1390s, but unlike the opportunistic soldiers of Edward’s time, the domestic sphere seems much more significant for Richard’s knights. In the shires it is hard to find clear purpose or aims which Richard had for his retainers. It seems likely that the continuing connection between king and knight was driven more by competition within gentry communities and the absence of solid noble leadership, than positive royal policy. Finally, it is clear that Richard’s reign as a whole was a right royal disaster; very few English kings have been deposed. Similarly the king’s knights of Richard’s reign did not show themselves to be a particular regal asset. However, the policies of his grandfather and cousin show that royal retaining was not without its value. Instead while there was great potential, this remained potential unfulfilled.

\textsuperscript{20} Knighton’s chronicle, p.369.
\textsuperscript{21} Snead, \textit{The careers of four fourteenth century military commanders}, Conclusion
\textsuperscript{22} Given-Wilson, \textit{Royal Household}, p.7.
Appendix A: Career Biographies

(Entries in italics represent specific time of retaining, in some cases unclear)

**Hugh de Wrotesley:**
First mentioned as king's knight 1377
Conformation Grant by Ed. III 40l a year from various farms 1378
Died 1381

**Ralph Ferrers:**
Commissioner of Peace, Staffordshire 1377
Member of Continual Council 1377
Trier of Petitions Parliament 1377
Retained king's knight 1378
Accused treason in Parliament 1380
Commissioner of Peace, Leicestershire 1382
Died c.1391

**Anthony Malorre:**
Confirmation of annuity granted by Black Prince 1378
Commissioner of Peace, Kesteven, Lincolnshire 1380, 1384, 1389
Commissioner of Array, Kesteven, Lincolnshire, 1385
Sheriff Lincoln 1382, 1389
Grant king's manor of Somerton, Lincoln 1389
Keepership Castle of Somerton 1390
Died c.1393

**William Clynton:**
Royal Pardons at his supplication 1380, 1381
On king's business in Brittany 1381
Retained for life to stay with king 1381
Died 1384

**Ralph Stafford:**
Eldest son Earl of Stafford
King's kinsman, licence to hunt in king's forests 1382
Murdered 1385

**Thomas Mowbray:** b.1366
Created earl of Nottingham on death of older brother John 1382
Given 20l from issues of Nottingham 1383
Given possession lands of older brother John, Earl Nottingham 1383
Commissioner of Peace, Bedfordshire 1384
Given title Earl Marshall 1385
Made Warden East Marches towards Scotland 1389
Created duke of Norfolk 1397
Died in exile 1399

**John Walsh:**
Fought duel against Navarrese esquire in Parliament 1384
Knighted and retained by king 1384
Called to give account of office as receiver of Cherbourg 1385
Commissioner of Array, Holland, Lincolnshire 1385
Commission investigating release of prisoners, Hertfordshire 1392
Sheriff, Lincolnshire 1395

**John Annesley:**
Knight of Shire, Nottinghamshire 1377, 1378, 1379, 1384, 1385, 1386, 1388
Fought duel over loss castle in Normandy 1380
Retained to stay with king 1385
Confirmed as king's knight 100M by Henry IV

**Thomas Latimer:** b1341
Knight of Shire, Northamptonshire 1377, 1378
Commissioner of Peace, Northamptonshire 1382, 1383
Commissioner of Array, Northamptonshire 1385
Attendant on king's mother 1385
One of presenters of Lollard conclusions 1395
Died 1401

**William Thorpe:** b1350
Steward Rockingham Forest, Northamptonshire 1382
Commissioner of Peace, Northamptonshire 1382, 1383, 1389
Commissioner of Array, Northamptonshire 1385
Grant for life Bailiff Geddington, Bristol, and Burley 1388
Summoned to Parliament, Lord Thorpe 1390
Died 1391

**Thomas Stafford:** b1368
Retained to stay with king for life as minor 1389
Given seisin of inheritance of his father, Earl Stafford 1390
Died 1392

**Philip Darcy:** b1352
Summoned to parliament, Lord Darcy 1377
Commissioner of Peace, West Riding, Yorkshire 1382, 1384
Commissioner Array, Lyndsey, Lincolnshire 1385
Admiral, northward of Thames 1387
Retained to accompany king on expedition to Scotland 1389
Sent on king's service fight rebels in Ireland 1392
Died 1399

**Adam Peshale:**
Knight of Shire, Staffordshire 1380, 1382, 1383
Sheriff, Staffordshire 1381
Custody of Forest of Morfe in good behaviour, Worcestershire 1384
Commissioner of Array, Staffordshire 1385
Grant, 20l retained for life to stay with king 1390
Sheriff, Shropshire 1394

**Hugh Despenser:**
Commissioner of Peace, Bedfordshire 1384
Travelling beyond sea in king's service 1385
Preparing to go with king to Scotland 1389
Going to Brittany on king's service 1389
On death Ralph Ferrers, retained to stay with king 1391
Going to Ireland in king's retinue 1394

**John Bussy:**
Commissioner of Peace, Kesteven, Lincolnshire 1382
Sheriff, Lincolnshire 1383, 1385, 1390
Knight of Shire, Lincolnshire 1383, 1388-97
Commissioner of Array, Kesteven, Lincolnshire 1385
Retained to stay with king 1391
Grant manor of Somerton, on death of Anthony Malorre 1393
Personally overseeing elections Lincoln 1393
Chief Steward duchy of Lancaster north Trent 1394
Speaker of Commons 1398
Member Continual Council 1399
Executed 1399

**John Littlebury:**
Retained to stay with king 1392
Travelling to Ireland king's retinue 1394
Constable Richmond Castle, chief forester of New forest 1394
Constable Colchester Castle 1395
Sheriff, Lincolnshire 1398
Confirmed as king's knight 100M by Henry IV

**Nicholas Hauberk:**
Grant of maintenance, king's esquire 1388
Travelling abroad as king's esquire 1390
Retained to stay with king as knight 1392
Grant, 100M for life 1393

**John Beaumont:** b1369
Summoned to Parliament, Lord Beaumont 1383
Grant king's kinsman, 100M 1389
Member Privy Council 1389
Admiral Northwards of Thames 1389
Warden Cinque Ports 1392
Retained to stay with king 1393
Died 1396

**John Paveley:**
Sheriff, Northamptonshire 1379, 1386, 1389
Attendant on king's mother 1385
Grant to support his estate, 100M, 40l after father's death 1386
Grant to wife of 20l as granted to her husband by the Queen 1393

**John Calveley:**
Knight of Shire, Rutland 1383, 1390
Knight of Shire, Leicestershire 1385, 1397
Commissioner of Array, Leicestershire 1385
Sheriff, Rutland 1384
Sheriff, Leicestershire 1385
Steward of king's lordship of Okeham 1388
Commissioner of Peace, Leicestershire 1389
Retained to stay with the king for life 1394
**William Goderich:**
Grant 20l and given tenement in London, king's esquire 1391
*Grant of land, king's knight 1394*

**Henry Retford:** b1354
Commissioner of Array, Lyndsey, Lincolnshire 1385
Travelled with John of Gaunt to Spain 1386
Sheriff, Lincolnshire 1389, 1392, 1397
*Retained to stay with king, travelling to Ireland 1394*
Speaker of Commons 1402
Sheriff, Lincolnshire 1406, 1427
Died 1409

**Henry Green:**
Commissioner of Peace, Northamptonshire 1382
Commissioner of Array, Northamptonshire 1385
Knight of Shire, Northamptonshire 1394, 1397
*Retained to stay with king for life 1397*
Member Continual Council 1399
Died 1400

**William Bagot:**
Sheriff, Leicestershire 1382
Received livery Henry Bolingbroke 1386
Knight of Shire, Warwickshire 1388-1402
Commissioner of Peace, Warwickshire 1389
Steward of king's manor of Cheylesmore 1391
*Retained to stay with king 1397*
Member Continual Council 1399
Died 1407
Appendix B: Maps of Lands

Fig 1: All complete manors held by king’s knights
Fig 2: All lands including knights fees held by king’s knights (Grey indicates knights retained before 1389)
Fig 3: Connections to estates outside Midlands
(The estates of Mowbray and Stafford are extensive and not shown by arrows)
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