The Last Week of the Life of Edward the Black Prince

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Edward the Black Prince died in the palace of Westminster, after years of debilitating illness, on Trinity Sunday, 8 June 1376. There has been little or no discussion by historians of why the prince should have chosen Canterbury for burial, when Westminster abbey was already well-established as the royal mausoleum, or any discussion at all of another matter to which the prince gave attention in his very last days, namely the grant of a charter of disafforestation to the community of Wirral in his earldom and county of Chester. In order to recover the prince's own assessment of his life and significance at the end of his career, it is necessary to explore the reasons for both the charter and the burial in some detail.

To take the disafforestation of Wirral first, there are three documents that throw light on this. The charter itself is dated 20 July 1376, and was issued in the name of Edward III but on the orders of his son, the duke of Lancaster.[1] The second is a reference to the disafforestation in the indictment roll of the session of the Chester county court held six months later, on 30 January 1377.[2] The third is a petition of the community of Wirral to the king, asking for the charter to be confirmed by statute, a request that was never granted. The petition is undated, but must have been made between 20 July 1376 and Edward III's death on 21 June 1377, and almost certainly before 30 January 1377.[3] There are some problems in reconciling the contents of the first and third of these documents, but the reasons for the grant of disafforestation are clearly set out. In the charter it states:

> Many of our [the king's] liege subjects of Cheshire have sustained so much in the way of damage, oppression and loss on account of a forest there called

1 The National Archives, London [henceforth TNA], C 53/154, m. 10. This is the enrolment copy on the charter rolls, the original is lost.

2 TNA, Chester county court indictment roll, CHES 25/4, m. 42.

3 TNA, SC 8/148/7364.

> Wirral. Our son had the greatest desire to further their peace and alleviate their condition, and at the very end of his life he made a strong recommendation to us in those terms. We […] grant that the said place called Wirral, and everything contained within its bounds, shall be entirely disafforested for ever […] [Latin]

The petition puts the case in similar terms:

> To the king [Edward III] … the poor community of Wirral say that their former most gracious lord [the Black Prince] had taken into consideration the great harm, damage and hardships that the beasts of the forest of Wirral had done continually to his common people there.… So he [the prince], for his soul, and the souls of his noble ancestors, and for the relief of the said land (*pays*) and community, disafforested Wirral on his own behalf and that of his heirs.… They ask for [confirmation by statute] of this for the love of God and as a work of charity, in full accomplishment of the last will of his well-beloved son, whom God pardon in His mercy. [Anglo-Norman]

The indictment roll adds an important piece of information, namely that the grant was made by the prince 'by his special grace', and without requiring any payment for it.

In the petition and the indictment roll it is stated that it was the prince who had disafforested Wirral, whereas the charter on the other hand assumes that it was effected by the king, but at the prince's request. What is likely to have happened is this. On his death bed, the Black Prince ordered the disafforestation. This would be implemented by letters under his privy seal, reciting the text of a charter, which were then sent to the chamberlain of Chester with instructions to issue the charter under the Chester exchequer seal.[4] When the messenger arrived in Chester, up to five days later, the charter was issued, and it was only some days afterwards that the officials in Chester castle learned that the prince had died before the messenger's arrival and that the charter was, therefore, invalid. It cannot be doubted that the decision on Wirral's disafforestation was widely known to have been made at the very end of the prince's life, that it was done as an act of charity in recompense for the damage and loss the community there had suffered during the time of the prince's rule as earl of Chester, and that it was done in contemplation of his imminent death and in response to his need to obtain God's merciful forgiveness.

What is far from clear, though, is why it was that Wirral was chosen for this demonstration of death-bed penitence, when other communities in

[4] For the procedure, see M. Sharp, 'The Administrative Chancery of the Black Prince before 1362', in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to T. F. Tout*, ed. A. G. Little and F. M. Powicke (Manchester, 1925), pp. 321–33 and idem, 'The Central Administrative System of Edward, the Black Prince', in *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England*, ed. T. F. Tout, 6 vols (Manchester, 1920–33), V, pp. 289–400.

England, Wales or France would have been equally and, in some cases, very much more, appropriate. What Cheshire and Aquitaine had in common was that they were the two places to which the prince had given most attention as a ruler, and both suffered serious public order problems, in part as a result of war. Malcolm Vale's introduction to the Gascon Roll for 1317–19 shows clearly that the effects of Edward I's 'first Gascon war' of 1294–1303 had left 'a legacy of disruption, dispossession, ill-will and resentment in the duchy' that was still unresolved fourteen years after peace had supposedly been made.[5] Cheshire was a source of both money and soldiers for wars in Wales and Scotland, as well as France, and it will be argued later that this had a pathological effect on its local polity. Wirral, though, was a place Edward had visited only twice in his lifetime: first during his state visit of 1353, when he had hunted in the area of the forest around Shotwick park, and the second time in 1358, eighteen years before his death. By 1376, Edward was no longer prince of Aquitaine, and had renounced its rule some years earlier. He was still earl of Chester, though, and ruler of the two counties. In order to make sense of the prince's own verdict on his life and career that these death-bed arrangements signify, both his last will, and in particular his plans for his funeral, and the grant to Wirral have to be considered in conjunction.

Why Wirral?

Wirral, one of the seven hundreds into which fourteenth-century Cheshire was divided, is situated on the north-western extremity of the county. From some unknown date in the twelfth century it had been placed under forest law by one of the Anglo-Norman earls of Chester, despite the fact that it was a rather unlikely region for a forest. The Cheshire forests were not royal but comital, and following the decision of Henry III's government not to integrate Cheshire into the English system of governance after the death of the last Anglo-Norman earl in 1237, they remained separate from the English forest administration.[6] The exercise of forest law in the county by the earls (or by kings of England, when the earldom was in their hands) differed significantly from the English model, in part because of the inclusion of forest privileges in Earl Ranulf III of Chester's so-called 'Magna Carta of Cheshire' of 1216.[7]

With the Black Prince's assumption of adult responsibilities in 1346 Peter Gildesburgh and William Shareshull, his principal financial and legal councillors respectively, saw the exploitation of the Cheshire forest administration as

5 Available at: www.gasconrolls.org/editions/calendars/C61_32.

6 J. Green, 'Forests', in *Victoria History of Cheshire*, 5 vols (Oxford, 1979–2003), II, pp. 167–71.

7 Ibid., p. 169.

one of the ways of establishing a new regime of quasi-taxation in his earldom of Chester. Cheshire sent no members to parliament in the Middle Ages, and had not contributed to any of the lay subsidies granted in parliament since the end of the thirteenth century. Consequently a whole raft of different types of levy had to be devised, to ensure that the county paid its share to support royal military policy. This began with the holding of a forest eyre under John Macclesfield (an experienced royal forest justice) and others for the three Cheshire forests of Wirral, Delamere-Mondrem and Macclesfield in 1347. This was resented by the local communities as an oppressive innovation, and turned out to be a financial failure.[8] When the control of the prince's administration passed to Sir John Wingfield in 1351, a much more successful attempt was made to raise revenue from this source. First, though, the ground had to be prepared, by enforcing the 'assize of the forest' within Cheshire through a set of ordinances of the prince's council in 1351, which entailed importing the full rigour of English forest procedure.[9] Forest inquisitions were held in the spring of 1351 by Wingfield and the county officials using the new law and procedures, and both threats and cajolements were used, with great effect. The forest inquisitions of 1351 provoked the most serious resistance to the prince's rule during his period as earl of Chester, particularly in Wirral, and had to be countered by Wingfield's smack of firm government in order to counteract the threat of widespread resistance.

The policy was undoubtedly effective in breaking the resistance of the communities, and plans were laid to hold a second forest eyre in Cheshire, at the time of the prince's state visit to the county in the late summer of 1353. In fact, that visit had to be devoted entirely to dealing with very serious public order problems within the county, to holding a court of trailbaston to try crimes of violence, oppression and extortion, and to negotiating a taxatory common fine of 5,000 marks with the county community.[10] The record of the trailbaston sessions does, however, throw a great deal of light on problems within Wirral forest and its administration at that time. The chief officer in

8 P. H. W. Booth, *The Financial Administration of the Lordship and County of Chester, 1272–1377*, Chetham Society, 3rd ser., 28 (Manchester, 1981), pp. 116–26; *Account of the Chamberlain of Chester, 1361–62*, ed. P. H. W. Booth and A. D. Carr, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 125 (Liverpool, 1991), pp. liv–lv; TNA, DL 39/1/19. Macclesfield had acted as justice of the forest of Kinver (Staffordshire) in 1338. See *The Forests of Cannock and Kinver: Select Documents, 1235–1372*, ed. J. Birrell, Staffordshire Record Society, 4th ser., 18 (Stafford, 1999), pp. 205–13.

9 *Register of Edward, the Black Prince, Preserved in the Public Record Office*, 4 vols (London, 1930–3) [hereafter *B.P.R.*], III, pp. 15–16.

10 P. H. W. Booth, 'Taxation and Public Order: Cheshire in 1353', *Northern History*, 12 (1976), pp. 16–31; Booth, *Financial Administration*, pp. 121–2.

the forest was William Stanley, the hereditary master-forester.[11] His second in command was John Lascelles, a Wallasey landowner, the riding forester.[12] Under them were the six 'walking foresters', appointed by Stanley. Stanley was the scion of a Staffordshire family that had married into the office of forester, but as the property connected with it had descended through daughters they were possessed of only a small amount of land in Cheshire, just one third of the small manor of Storeton (worth 67s. 8d. a year in 1349).[13] He did not have a manor-house of his own, but lived in the prince's modest castle of Shotwick, of which he was custodian, and to which a deer-park was attached. Consequently, if his family were to thrive then he had to make the most of his position of power and influence as master-forester of Wirral. And thrive they certainly did. Two lines of William's descendants became heads of important Cheshire gentry families: the Stanleys of Hooton and Alderley. The descendants of William's younger son, John, knight of the Garter and lord lieutenant of Ireland, did even better: they became lords of Man and earls of Derby, and were to dominate the polities of both Lancashire and Cheshire from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

The accusations made against the Wirral foresters in the 1353 trailbaston sessions were damning.[14] The community of Wirral had clearly decided to use the opportunity of the prince's presence in Cheshire, and his publicly expressed determination to deal with the public order problems in the county, to counter what was generally perceived as the foresters' oppressive conduct. This was encapsulated in a sweeping accusation made to the trailbaston judges that the foresters of Wirral,

> while exercising their official positions, have repeatedly harassed the common people of Wirral by many crimes and oppressions, to their grave damage. Furthermore, they have openly issued threats against the said common people so that none of the community dared complain about their behaviour, or prosecute them.[15]

The postponed forest eyre was eventually held at Chester in September 1357, presided over by Sir Richard Willoughby, a former chief justice of the king's bench, with three officials acting as his associates.[16] The foresters played a

11 See W. Fergusson Irvine, 'The Early Stanleys', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 105 (1953), pp. 56–9.

12 For their careers, see *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, pp. 176–7.

13 TNA, CHES 3/1/23 Edw. III/8 (for the valuations of the other two-thirds of the manor).

14 P. H. W. Booth, 'Calendar of the Cheshire Trailbaston Proceedings, 1353', *Cheshire History*, 11 (1983), pp. 47–50.

15 Booth, 'Calendar', p. 49.

16 The plea roll is TNA, CHES 33/6. The Wirral section of the roll is currently being prepared for publication by the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire by members

key role in the eyre, as they were responsible for presenting offences against the vert and venison, and also acted jointly with twelve local landowners in the 'regard of the forest', to investigate assarts and purprestures. It is significant that both Stanley and Lascelles had been summoned to London in the summer of 1351 to speak to the prince in person about the situation in the forest, and he had ordered his legal advisers to favour them by ensuring that they were not deprived of any of their puture rights.[17] The Wirral section of the plea roll makes it clear that the foresters' work was done thoroughly, even ruthlessly. By 28 February 1358, a common fine of £1,000 had been agreed with 'the men of the forest of Wirral', payable in instalments over five years, sums that proved in the event very difficult to collect.[18]

The key role played by the Wirral foresters in making the levy of this sum possible, when the prince was gearing up his war effort once again for what turned out to be the Rheims campaign of 1359–60, explains why it was not possible for the administration to deal with their unlawful activities in any effective way. The necessity for this type of revenue can be realised when we consider the increased financial strain on the prince's administration, which became apparent when his entire principality, duchy and earldom had to act as surety to raise loans of over £13,000 for the campaign.[19]

Edward, Sir John Wingfield, and the council faced a dilemma that proved irresolvable, in that order could only be restored at the expense of the war effort: by coming down heavily on soldiers and officials who had behaved in an oppressive and extortionate manner towards their fellow members of the community. The Wirral foresters were a prime example of this, and so they were allowed to carry on as before. Stanley and Lascelles had been shown in 1353 to be at the heart of what contemporaries called a 'covin', a circle of corrupt officials banded together for mutual profit and protection, which included the beadle of Wirral, Ranulf Racket, who was later appointed to a

of the Ranulf Higden Society (www.ranulfhigden.org.uk), and I am grateful for their permission to use their work in this article. John Delves, Sir Richard Stafford and the chamberlain of Chester were the other justices (see *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, pp. 189–90).

17 *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, p. 176. 'Puture' was a payment made to the foresters by most Wirral townships in lieu of the hospitality that the foresters had the right to exact from them.

18 *B.P.R.*, III, p. 298; *Accounts of the Chamberlains and other Officers of the County of Chester, 1301–1360*, ed. R. Stewart-Brown, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 59 (Liverpool, 1910), p. 247.

19 *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, p. lii. In addition, the earl of Arundel lent the prince £2,000 on the surety of 'a gold and jewel-encrusted crown and a gold star' that had been the property of the French king, *B.P.R.*, III, pp. 302, 333.

forestership by Stanley,[20] and Henry Charlton, the coroner.[21] The two foresters also served regularly on the county court indictment jury for Wirral, which had been established as part of the Cheshire legal reforms initiated in 1353 to make the prosecution of serious crime more effective.[22] Their presence on the jury was both a way of bolstering their influence in the area, as well as fending off attacks from others. In 1355, Henry Molyneux and John Brocton, both under-foresters, were accused of killing Richard son of Simon Becheton, lord of another third of Storeton manor. It was alleged further that Stanley and Lascelles had conspired with the killers, had lured Becheton into a boat in the Mersey with the connivance of his girlfriend (*amica*), Rose, where he was fatally wounded, and had then arranged for Brocton to be spirited out of the county.[23] Stanley, Lascelles and Molyneux were imprisoned in Chester castle, and Stanley forfeited his master-forestership which he did not receive back until August 1357 following his acquittal.[24] In May 1356 the foresters were accused of extortionate practices similar to those of which they had been found guilty in 1353, and in addition Stanley and Lascelles were accused of 'champerty', that is of corruptly using legal process to recover a debt to the loss of those to whom the money was legitimately owed.[25]

Stanley died in April 1360, before the forest eyre justices had finally decided on the legitimacy of his claims to liberties as master-forester.[26] His son, William Stanley the younger, followed in his father's footsteps, and reaped some of the benefits of the illicit exploitation of the foresters' authority that had been in evidence since at least the early 1350s. On 21 June 1361 he did homage and swore fealty to the prince, as earl of Chester, for his inheritance, held in chief of the earl by one eighth of a knight's fee.[27] The success of his father's rise to power and fortune, and his own continuation of it, is witnessed by his building a stone manor-house, almost certainly on a virgin site, on his third part of the manor of Storeton at a time when such domestic buildings were a great rarity in Cheshire.[28] However, the younger William now faced an opponent of much greater significance than had hitherto been

20 TNA, CHES 33/6, m. 1.

21 Ibid., p. 30.

22 TNA, CHES 25/4, mm. 1, 2, 2d, 3, 3d.

23 TNA, CHES 25/4, mm. 2d, 4.

24 *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, pp. 176–7.

25 TNA, CHES 25/4, m. 3d.

26 *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, pp. 176–7.

27 *B.P.R.*, III, p. 385.

28 E. W. Cox, 'The Antiquities of Storeton in Wirral', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 49 (Liverpool, 1898), pp. 47–70; M. J. B. Hislop, 'A Medieval Building Contract from Storeton, Wirral', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 74 (1999), pp. 115–21.

the case. By far the most important landowner in Wirral was the abbot of Chester, who possessed a large amount of property in the hundred. Consequently his steward, Ranulf Roter, was a man of very great consequence indeed. Roter came from a similar background to the Stanleys, namely that of a very modest landowning family, and likewise had his way to make in the world. He had legal training, and acted as the abbot's attorney in the 1353 trailbaston sessions.[29] Roter was successful in acquiring land; for example in 1356 he bought from the prince, against stiff competition, the marriages of three of the daughters and co-heiresses of Sir Peter Thornton, his cousin, for 90 marks.[30] His power and influence in Wirral as the abbot's steward, plus his access to advancement under the abbot's patronage, threatened to overtake the hard-won rise of the Stanleys, and the two families became bitter enemies. Both sides attempted to use the criminal justice system to further their aims. In November 1360, the younger William Stanley, who had only recently succeeded his father, claimed that when he was trying to enforce the forest law against Roter, he had responded by threatening him with a gang of thirteen men armed with weapons of war in contravention of a recent ordinance forbidding armed assemblies, which then took refuge in the abbot's manor-house.[31] This led to an incident at the session of the county court of 8 December 1360, when a violent argument broke out between Roter and Stanley. Ranulf began by complaining that William had unlawfully seized goods in November which really belonged to the abbot of Chester. William replied by saying that 'ipse fuit melior Ranulpho, et quod idem Ranulphus tarde venit ad docendum ipsum suum facere', to which Ranulf countered 'qui semet laudet stertore coronabitur'.[32]

Roter reached the summit of his influence in September 1361, when he took on a ten-year lease of the prince's manor of Frodsham at a rent of £80 a year. This not only gave him a stone manor-house of considerable size (described as a *castellum* in 1315),[33] but also semi-independent status within the manor, which was an important liberty within Cheshire. His enjoyment of it was not to last long, though, because on 4 July 1362 he was murdered by four men at his estate at Kingsley, not far south of Frodsham. It is not clear what motivated this crime as Roter must have accumulated a number

29 Booth, 'Calendar', p. 41.

30 *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, p. 168.

31 *B.P.R.*, III, p. 401. The lieutenant-justiciar was ordered to acquit Roter of this offence by the prince's council in February 1361 (ibid., p. 410).

32 TNA, CHES 24/5, m. 12. The exchange, in modern English, may perhaps be rendered thus: *William* 'I am a better man than you are, Ranulf, and it's not up to you to teach me how to do my job.' *Ranulf* 'A man who sings his own praises is just asking to be rewarded with the prize of a crown made of shit.'

33 TNA, SC 6/802/12.

of enemies, but his removal from the scene was certainly to Stanley's advantage.[34] Some years later, in 1371, Stanley took on his remaining serious rival in Wirral, Hamo Massey of Puddington, by accusing him of both illegal hunting of large numbers of deer in the forest, as well as of committing serious encroachments on the forest landscape. Unlike the Stanleys, Massey had done important military service for the prince, by leading a contingent of archers from Wirral as an indentured esquire to the Poitiers campaign, and a fellow huntsman of his in 1371 was said to be Sir John Danyers, who had served on the same campaign.[35] Finally, a month before the prince's death, John Stanley, 'brother of William', was accused of getting one of his friends to murder Thomas Clotton at Storeton, and then of having fled the county.[36] Clotton was the husband of Alice Laken, having bought her marriage for 50 marks from John Lascelles when she was only nine years old, and she was the lady of yet another third of the manor of Storeton. She conveyed all her property in Storeton to Sir William Stanley (as he was by then) in 1410, and by that time he was in possession of the whole of the manor.[37] No trial resulted after the first accusation, but a year later in 1377 an indictment jury that was significantly headed by Hamo Massey accused John Stanley himself of having committed the crime, with the advice and agreement of his brother William, and of conspiring to do it at Little Sutton, an important manorial centre of the abbot of Chester in Wirral.[38] Taking into account that in the first indictment John had been described as being of the *familia* of the abbot, it looks as if one of the consequences of the Roter murder in 1362 had been John Stanley's insinuation into the abbey's sphere of influence.

The prince and his council were clearly aware of the important role played by the foresters of Wirral in compelling the local community to agree a communal fine of £1,000 in early 1358, as they were present in Chester the following September.[39] The violence in Wirral continued after the prince's death and the grant of disafforestation. Part of the reason for this was that there was a flaw in Edward III's charter of 20 July 1376 in that the grant had been made in a great hurry, and had not been preceded by an inquisition *ad*

34 Roter was accused of being implicated in the murder in June 1362 of Robert son of Richard Frodsham, a former associate of his, but by the time that case came to trial Roter had himself been murdered (TNA, CHES 25/4, m. 13d). Another 'Ranulf Roter', presumably the son and heir, was murdered at Kingsley on 16 September 1362 (TNA, CHES 25/4, m. 41d).

35 *B.P.R.*, III, p. 204; *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, pp. 131–4.

36 TNA CHES, 25/4, m. 39d.

37 *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, 51 (1956), pp. 36–7; John Rylands University Library of Manchester, RYCH/1417, 1826.

38 TNA, CHES 25/4, m. 44. Stanley received a pardon for this offence in 1378 (*Cheshire Sheaf*, ibid.).

39 *B.P.R.*, III, pp. 298, 307–17.

quod damnum. Also, although his jurisdiction had been taken away, the actual office of hereditary master-forester had not been abolished. Such a charter would extinguish property rights and legal privileges, and those affected normally had to be given the right to challenge the grant at the inquisition. The person most affected, of course, was William Stanley the younger, whose right to receive a sum of money in lieu of 'puture' from most of the Wirral townships was abolished. The community of Wirral's plea to have the charter confirmed by Act of Parliament was not accepted, and the Wirral communities had to pay substantial sums of money to buy out the Stanley rights. This led to a further rise in tension between the ex-foresters and the local community, which resulted in the final act of disorder in the whole saga.

In January 1377, Hamo Massey, Thomas Hough and John Poole together with three other Wirral landowners were commissioned by the royal government to collect 660 marks from the community of Wirral. This was presumably as part of a mize (or tallage of recognition) that had now become established as part of the county's peculiar taxation system.[40] When they came to Wallasey to collect the tax, it was claimed later that they brought a hundred armed men with them.[41] This was the territory of the Lascelles family. William Stanley's deputy, John, had died by this time, and it was his son, Thomas, together with Stanley, who resisted the commissioners with armed force. At the subsequent court hearing on 24 February they were accused of having lit a warning beacon to gather a counter force of fifty-six men, and that this had resulted in a violent confrontation. Thomas fled to sanctuary, having stated that he would not pay his assessed sum because the abbot of Chester, the prior of Birkenhead, Hamo, the other commissioners and many others in Wirral had granted the levy without his consent. The commissioners were accused in their turn of breaking into the houses of Thomas and his widowed mother, wounding their tenants, and seizing cattle and money. William Stanley was on the indictment jury this time, and he and his fellows counter-attacked by making a long series of accusations of serious crimes against Massey, Thomas Hough, John Poole, the prior of Birkenhead, and others.[42] This was obviously a pre-emptive strike by the foresters' party, but the commissioners had anticipated it by petitioning Edward III, probably in early February, to the effect that they had simply been obeying royal orders by legitimately collecting the levy, but that the foresters' supporters, armed for war, had attacked them, burned their houses, and continued to threaten them.

Consequently, when the county court met on Tuesday 24 February, the presentment jury's indictment was trumped by a writ from the king, ordering

40 *Chamberlain's Account*, ed. Booth and Carr, pp. liii–lv; *Victoria History of Cheshire*, II, pp. 23–5.

41 TNA, CHES 25/4, mm. 42–44.

42 Ibid., m. 42.

a new jury to be sworn in to inquire into the allegations in the petition. This was to be held before the lieutenant-justiciar and chamberlain of Chester on 11 March 1377. The sheriff of Cheshire, Sir Laurence Dutton, had chosen a jury for that inquiry of men not associated with either of the contending parties, and it found that the allegations in the petition were true. In fact, it gave more details of the actions of the foresters, listing the fifty-six names of those who had come armed in addition to Thomas Lascelles. When Hamo had showed them the commission to collect the tax, they had replied that it was worthless, and that they would die forty deaths before they would allow it to be enforced upon them by distraint, and loosed arrows at the commissioners.[43] At the county court held on 10 March, the previous day, the presentment jury led by Hamo Massey this time had indicted John Stanley for the murder of Thomas Clotton, and also indicted William Stanley for the by now familiar series of crimes of oppression and extortion in the forest in the 1360s and 1370s. The very day the court was held, it was alleged, Stanley had ridden through Wirral with a gang of armed men from Cheshire and Lancashire, to terrorise the local community. The result appears to have been a draw. The forest law was no longer to apply in Wirral: the master-forester retained his financial perks. On the other hand, the community of the hundred had become divided into warring factions.

The dire situation in Cheshire in 1353 had provided both material and a setting for the work of a regional poet, the author of the satire *Winner and Waster*.[44] The thirty years of the domination of the Stanleys, father and son, over Wirral forest furnished another setting: the episode in the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that describes the journey of Sir Gawain from King Arthur's court to find his adversary. The only real landscape that the *Gawain*-poet employed was that to describe the part of the journey along the north coast of the principality of North Wales, through Flintshire, and across the Dee 'into the wilderness of Wirral, where there lived only few whom God or men of good heart loved'.[45] There have been many speculations by students of English literature about the meaning of this enigmatic statement. According to Tolkien and Gordon, Wirral was a physical wilderness, since it 'remained wild as late as the sixteenth century' but was also a moral 'wyldrenesse' because of 'the concern caused to the authorities in the four-

43 Ibid., m. 42.

44 T. Turville-Petre, 'Wynner and Wastoure: When and Where?', in *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. McDonald (Groningen, 1994), pp. 164–6.

45 See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1967), p. 98 for this interpretation of the text. I am grateful to Professor A. D. Mills for his advice on interpreting these lines.

teenth century by the criminals who resorted there'.[46] Other literary commentators agree, and make general comments such as that Wirral had a reputation for 'lawlessness and local rebellions', or that it was 'notorious for its outlaws'.[47] The notion of Wirral as a 'wild' (uncultivated) landscape, dominated by wild beasts, has to be dismissed out of hand, since it is belied by the forest records themselves. What has not been done hitherto is to investigate the uniquely rich legal records of the palatinate, to determine what type of lawlessness characterised this part of later fourteenth-century Cheshire.

If Michael Bennett is right in his claim that *Sir Gawain* was written by a north-western poet at Richard II's court, at a time when Cheshire soldiers formed the backbone of his 'imperial guard', then we should have to ask what the denigratory references to Wirral and its people would have meant to them.[48] The well-documented problems caused by armed factions competing for dominance within the hundred both through subversion of legal procedure and through armed force were well-known outside the immediate area. The petition of the community for confirmation of the disafforestation was made in parliament. It is very likely that the corrupt and oppressive behaviour of the foresters was brought to the attention of the prince's council, almost certainly on more than one occasion, in the 1360s and 1370s. This leads us to the much more difficult question, which is this: what conclusions would the prince have drawn from his awareness of the Wirral situation, and why would those conclusions have led him to single out this place as the recipient of his death-bed favour? The key to this must surely be the characterisation of the foresters' crimes as 'oppression'. The two Stanleys were successful social climbers in an age in which it was difficult to be such, and their only real weapon was a generally detested forest law which they manipulated without scruple. The prince needed both soldiers and money from Cheshire, and the role the elder Stanley played in the 1357 forest eyre helped towards raising the latter. Good public order, particularly after the Black Death, was in the end dispensable.

Nájera and After

Nine years before Wirral's charter was granted, the prince had won his last great military victory, at Nájera in northern Spain. It is the communica-

46 Ibid., p. 98.

47 R. Elliott, 'Landscape and Geography', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. D. Brewer and J. Gibson (Cambridge, 1997), p. 115; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. W. J. R. Barron (Manchester, 1998), p. 176. These two examples stand for many more.

48 M. J. Bennett, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Literary Achievement of the North-West Midlands: The Historical Background', *Journal of Medieval History*, 5 (1979), 80–1.

tions that took place between the two sides beforehand that provide the link between the prince's success in military campaigns, and his apparent need to atone for his actions at the end of his life. Particularly important are the copies of two letters from Enrique of Trastamara to the Black Prince, and one from the prince in reply to the first, sent prior to the battle, which survive.[49] Written in French, they were intended for wide dissemination,[50] and their importance can also be gauged by the fact that what we have are reference copies written on paper by the prince's administration, presumably on his instructions. The first one, which is headed 'the first letter of the Bastard of Spain to my lord the prince', is dated 28 February 1367 and is a politely phrased conventional denial by Enrique of the prince's right to invade Castile. The prince's letter, which is undated and was most likely preceded by a further exchange of letters, is deliberately insulting – he addresses Enrique as 'count of Trastamara' only, and as one who 'calls himself king of Castile'. There then follows a detailed and carefully worked-out justification of the prince's military action, which he claims is based on lineage (Edward's blood relationship with Pedro I of Castile through their common descent from the father of Eleanor of Castile, queen of England), old and new alliances (the treaties of 1254, 1362 and 1366),[51] the will of Alfonso XI in which the crown of Castile was left to his legitimate son, Pedro, and the homage and fealty performed to Pedro by the people of his realms in general, and by Enrique in particular. Consequently, the prince claims that his sole aim is to restore Pedro to his rightful position, and to avoid bloodshed between Christians if at all possible should Enrique be prepared to accept an honourable settlement. Most significantly, the prince felt that he had to deny in the strongest possible terms that his actions were motivated by the arrogant desire for vainglory ('pur orgueill de vein glorie') but only by right and justice ('bien et justice'), in contrast with Enrique who was driven by greed ('covatise').

49 R. Delachenal, *Histoire de Charles V*, 5 vols (Paris, 1909–31), III, pp. 554–7.

50 The original is in the British Library, London, Cotton, Caligula D iii 141. For the use of the prince's first letter to Enrique, see Chandos Herald, *The Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince*, ed. and trans. R. Barber (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 123; it was recycled from that source by Froissart in *Chroniques de Froissart*, ed. K. de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1869), VII, pp. 187–8. See also the commentary on the versions in Ayala's *Crónicas* in P. E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 93–4. One of the three Ayala letters is a justification by Enrique of his seizure of the throne because of Pedro's murder of his relatives as well as of members of the nobility and others, plus his attacks on papal and episcopal rights, as well as rape.

51 A. Goodman, 'England and Iberia in the Middle Ages', in *England and her Neighbours, 1066–1453*, ed. M. Jones and M. Vale (London, 1989), pp. 77–8; Russell, *English Intervention*, pp. 2, 63.

Enrique's reply, which is entitled 'the last letter of the Bastard, before the battle', was written just three days before the fighting, and begins by making fun of the prince's self-importance by addressing him as 'Edward, prince of Wales, who call yourself "eldest son of the king of England, and prince of Aquitaine"'. He then goes on to say that everyone knows that the prince is indeed wedded to vainglory, but that Enrique for his part is willing to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, and suggests that two or three knights from each side should be sent to choose a site for the battle that will give no advantage to either. In fact, it was not the first time that the prince had been compelled to make a public denial of the vainglory charge. Eleven years before, he had set out a justification of the legality of his military operations in the statement he made to the cardinal-mediator just before the battle of Poitiers. In this he said his father's claim to the French throne was a just one, and also that he, the prince, did not want it to be thought that it was his pride that had been the cause of so many deaths in battle.[52] Enrique's offer was not a serious one and the prince went on to win his last great victory. Within a remarkably short time afterwards all had turned to ashes. In 1369 Pedro was murdered by his brother and the war with France had resumed, and by the time of the prince's death the English had lost all the gains in Aquitaine that they had made since 1337.

In assessing the prince's achievements and trying to estimate his own views in that regard, we have to employ all the available evidence, even that from his far distant earldom of Chester. What is known for certain is that the prince fell ill not long after the Nájera campaign, became physically disabled so that he was no longer capable of riding a horse by 1370, returned to England in January 1371, and resigned his principality in November 1372. The part that he played in public life after his return was a very modest one.[53] None of the contemporary accounts throw any real light on his chronic illness, and modern historians have only been able to speculate.[54] The St Albans chronicler, Thomas Walsingham, who was writing not long after the prince's death and who had excellent connections with the English political establishment, wrote that for five years the prince had suffered discharges of both semen and blood which made him so weak that those in attendance on him thought he

52 Barber, *Life and Campaigns*, p. 94.

53 R. Barber, *Edward, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 227–9.

54 *Eulogium historiarum sive temporis*, ed. F. S. Haydon, 3 vols (London, 1858–63), III, p. 334 records under the year 1369 that the prince 'coepit dysenteria graviter vexari'. For comments on the prince's infirmity, see D. Green, 'Masculinity and Medicine: Thomas Walsingham and the Death of the Black Prince', *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009), pp. 34–51.

had died.[55] Unfortunately, it is not at all clear what Walsingham was trying to say here, and it seems most likely that he had some type of symbolic interpretation in mind. The answer to the question 'what was the prince suffering from in the last eight or nine years of his life?' has to be sought in the evidence of his behaviour in those last years, from the time of the battle of Nájera onwards.

For some historians, Edward's ultimate failure was a product of flaws in his character. P. E. Russell had a poor view of the prince's capacities as a statesman because he felt that he allowed 'his own private prejudices and ambitions' to take precedence over English strategy. Having re-established Pedro I of Castile on his throne in the spring of 1367, the prince turned against his ally far too rapidly, although the reason for the change of heart, namely Pedro's inability to raise the money quickly to pay for the expedition, seems ill-founded in the circumstances. There was a rumour as early as that summer that the prince would take over the regency of Pedro's realms, should the king default on his debts.[56] Then followed a plan in the autumn to force Pedro to pay what he owed, or face the partitioning of Castile between the prince (who would probably be given the title of king), Pere of Aragon and Charles of Navarre. After Pedro's murder by Enrique at Montiel in March 1369, the prince still wanted to make good his claim to the throne of Castile, with the support of Aragon, but the renewal of the war with France that year and lack of support from the English government made it impossible.[57] In order to make sense of this, it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of the Castilian affair, with the treaty between Pedro and Edward III in 1362.

The establishment of the principality of Aquitaine inevitably involved the English in Iberian politics, and Pedro needed allies to counter the threat to his throne from his illegitimate half-brother, Enrique of Trastamara. Enrique, on the other hand, as the bastard son of Alfonso XI, could only rightfully claim the throne of Castile if he could establish that Pedro was so irredeemably wicked that the Trastamaran candidature was the only possible alternative. To bring this about, Enrique and his supporters ran what was probably the most effective black propaganda campaign of the later Middle Ages, and employed all the media of communication, both formal and informal, that were open

55 *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, ed. J. Taylor, W. Childs and L. Watkiss (Oxford, 2003), I, p. 33.

56 Russell, *Intervention*, p. 125; C. Estow, *Pedro the Cruel of Castile, 1350–1369* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 248–9; J. F. O'Callaghan, 'The Masters of Calatrava and the Castilian Civil War', in *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas*, ed. J. Fleckenstein and M. Hellmann (Sigmaringen, 1980), p. 369 and J. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (London, 1975), pp. 419–27.

57 Russell, *Intervention*, p. 133. The possibility of doing a deal with Enrique was also considered. Estow, however, does feel that Russell tended to judge the prince's actions 'against unfair standards': *Pedro*, p. 236.

to them. Pedro became 'the cruel', the capricious murderer of members of his own family and of the Spanish nobility, a rapist, an enemy to the Church, and an effeminate favourer of Jews and Muslims over Christians. He had the demeaning nickname 'Pero Gil' fastened on him, which Roger Wright has translated as 'Pedro the pansy'.[58] In 1369, in a letter offering compensation to the town of Ubeda, which had been taken by the Moorish King Muhammad V of Granada, Enrique called his half-brother a 'traitor, heretic and tyrant'.[59] A number of popular ballads (*romanceros*) survive concerning Pedro, and they accuse him of the treacherous murder of his half-brother, Fadrique, the assassination of his French virgin-wife, Blanche, on her sixteenth birthday, and of wickedly supporting the Muslim king of Granada in a siege. His murder by Enrique is characterised in one of the ballads as the ridding of the world of a tyrant so hated that all can only feel joy. The most compelling of the series features Pedro meeting a sinister shepherd in black, with a black hound, who predicted his death from his brother's dagger, his replacement as king, and final descent into hell.[60]

The propaganda was clearly widely disseminated, and undoubtedly fulfilled its purpose. The well-informed Westminster abbey chronicler, John of Reading, wrote that the reason Pedro had been ejected from his throne in 1366 was 'that he had married a Saracen woman without consulting his peers' and had consequently been condemned by the pope.[61] Sir Thomas Gray in the *Scalacronica* adds that Pedro was 'not only ruled by Jews' but that 'he did not love his wife, but passionately loved a Jewess'.[62] Obviously no charge or rumour was too ridiculous or ill-founded to be credited in the case of Pedro, and the anonymous Canterbury chronicler's attempt at a riposte, in describing Enrique's army at Nájera as being composed in part of 'infidels', is weak in comparison.[63] When Pedro's envoy, Martín López de Cordóba, had been sent to Edward III in 1365 to plead for English help against Enrique's threatened invasion, he was carrying instructions which went considerably further than the usual practicalities of arranging for support in accordance with a pre-existing treaty. He was told to explain to Edward that Enrique was

58 *Spanish Ballads*, ed. R. Wright (Warminster, 1987), pp. 222–3.

59 Estow, *Pedro*, p. 254.

60 *Spanish Ballads*, ed. Wright, pp. 96–9; Estow, *Pedro*, p. xxxv.

61 *Cronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis, 1346–67*, ed. J. Tait (Manchester, 1914), p. 24.

62 *Scalacronica, 1272–1363*, ed. A. King, Surtees Society, 209 (Durham, 2005), p. 191. Pedro had also admitted Jews to the Order of the Band, said Gray, and this had enraged the Christian members to such a degree that they insisted on a sort of trial by battle in which, inevitably, the Jewish knights were all killed by half the number of Christians.

63 *Chronicon Anonymi Cantuariensis: Chronicle of the Anonymous of Canterbury*, ed. C. Scott-Stokes and C. Given-Wilson (Oxford, 2008), p. 150.

using the accusation that Pedro was a tyrant only in order to seize the throne that had been lawfully inherited, and that it was for that reason he was being denounced to the pope and the king of France as a cruel and unbridled ruler of his nobility whom he sought to deprive of their legitimate rights.[64] López was further instructed to counter this by setting out in detail the 'great crimes' that had actually been committed by those whom Pedro was supposed to have treated so cruelly. Russell concludes that the English government, as well as the Black Prince and his councillors, were influenced by the black propaganda to such a degree that it made them hesitate to give Pedro, their ally, the support to which he was entitled under the terms of the treaty, and that that was the reason the prince did not prevent English mercenaries from fighting on Enrique's side in 1366, and why he turned against him so rapidly in 1367.[65]

The impact of the attack on the moral and legal roots of Pedro's position must in part explain the extraordinarily detailed argument that the prince and his officials set out in his letter to Enrique before the battle of Nájera. It was more than the conventional justification for armed intervention, such as, for example, in the memorandum that Edward II's government produced before the war of St Sardos in 1324 to be incorporated in letters sent to the king's Gascon subjects, and others.[66] The prince clearly regarded Enrique's letter of 28 February, couched though it was in very moderate terms, as an accusation of dishonourable conduct, and which was, by implication, unlawful also. Hence the perhaps rather unwise point made in the prince's reply that he was in no way motivated by vainglory. In his response to this, Enrique latched on to that point, said vainglory was exactly what the prince was moved by, which, if true, would have undermined the English legal and moral case completely. According to Aquinas, vainglory (*inanis gloria*) was a capital vice, and therefore the root cause of many other vices, such as boasting, obstinacy, love of one's own opinions and violence in speech, and was a mortal sin, meriting eternal punishment.[67] The contrary virtue, magnanimity, entailed living a

64 Russell, *Intervention*, pp. 38–9.

65 Ibid., p. 40. Russell saw this as an example of the prince's 'inclination to sacrifice first principles to social or ideological prejudices'. P. Linehan, 'Castile, Navarre and Portugal', in *New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. VI: *c. 1300–c.1425*, ed. M. Jones (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 638–9 accepts the accusations against Pedro at face value, as does J. F. O'Callaghan, in *Medieval Spain*, pp. 419–27.

66 TNA, C 61/36, m. 24. This roll is currently being edited for publication, both online and in hard copy, by the AHRC Gascon Rolls project at www.gasconrolls.org /editions/ calendars/ C 61 36.

67 A. Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy: A New History of Western Philosophy*, 4 vols (Oxford, 2004–7), II, pp. 263–72; *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae*, ed. A. Ross and P. G. Walsh (London, 1966), XLII, pp. 142–59. Strangely, the Trastamaran side did not attack the prince on the grounds that he was merely a mercenary soldier of Pedro, and not the 'head of the war', as was found in the trial for treachery of the Marshal d'Audrehem by

good and honourable life without concern for public fame. If Pedro's legal position were not sound, because the allegations made against his deeds and character were fundamentally true, and if the prince's decision to turn against Pedro so rapidly after his victory at Nájera was based on his belief in those same allegations as well as an illegitimate desire for unmerited glory, then the victory was not only hollow, but also potentially gravely sinful.

This was not just a remote theological or philosophical question beyond the ken of the practical fighting man, though, as can be seen from the comments on the same subject made by Sir Thomas Gray of Heton, in his chronicle written in the early 1360s. He was an experienced soldier, and had been a member of the prince's retinue on the Rheims campaign (1359–60).[68] Not long after this, probably in late 1362, he wrote an extended passage on how a war can be justified. In it he noted that God had barred Moses from entering the Promised Land because of his vainglory ('vain gloir'). The lesson he drew from this is that rulers ought always to give God the credit for their successes, and remember that it is their subjects who make their victories in war possible, and so deserve their well-being to be an important consideration. He concludes by saying that the powers of rulers are not given them to bring about 'destruccion general et comune', as has so often been the case in history, but to be exercised virtuously so they will rule their people 'par moralite'.[69]

After his defeat at Nájera and escape from the battlefield, Enrique turned his attention to undermining the legal and moral position of the whole English enterprise in the war with France, now that it was likely that the French government had determined the war was going to be renewed, despite the peace of Brétigny-Calais.[70] His ally in this undertaking was the ambitious Louis duke of Anjou, the young and headstrong brother of Charles V, whom the king had appointed as his lieutenant of Languedoc in 1364.[71] In August 1367 Louis and Enrique met at Aigues-Mortes in Languedoc and a 'treaty of friendship and alliance' was concluded between the Castilian pretender and the French king's lieutenant.[72] It committed the two parties to restore Enrique

the prince's court after the battle. See M. H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1965), pp. 50–3.

68 *Scalacronica*, ed. King, pp. xxxiii–xlii. A. King, 'War and Peace: A Knight's Tale: The Ethics of War in Sir Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica*', in *War, Government and Aristocracy in the British Isles: Essays in Honour of Michael Prestwich*, ed. C. Given-Wilson, A. Kettle and L. Scales (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 148–62.

69 *Scalacronica*, ed. King, pp. 192–5. See also Keen, *Laws of War*, pp. 189–217 for the difficulty of protecting the common people from the effects of warfare.

70 J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*, vol. II: *Trial by Fire* (London, 2001), pp. 572–6.

71 Ibid., pp. 526–7.

72 Delachenal, *Histoire de Charles V*, III, pp. 557–62.

to the throne of Castile, and then to make war upon the English and Charles of Navarre.

The treaty begins with a homily: a recitation of the English acts of aggression against France and Spain since the beginning of the Hundred Years War, and is clearly a continuation of the propaganda-driven debate between the contending parties. It calls Edward III, the Black Prince and his brothers, Lionel and John, together with Charles of Navarre, 'oppressors of men, like Nimrod', who have invaded both France and Castile as thieves, 'in their presumptuous pride'. Nimrod was not only a giant and a great hunter according to medieval interpretations of the Old Testament, but also a symbol of overweening pride, and therefore condemned to hell, through his supposed building of the Tower of Babel.[73] The two countries, the treaty goes on to say, have sustained 'unprecedentedly terrible wars ... especially in the kingdom of France'. The aggressors are further described as 'sons of Satan' who have a committed the entire catalogue of war crimes, including the rape of nuns and young girls, and have inflicted damage on France and Spain to a degree that is beyond measure. Indeed what has been done by them is so horrible that no one would think it believable even in a work of fiction. Enrique and Louis, though, for their part remember that the Children of Israel also suffered much in the wilderness by God's visitation, and that Satan and his angels fell from heaven to the deeps that had been prepared for them on account of their pride. The clear implication is that the divine chastisement of the Spanish and French will be followed by their entry into the Promised Land, in contrast with the Plantagenets' sin of pride that will lead them to their everlasting punishment.

Character and Reputation

Neither Edward III nor his first-born son has left us personal accounts of their public or private lives. There are no war memoirs, minutes of strategy meetings, informal messages or planning papers. We do not have a single letter in either of their own hands, and the letters written with their names attached are conventional, even when personal.[74] All the important judgements that students of History have made about the careers of both men are necessarily based upon inference, both from the impersonal official records of all kinds and from the actual course of events. In the case of the Black Prince analysis and assessment is even more difficult, as the opinions of contemporary writers are so conflicting. In the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, an English source, is to be

73 See *Clementine Vulgate: Biblia Sacra* (Venice, 1824), I, p. 11.

74 The prince's letter to his wife, after the battle of Nájera, has personal comments, it is true, but even this was intended for wide distribution, with the brief personal comments at the beginning and the end removed. See Barber, *Life and Campaigns*, p. 83.

found one of the most damning accusations against the prince's character, as well as extravagant praise. He is accused of 'outrageous and excessive' financial extravagance when he was ruler of Aquitaine, of levying unbearably high taxes on the people there, and of behaving in a foolishly arrogant way towards the local magnates. He would:

> let various great lords of the country who came to speak to him wait four or five days before he would deign to talk to them. Moreover, when they came to his presence he would keep them kneeling, shifting from one knee to the other, for a quarter of the day before he told them to stand up. This was the reason why several of these lords rose against him, as well as for the huge levy.[75]

This is a particularly surprising comment, since on his death the prince is described in the same chronicle as 'the solace of all England'.[76] Even allowing for our lack of knowledge of the source of the comments in the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, there is a case against the prince that has to be dealt with. It is true that other sources, such as Froissart, do make the point that Edward and Joan kept a magnificent, and therefore expensive, court in Aquitaine, which it clearly was when compared with the previous establishments of the seneschals of Gascony.[77] Also, the prince did have a high notion of his power and authority, as was shown by his understandably furious reaction to the breaches of the ordinances for the peace that he had proclaimed with his own mouth in Chester in 1353. Any assessment of the prince's career has to be undertaken with extreme caution, and with a careful, critical analysis of the sources. For example, Guilhem Pépin has convincingly suggested that a new look is needed at the prince's allegedly 'poor record' as ruler of Aquitaine.[78] The complete lack of accounts for the prince's household after 1344 makes it very difficult to know whether the attribution of 'extravagance' to his rule as prince of Aquitaine was actually based on what would be the unavoidable expenditure of a regal court in Gascony when there had not been one there

75 *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333–81*, ed. V. H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1970), p. 56. It was the opinion of John Taylor, in *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 140–1, that the 1356–69 section of the chronicle was written near to the events it describes, and based on 'missing newsletters and private information' with regard to events in France. It may be that the adverse comments on the Black Prince come from a dissident Gascon source (and I thank Professor Wendy Childs for her help with this).

76 The words used to describe the prince at his death are 'le tresnoble prince Dengleterre et de Gales et comford a tute Engleterre [...]': *Anonimalle Chronicle*, ed. Galbraith, p. 92. There is obviously no consistent point of view on the prince's character in the chronicle compilation as we now have it.

77 *Chroniques de Jean Froissart*, ed. S. Luce, G. Raynaud and A. Mirot (1876), VI, p. 80.

78 G. Pépin, 'Towards a New Assessment of the Black Prince's Principality of Aquitaine: A Study of the Last Years (1369–1372)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 50 (2006), pp. 59–114.

for many years, or was the result of irresponsible spending regardless of the consequences.

The effects of the prince's overall policy on the governance of Cheshire were stark, though, and this helps explain the reason for choosing Wirral as an appropriate vehicle for repentance in order to save the prince's soul. An analysis of the notes of warrant in the three volumes of the *Black Prince's Register* which survive from 1351 show that the prince did give serious attention to the well-being of his estates in the earldom of Chester and duchy of Cornwall in the years up to 1355. After that, his efforts were concentrated almost exclusively on the war effort.[79] The effects of this neglect can be seen not just in Wirral, but in the whole of the county, and those effects intensified during the reign of Richard II. In a series of petitions in parliament from April 1379 onwards there are complaints that Cheshire's inhabitants prey on other counties throughout the whole kingdom, armed in *routes de gentz*, and commit horrible crimes of violence before returning to their homes, from which they cannot be brought to justice.[80] People from other places, in Wales and the March in particular, are also guilty of this, but it is 'the people of the county of Chester above all (et nomement gentz del Countee de Cestre)' who are singled out. In the parliament of January 1380, some Midland and Welsh border counties, together with Yorkshire, complained that the people of Cheshire were making raids on horseback ('chivachent') to their areas in large numbers, armed for war ('a fere de guerre armez'), committing crimes of violence, extorting blackmail from their victims, and then returning home so quickly that they could not be apprehended.[81] The petition submitted by the whole Commons in the parliament of October 1382 alleged that substantial armed forces from Cheshire were continuing to enter many counties of England which were entirely oppressed and destroyed by them.[82] The petitions in the parliaments of November 1384, November 1390 and 1393, add little to the substance of the accusations but a good deal to their flavour. By this time the Cheshire men had begun to loom very large on the English political agenda, following the very significant support that they had given Richard II in his attempt to break free from the control of the great nobility which failed as the result of his defeat at the battle of Radcot Bridge in 1388. The uniquely tight bond of mutual interest that had been formed between the Black Prince and his county reached its culmination in 1397, when his son, Richard, made Cheshire a principality, extended its boundaries, and added

79 Booth, *Financial Administration*, pp. 70–9. The register for South Wales is lost, and that for North Wales survives as a fragment of twelve folios (for which see *B.P.R.*, III, pp. 489–96).

80 *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, II, p. 352; III, pp. 62, 81, 139, 201, 280, 308.

81 *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, p. 81.

82 Ibid., III, p. 139.

'prince of Chester' to the royal style.[83] At the same time, the king formed the nucleus of a standing army, out of over seven hundred men from Cheshire, three hundred of whom intimidated the parliament of 1397 which eliminated Richard's enemies and allowed him to establish what has been termed his 'tyranny'.[84]

The creation of the principality was not just a nominal gesture, but a recognition of the contribution that Cheshire had made in both soldiers and money to the causes of the king and of his father. The principality was dismantled when Henry IV seized power, and one of the reasons given for deposing Richard was his formation of the Cheshire Guard. Indeed, the chronicler Adam of Usk regarded this as the main reason for Richard's downfall.[85] Although his private army had not managed to save the king, Cheshire men rebelled twice against the new regime, in 1400 and 1403.[86] This has to be regarded as the ultimate result of the Black Prince's policy of abandoning good governance in Cheshire from the mid 1350s onwards, in the interests of prosecuting the war to the exclusion of all other considerations. The problems that this caused for the people of Wirral forest, and the resultant disafforestation in 1376, should be seen, therefore, as the prince's acknowledgment of that, and of his repentance for it. To put it in sacramental terms: contrition and confession had to be followed by satisfaction. His burial in Canterbury may be regarded as another side of that particular coin, and if we take the two final acts together, then there may well be another explanation of the prince's disastrous disablement in his final years.

Burial at Canterbury

Although the prince had established two chantries in the cathedral following his marriage in 1361, that does not appear to be the reason for his wishing

83 R. R. Davies, 'Richard II and the Principality of Chester', in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. F. R. H. Du Boulay and C. M. Barron (London, 1971), pp. 256–79; N. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, CT, 1997), pp. 392–3; P. Morgan, *War and Society in the Late Medieval Cheshire, 1277–1403* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 186–91.

84 Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 366–84; Morgan, *War and Society*, pp. 199–201; J. L. Gillespie, 'Richard II's Cheshire Archers', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 125 (1975), pp. 1–39 and 'Richard II's Archers of the Crown', *Albion*, 7 (1975), pp. 161–73.

85 Morgan, *War and Society*, p. 200.

86 P. McNiven, 'The Cheshire Rising of 1400', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 52 (1970), pp. 375–96 and 'The Men of Cheshire and the Rebellion of 1403', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 129 (1980), pp. 1–29; J. G. Bellamy, 'The Northern Rebellions in the Later Years of Richard II', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 47 (1964–5), pp. 254–74.

to be buried in Canterbury.[87] It was the College of Bonhommes at Ashridge which was the beneficiary of his actual endowments near the end of his life, sufficient to make him the 'second founder' of the house.[88] His will makes it clear that the most important thing for him was to be buried as near as possible to Becket's shrine – the martyr murdered as the result of Henry II's sinful actions. Pilgrims went to Canterbury for many different reasons, but one important factor is that it was one of the four major European centres for penitential pilgrimage, together with Cologne, Compostela and Rome. If the funeral procession to Canterbury can be regarded, therefore, as a penitential pilgrimage, albeit on a princely scale, then it does provide a link with the disafforestation of Wirral. The stipulation in his will that the prince's arms of war (his escutcheon) and arms of peace (ostrich feathers badge) should be displayed in both the procession and on his tomb has been interpreted by Malcolm Vale as representing his roles in war and in the tournament. It is possible, though, that they also represent in visual form the Augustinian doctrine of war only being justified when it brings about peace, and therefore a repudiation of vainglory as his motivation.[89] The war of 1337 had certainly not brought about peace, except temporarily, and the physical and social damage caused might seem, after 1369, to be wholly disproportionate to any gains.

None of the explanations for Edward's illness or illnesses in his last nine years are founded on convincing evidence, or are, indeed, plausible. As David Green has rightly pointed out, amoebic dysentery would hardly persist for such a long period of time before resulting in the patient's death. Thomas Walsingham's account corresponds with no known physical illness. However, if the chronicler is using symbolic language here, and if he had access to a good source of information, then it might be possible to interpret his words in another way. The emission of blood was often associated with melancholy, that is clinical depression, and the emission of semen could well have stood for the prince's loss of masculine vigour.[90] The choice of epitaph for his tomb, which contrasts his lack of bodily attractiveness at his death with how he had appeared in his prime, is also important. It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that the illness that the prince suffered from after 1367 was not physical, but mental. His father, Edward III, suffered from mental incapacity towards the end of his life. His nephew, Henry IV, had a very disabling illness in the last few years of his reign which has some striking resemblances to that of

87 A. P. Stanley, *Historical Memorials of Canterbury* (London, 1872), pp. 143, 163–8.

88 *Victoria History of the County of Buckingham*, ed. W. Page, 5 vols (London, 1905–28), I, pp. 386–90.

89 M. Vale, *War and Chivalry: Warfare and Aristocratic Culture in England, France and Burgundy at the End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1981), p. 90.

90 Green, 'Masculinity and Medicine', pp. 40–4.

his uncle, which some contemporaries interpreted as the result of 'leprosy', but was more likely some form of mental breakdown.[91] In addition, Henry, perhaps weighed down by guilt, also chose to be buried in Canterbury cathedral. Mental illness was a feature of the extended family of Plantagenet-Valois, most severely in the case of Charles VI of France from 1392 onwards, and Henry VI of England following the loss of Gascony in 1453.[92] In these two latter cases, mental collapse was followed by civil war. What cannot be doubted is that the illnesses severely compromised their functions as rulers, in an age in which personal involvement by the ruler was crucial.

It is possible, therefore, that the prince, whom we know to have taken his governmental responsibilities very seriously in the 1350s, and who was clearly concerned about the difficult question of how a war between Christians might be justified, came to believe that his actions had not been characterised by right and justice. As Sir Thomas Gray wrote, rulers ought not to bring about destruction but the well-being of their people, as it is that 'which is their treasure'.[93] In a century when the Gascon subjects of the English king were taxed to help pay for his wars in Scotland, and his English and Welsh subjects had to provide both money and manpower for his military campaigns in south-west France, it was, and is, difficult to show how the well-being of the people, who were the fuel for the engine of the high politics, was being fostered. Edward of Woodstock was a member of a political elite, with connections at the very highest levels in Western Europe. The links of a vertical nature, between the prince and those he ruled, were equally important – a fact he realised himself – and he clearly endeavoured to prove himself a good, active ruler of his estates in England and Wales, at least before the demands of war and campaigning made that all but impossible for him. The earldom of Chester had been the proving-ground for his first experience of rule, and his attempt to deal with the socio-political problems that Cheshire was encountering as early as the 1350s was seriously intended if, in the long run, a failure. Some historians have seen that failure as arising out of defects in his character, and have accused Edward of provoking a general rebellion in the county in 1353 through his arrogance and rapaciousness. This has been shown to be based on not a single shred of contemporary evidence. Both contemporaries and modern historians have a made a similar accusation against him, in terms of provoking a revolt against his rule in Gascony in the late 1360s.

What we can be sure of is this: that the first and last prince of Aquitaine had a serious breakdown of some sort which meant that after the siege

91 P. McNiven, 'The Problem of Henry IV's Health, 1405–13', *English Historical Review*, 100 (1985), pp. 747–72.

92 R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422–1461* (London, 1981), pp. 715–18.

93 *Scalacronica*, ed. King, pp. 192–4.

of Limoges in 1370 he played no role of significance in war, governance or politics. Taking all the evidence that we have, it does seem significant that in his last days the prince went back, in a sense, to the roots of his public life. When he had visited Cheshire in 1353, Wirral was a part of the county that suffered particularly badly from oppression and extortion inflicted by those with power and in office. There are no contemporary sources to help us gain any real insight into his state of mind in the final phase of his career, following the Nájera victory, but the last-minute grant of disafforestation of Wirral, combined with his wish to be buried as near as possible to the martyr-victim of royal injustice in Canterbury, can be seen as contributions to his own assessment of his life and career. It seems a reasonable hypothesis, but can probably never be more than that, that his dysfunctional state in those last half-dozen or so years was the result of a serious mental breakdown.