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A Southwark Tale: Gower, the 1381 Poll Tax, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

By Sebastian Sobecki

During the second half of the 1380s, John Gower, the leading fourteenth-century poet and an acquaintance of Geoffrey Chaucer, was working on his longest English poem, the *Confessio Amantis*. Chaucer, in turn, is believed to have been writing some of the material that would later form *The Canterbury Tales*. In addition, Chaucer was probably finishing *Troilus and Criseyde*, which must have been available before March 1388, at least in part, to Thomas Usk, the poet and undersheriff of London, who names the poem and borrows from Chaucer's *Boece* in his *Testament of Love*.[1] It is in the *Confessio* and in the *Troilus*, that is, in works written in the second half of the 1380s, that Chaucer and Gower first refer to one another in a literary context.[2] The only other instance that connects the two names is a 1378 legal record, in which Chaucer hands power of attorney to Gower and the lawyer Richard Forster.[3] Rather than reading this document as proof of Gower and Chaucer's supposed personal friendship, I adduce new evidence for Gower's legal training that suggests that the 1378 record was a purely professional arrangement—Chaucer might simply have needed a team of lawyers at the time. There is no reason to read this document through the prism of an instance of poetically embedded praise some ten years later, particularly given Gower's likely career as a lawyer.

The new evidence for Gower's legal training changes what we know of the relationship between the two poets and, by virtue of pushing forward their literary acquaintance to the late 1380s, brings into sharp relief their deep ties to Southwark, where Gower may have resided at the time and where Chaucer launched his *Canterbury Tales*. Furthermore, on closer inspection, this new focus on Gower's and Chaucer's work in Southwark has the potential not only to foreground the role of an emerging literary culture in the area but to challenge existing models of read-

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[1] *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1987), 1003 and 1020. Paul Strohm suggests that Usk's brush with *Troilus* might have come slightly earlier, in 1385 or 1386 (personal communication).

[2] Chaucer dedicates the *Troilus* to Gower (5.1855–56), whereas the first version of the *Confessio* includes lines of praise for Chaucer (8.2941–49).

[3] Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford, 1966), 54.

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ing *The Canterbury Tales* and modify our understanding of what Chaucer had in mind when he embarked on this collection of tales.

Lawyerly Gower

There exists broad consensus that Gower possessed a certain degree of legal expertise.[4] Although no evidence has been found to support John Speght's claim that Gower and Chaucer were Inner Templars,[5] Gower's writings betray an intimate familiarity with legal forms and subjects, terminology, and procedures.[6] In addition, we know of a series of property transactions, which point to Gower's fluency in legal idioms.[7]

Gower's legal expertise is showcased in the Septvauns affair, where he acquired the manor of Aldington Septvauns from William Septvauns, a royal ward.[8] Lord John Cobham of Cooling in Kent, owner of the neighboring manor of Aldington Cobham, initiated a legal inquiry into William's minority. It was asserted that William was still a minor at the time of the sale, and because he was a royal ward and the property would have involved the alienation of Crown lands, a royal commission was tasked with determining William's age. The Septvauns affair has prompted readers to question Gower's ethical standards, and a recent commentator has given his discussion of this case the apt heading "Gower's Black Eye."[9] And yet Gower's

[4] On Gower's legal background, see David R. Carlson, *John Gower: Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 178; Matthew Giancarlo, "The Septvauns Affair, Purchase, and Parliament in John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*," *Viator* 36 (2005): 435–64, and *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 9–112; Conrad van Dijk, *John Gower and the Limits of the Law* (Cambridge, UK, 2013), 4–5; Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the "Confessio Amantis"* (Cambridge, UK, 2014); Candace Barrington, "John Gower's Legal Advocacy and 'In Praise of Peace,'" in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation, and Tradition*, ed. Elizabeth Dutton, John Hines, and R. F. Yeager (Cambridge, UK, 2010), 112–25; and Yeager, "John Gower's Poetry and the 'Lawyerly Habit of Mind,'" in *Theorizing Legal Personhood in Late Medieval England*, ed. Andreea Boboc (Leiden, 2015), 71–93.

[5] Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 54.

[6] Sebastian Sobecki, *Unwritten Verities: The Making of England's Vernacular Legal Culture, 1463–1549* (Notre Dame, 2015), 25–34, for a summary of training in the early Inns of Court. The standard discussions of the history of the late medieval and early modern Inns of Court are Walter Cecil Richardson, *A History of the Inns of Court: With Special Reference to the Period of the Renaissance* (Baton Rouge, 1975), 1–15; J. H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History* (London, 2002), 159–60; and Baker, "Oral Instruction in Land Law and Conveyancing, 1250–1500," in *Learning the Law: Teaching and the Transmission of Law in England, 1150–1900*, ed. Jonathan A. Bush and Alain Wijffels (London, 1999), 157–73. Legal education prior to the emergence of the Inns is examined by Paul Brand, "Legal Education in England before the Inns of Court," in *Learning the Law*, 51–84. For legal education generally, see James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts* (Chicago, 2008).

[7] The property transactions are given by John H. Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York, 1964), 58–67. By far the most detailed treatment of the Septvauns affair is Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, 94–105.

[8] The following summary of the Septvauns affair is taken from Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, 95.

[9] Van Dijk, *John Gower and the Limits of the Law*, 1.

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handling of this case was impressive: he had anticipated the potential for complications and, in advance of the transaction, had made a Chancery inquisition in March 1365 to establish whether his purchase was illegal—an *inquisitio ad quod damnum*.[10] This is a common if sophisticated legal tool, and its use by Gower reveals familiarity with the legal mechanisms at the Court of Chancery.[11] In fact, Matthew Giancarlo, the best modern commentator on the Septvauns affair, is so impressed by Gower's skill in this affair that he endorses the view that Chaucer may have modeled the Man of Law, who was a serjeant-at-law, on Gower.[12] Seven years later, Gower sold most of Aldington Septvauns, together with the manor of Kentwell, to a consortium led by Lord Cobham,[13] who went on to be singled out for considerable praise by Gower in the *Cronica Tripertita*.[14] At the start of the Septvauns affair, in 1365, the chancellor was Simon Langham, who was preparing to assume the see of Canterbury. Langham was mentor to William of Wykeham, the then Keeper of the Privy Seal and soon-to-be bishop of Winchester. Wykeham succeeded Langham as chancellor in the following year. In 1369, three years into Wykeham's first tenure as chancellor, the Septvauns affair was finally resolved with a favorable outcome: "the claim was eventually awarded to [Gower]."[15]

While references to the law permeate almost all of Gower's works, the highest concentration of legal topoi occurs in his longest Anglo-French poem, the *Mirour de l'Omme*. Counting some thirty thousand lines, the *Mirour* is believed to have been one of Gower's earliest works, with some parts perhaps dating back to the late 1360s.[16] Its extensive section on the law—a highbrow precursor to *London Lickpenny*—mounts a sustained attack against England's legal system that is laced with often highly technical language.[17] At one stage, the narrator comments on his own garb:

> Pour ce que je ne suy pas clers,
> Vestu de sanguin ne de pers,

[10] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, 95.

[11] The writ *Inquisitio ad quod damnum in mortmain* was frequently used by the king to determine whether property truly was his to give. See Kathleen L. Wood-Legh, *Studies in Church Life in England under Edward III* (Cambridge, UK, 1934), 60–88. I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers for this point.

[12] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, 99.

[13] Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 53. Aldington Manor was a twin estate, which after the death of Reginald second baron of Cobham went in part to his son John Cobham, while the other half passed to William Septvauns senior, after whose death it was inherited by William. It is possible that Gower may have acted as a go-between, purchasing William junior's share of the twin manor only to sell it seven years later to William's uncle, John Cobham. Cobham's inquiry would then have been a means of appearing to mask his own intentions while securing the ancestral family seat from a profligate relative.

[14] I discuss this passage below.

[15] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, 97.

[16] R. F. Yeager argues that Gower started the poem during Edward III's reign but continued revising it into the late 1370s, "Gower's French Audience: The *Mirour de l'Omme*," *The Chaucer Review* 41/2 (2006): 111–37.

[17] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, 90–112.

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Ainz ai vestu la raye mance,
Poy sai latin, poy sai romance

(21.772–75)[18]

[because I am not a cleric clothed in scarlet and blue, but I have worn only striped sleeves —I know little Latin and little French][19]

Matthew Irvin embeds his reading of this passage in the broader context of the poem, arguing that the speaker casts himself as "a powerless and ignorant defendant in [an] ecclesiastical court."[20] Irvin's argument could be taken a step further: the contrasting gowns in the two middle lines above capture the dialogic juxtaposition of the two interlocutors, one of whom is a canon lawyer, the other apparently not versed in ecclesiastical matters. This distinction is sharpened by the poet's formal decision to place the two gowns in adjacent lines that nevertheless belong to separate couplets. This adjacency, it would appear, gestures at proximity and a notional similarity, not only of the gowns but also of their bearers, which permits them to participate in this exchange. And since the structuring theme of the surrounding text is that of the law's many discourses, the participants in this exchange are brought together by their shared investments in the law. The contrast, I think, is not between a canon lawyer and some non–legal gown wearer (where the mentioning of a gown would be arbitrary), but between a canon and a secular lawyer. So when the narrator acknowledges that he has "worn only striped sleeves," he inserts his status into a professional hierarchy that places the canon law at its pinnacle. In other words, the contrast is couched in the paradoxical idiom of aspirational humility, so common in retractions and other medieval instances of simulated deference.[21] A typical example of this tendency is Chaucer's "Retraction," in which he revokes his works, just as the text of the "Retraction" is appended to and physically helps to transmit his poetry in manuscript. That this compliment in Gower's poem is feigned is confirmed by the phrase "poy sai latin, poy sai romance," uttered by a narrator who has just dazzled his audience with almost twenty-five thousand lines of "romance." There has survived a loose vellum illumination of the Court of Chancery, dating from the 1460s and kept in the Inner Temple Library (Fig. 1). The

[18] *The Complete Works of John Gower: The French Works*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1899-1902), 1:246. All quotations from the *Mirour* are taken from this edition.

[19] *Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. William Burton Wilson, revised by Nancy Wilson van Baak (East Lansing, 1992), 291. All translations from the *Mirour* are taken from this source.

[20] Irvin, *Poetic Voices of John Gower*, 17 n. 27. Candace Barrington suspects that the speaker's gown belongs to a seigneurial attorney who specializes in conveyancing (Barrington, "John Gower's Legal Advocacy and 'In Praise of Peace,'" 122). Other readers have noted that such striped sleeves were worn by various professional groups, not all of which were connected with the law. Fisher was quick to point out that striped garments "connoted a civil livery of some sort" (*John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 56), while Mary Flowers Braswell went a step further, denying the narrator any legal role based on the shape of the sleeves (*Chaucer's "Legal Fiction": Reading the Records* [Cranberry, NJ, 2001], 122–23). Linne Mooney and Estelle Stubbs argue that Gower was based at the Guildhall (*Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375–1425* [Woodbridge, UK, 2013], 135–36).

[21] I discuss such retractions by Chaucer, John Lydgate, and Jean de Meun in "Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction: The *Testament* as a Literary Palinode," *Chaucer Review* 49/3 (2015): 265–93.

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Fig. 1. The Court of Chancery. Illumination on vellum (set of four), London, Inner Temple Library, Misc. MS. 188, 1460s. With kind permission of The Masters of the Bench of the Inner Temple.

image shows the contrast between the scarlet and blue of the canon lawyers in the *Mirour* with the striped blue-and-green gowns of the serjeants-at-law and Chancery barristers.

But gowns matter to Gower. Anticipating John Fortescue's apotheosis of the order of serjeants-at-law a century later, the narrator in the *Mirour* conflates the

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moral with the sartorial as he bewails the abuse of professional robes: "qui scievont loy offendre, / Et nepourqant ils ont l'abit" (24.267–68) (those who wear the garb of the law and yet scoff at the law are greatly cursed), adding that "Qu'il le mantell tantsoulement / D'ascun pledour porra porter / Tanq'a la Court de Westmoustier / Il ert certain d'avancement" (24.279–81) (he who can thus prepare himself so that he can wear the robe of a lawyer, is certain of advancement up to the Court of Westminster).

During the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Court of Chancery was emerging as one of England's most powerful tribunals. It gradually became the highest court of appeals for common-law jurisdictions but was itself increasingly governed by equity law, that is, the application of civil-law principles to provide legal solutions where existing common-law circuits offered no redress or were very long-winded. In other words, Chancery was on its way to become a court of conscience.[22] In practical terms, equity cases in Chancery essentially were a matter of adjudicating in often convoluted property matters and, in this context, determining complex family relationships. Chancery thus began to specialize in conveyancing, particularly where it involved tricky property actions, such as the Septvauns case.

There exists some circumstantial evidence to associate Gower and his works with the Court of Chancery: for instance, this is the only court not targeted in the *Mirour*; one of the three beneficiaries of Gower's will, John Burton, was a Chancery clerk;[23] and, finally, Parkes's Scribe 10, whom I have identified as Gower, writes in the script of engrossed Chancery documents.[24] Given his confident knowledge of Chancery mechanisms in the Septvauns case and in later life, when he obtained a Chancery injunction,[25] I would argue that Gower was not only a trained lawyer, but, confirming Fisher's intimation,[26] was also linked to Chancery and, I

[22] Margaret E. Avery, "The History of the Equitable Jurisdiction of Chancery before 1460," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 42 (1969): 129; Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 97–108; and P. Tucker, "The Early History of the Court of Chancery: A Comparative Study," *English Historical Review* 115 (2000): 791–811.

[23] Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 67. Parkes identifies a further beneficiary, William Denne, with William Donne of the privy seal (M. B. Parkes, "Patterns of Scribal Activity and Revisions of the Text in Early Copies of Works by John Gower," in *New Science out of Old Books: Manuscripts and Early Printed Books; Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle.*, ed. Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper [Aldershot, 1995], 97). The third beneficiary was Sir Arnold Savage.

[24] Sebastian Sobecki, "'*Ecce patet tensus*': The Trentham Manuscript, *In Praise of Peace*, and John Gower's Autograph Hand," *Speculum* 90/4 (2015): 925–59. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Stephen Justice argue for Scribe D, whose work is heavily geared toward Gower, to have enjoyed Chancery connections ("Scribe D and the Marketing of Ricardian Literature," in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Maidie Hilmo and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton [Victoria, 2001], 217–37; see also Robert Epstein, "London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower's Urban Contexts," in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard [Cambridge, UK, 2004], 44–45). Linne Mooney and Estelle Stubbs identify Scribe D with the Guildhall scribe John Marchaunt (Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, 38–66).

[25] I treat the injunction in my discussion of Gower's marriage below.

[26] Fisher's focus on Chancery at 54–56 suggests that Gower may have been linked with this court (*John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*). Andrew Galloway notes that Gower was required to argue his position in the Septvauns case in Chancery, where he may have been well known ("Common Voice in Theory and Practice in Late Fourteenth Century England," in *Law, Governance, and Justice: New Views on Medieval Constitutionalism*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper [Leiden, 2013], 269).

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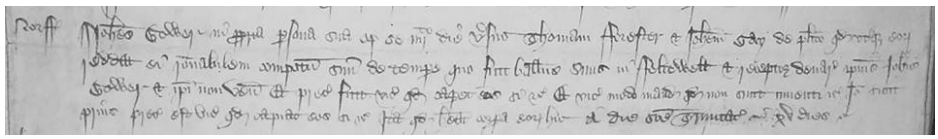

Fig. 2. Common Pleas, CP40/541, m. 46f. John Gower submits a plea of account against Thomas Forester and John Gay in connection with his manor in Feltwell, 1396. By kind permission of The National Archives.

would argue, to the court's developing equity side, in particular. In addition, there exists new evidence to support the theory of Gower's training as a lawyer.

New Evidence from the Court of Common Pleas, 1396–99

Irvin has drawn attention to the many legal references in Gower's Latin works, in particular to the post-1381 poem *Visio Anglie*, also known as book 1 of the *Vox Clamantis*, the poet's most substantial Latin work.[27] Irvin's main focus is on the voices Gower assumes, and the most remarkable and persistent of these is the legal one, which frequently articulates the technical phrase "in propria persona", used when someone appeared in court in person.[28] This expression occurs in the *Visio*, in chapters 16 and 17, where in both sections the poet's narrative avatar recounts his vision "quasi in propria persona."

For the first time, this phrase can also be linked to the historical Gower. Four previously unknown legal documents from the Court of Common Pleas involve Gower, three of which show that he appeared in court in propria persona (Fig. 2). The first item dates from 1396 and has John Gower submit "in propria persona" (line 1) a plea of account against Thomas Forester and John Gay in connection with Feltwell.[29] The main purpose of the action of account at common law, characterized by the phrase "de placito quod . . . reddat ei rationabilem compotum suum" (lines 1–2),[30] is to determine how much is owed. Such an action is a request for a judicial audit and often precedes a plea of debt. We can determine that this is John Gower the poet because the plea is directed against his bailiff in Feltwell ("fuit ballivuus suus in Feltewell," line 2). Gower had bought the manor of Feltwell in 1382 from Guy de Rouclif, Hoccleve's immediate superior at the privy seal, who also happened to leave in his will a book on the "Bello Troie" for Hoccleve.[31] Of

[27] Irvin, *Poetic Voices of John Gower*.

[28] Ibid., especially 4, 27–42.

[29] For a transcription and translation of all four records, see the Appendix. All quotations are taken from the Appendix. Fisher lists another Feltwell record from the same year concerning a certain John Cook of Feltwell who was pardoned for not appearing to answer Gower (*John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 64). I have found that the same John Cook of Feltwell also appears as a defendant in an action of account in the Court of Common Pleas brought by William Catte, also in 1396 (CP40/541, m. 396f.). All these documents have been digitized at http://aalt.law.uh.edu/ and partial indices for 1396 and 1399 exist on the same website.

[30] For a translation, see the Appendix.

[31] Elizabeth Morley Ingram, "Thomas Hoccleve and Guy de Rouclif," *Notes and Queries* 20/2 (1973): 42–43.

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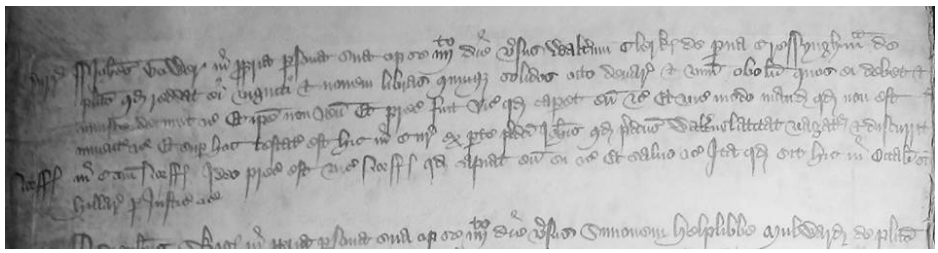

Fig. 3. Common Pleas, CP40/555, m. 165d.. John Gower submits a plea of debt against Walter Clerk of Little Cressingham in Norfolk, 1399. By kind permission of The National Archives.

all Gower's acquisitions, the manor of Feltwell was among the most significant, and he never sold this house. In fact, his will specifies that his widow, Agnes Groundolf, was to receive one half of the annual revenue generated by his manors of Feltwell and Multon.[32] The legal definition of a bailiff in the action of account approximates someone entrusted with the plaintiff's money, but there is every reason to believe that the Thomas Forester in this document is indeed Gower's manorial bailiff in Feltwell since the second defendant, John Gay, is recorded simply as a receiver of Gower's money ("receptor denariorum ipsius Iohannis Gower," line 2).[33]

The remaining new documents date from 1399. The second document (Fig. 3) is a plea of debt against Walter Clerk from Little Cressingham, some twelve miles from Gower's manor in Feltwell. In contrast with a plea of account, the debt action uses the phrase "de placito quod reddat" (line 2) immediately followed by the outstanding sum. In principle, this document could refer to one of John Gower's namesakes were it not for the unusual presence of two county jurisdictions in the margin: the lower entry has "Norf*olkscira*" (Norfolk) in line 5, where Feltwell was and where the defendant was hiding, while the upper marginal inscription gives "Surr*egia*" (Surrey) in line 1, the county of Gower's residence in Southwark, certainly by 1394/95 if not earlier. No other known John Gower was based in Surrey. As with the plea of account from 1396, Gower appears "in propria persona" (line 1). Clearly Walter Clerk was in no hurry to repay the money: although the wording of this document follows the writ of debt, Clerk was at large in the county of Norfolk, and the document embeds technical phrases from another legal action, the writ of latitat: "Walterus latitat vagatur et discurrit in comitatu Norfolkscira" (Walter hides, roams, and runs about in the county of Norfolk, lines 4–5). Later that year Gower entered a second plea of debt against his debtor, only this time he was represented by an attorney, "per attornatum suum" (line 1) (Fig. 4). How can we tell that Gower appeared in court to enter the first plea but indeed used a lawyer

[32] Gower's will is printed in Richard Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*, 2 vols. (London, 1786–96), 2:15–26 (for another, supposedly corrected, version, see W. H. B., "Will of John Gower the Poet, anno 1408," *Gentleman's Magazine* 3 [1835]: 49–51). Macaulay prints a translation in his *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4:xvii–xviii.

[33] Martha Carlin has suggested to me that Forester and Gay may have served in succession as bailiff and receiver. See the Appendix for the complete transcription and translation of this record.

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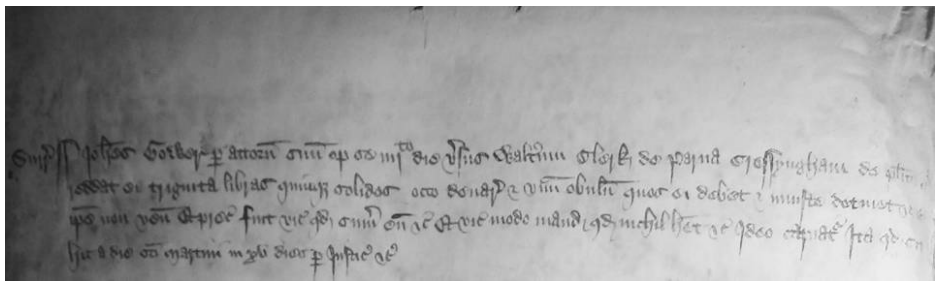

Fig. 4. Common Pleas, CP40/555, m. 74d. John Gower submits a second plea of debt against Walter Clerk of Little Cressingham in Norfolk, 1399. By kind permission of The National Archives.

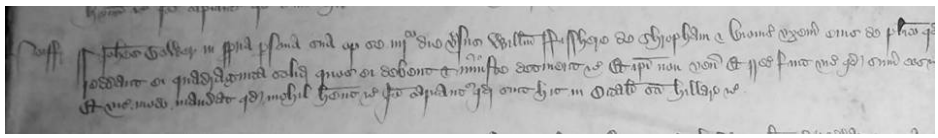

Fig. 5. Common Pleas, CP40/555, m. 118f. John Gower submits a plea of debt against William Fisher of Shropham in Norfolk and his wife Denise, 1399. By kind permission of The National Archives.

on the second occasion? The first plea of debt against Walter was for £29 5s. $8^{1}/^{2}$d.; the second for £30 5s. $8^{1}/^{2}$d. The difference is exactly £1—the lawyer's fee.[34]

Gower was certainly active in the royal courts in 1399.[35] Given the political insecurities, it was probably prudent to collect money he was owed. Also, since his eyesight likely began to deteriorate during that year, Gower may have wished to put his house in order.[36] The fourth document (Fig. 5), the third and final item dating from 1399, is a plea of debt against William Fisher and his wife Denise, both from Shropham, eighteen miles from Feltwell. Again, Gower acts in propria persona (line 1).

While R. F. Yeager is certainly correct in unmasking as a tenuous assumption the tendency of nineteenth-century critics to treat the narrator of the *Mirour* and its poet as the same being,[37] the three records showing Gower act in propria persona help to align the historical Gower with the narrative persona of chapters 16 and 17 of the *Visio* (and therefore also of book 1 of the *Vox*). Eve Salisbury detects

[34] J. H. Baker, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England*, vol. 6, *1483–1558* (Oxford, 2003), 124, estimates that a debt action in the fifteenth century might cost between 30 and 40s., so the lower figure for Gower's attorney and court costs is realistic for the late fourteenth century.

[35] I have checked many, though not all, Common Pleas records for 1398 and 1400 but have not found entries linked to Gower.

[36] Based on my study of the Trentham manuscript, which contains the earliest version of the three poems about Gower's blindness, I date the beginning of the poet's problems with his eyesight to between October 1399 and May 1400 (Sobecki, "'*Ecce patet tensus*'," 951–59).

[37] Yeager, "John Gower's Poetry and the 'Lawyerly Habit of Mind,'" 73.

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a similar alignment of poet and persona in the line "Uxor Amans, humilis Gower fuit illa Ioannis," which forms part of the epitaph Gower had constructed for Agnes.[38] In the phrase "uxor amans" Gower has "inextricably bound this uxor not only to himself, but to his poetic persona," the fictional lover Amans in the *Confessio Amantis*.[39] In addition, as Candace Barrington and I have separately argued, the representation of Gower as an old archer, which is found in a number of manuscripts of the *Vox*, has its narrative alter ego in Cupid in the poem *Ecce patet tensus*, which sources most of its lines from the *Vox*.[40] A similar pattern recurs in Gower's lyrical poetry, some of which is patently autobiographical.[41] In other words, if Gower's poetry encourages an analogous or, at least, associational reading of poet and persona in the *Visio/Vox*, the *Confessio*, and his lyrics, then a similar assumption could be made for the *Mirour*: the new evidence for Gower's ability to represent himself in propria persona while only using an attorney to follow up a case at a time when he started to suffer from failing eyesight helps to break down the barrier between the narrative persona in the *Mirour* and the historical poet.[42]

But what are the consequences of Gower's status as a trained lawyer for the study of Gower, Chaucer, and later Middle English writing? The only document that associates the two poets dates from 1378, when Chaucer, in preparation for a mission abroad, assigned power of attorney to Gower and the lawyer Richard Forster.[43] I believe it was a mistake to dismiss this document as evidence of Gower's legal expertise and to limit his role to that of a literary executor of Chaucer's writings. Forster's three documented appearances were in London's civic courts and the Guildhall, but Chaucer may have also needed a lawyer trained in handling property who could represent him in national courts such as Chancery and Common Pleas. Furthermore, as I will argue later, there is no evidence for Chaucer's works to have circulated in England before the late 1380s, and there is therefore no indication that Chaucer and Gower knew each other's writings before that time. In other words, nothing suggests that in 1378 Chaucer was a recognized poet in need of a literary executor. If Gower's legal training helps to redefine his only documented contact with Chaucer, in 1378, as professional in nature, then a better understanding of their shared networks at the time at which they read one another, in the late 1380s, is essential—not least because Chaucer's earliest literary recep-

[38] Eve Salisbury, "Promiscuous Contexts: Gower's Wife, Prostitution, and the *Confessio Amantis*," in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Turnhout, 2009), 228–29.

[39] Ibid., 229.

[40] Candace Barrington, "The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis: Wholeness and Disability in Lancastrian England," *Accessus* 1/1 (2013): 18–19; and Sobecki, "'*Ecce patet tensus*'," 957.

[41] Sobecki, "'*Ecce patet tensus*'," 951–59.

[42] Yeager rightly notes that such a biographical reading would have to account for the fact the narrator is married in the poem (Yeager, "John Gower's Poetry and the 'Lawyerly Habit of Mind,'" 73). But this need not be a difficulty: if Gower was a widower, his relocation to the vicinity St. Mary Overy (whether or not as a corrodian) would have followed a not uncommon pattern.

[43] Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 54. A Richard Forster is known to have practiced law in 1378 and 83, ibid., 60 n. 5, and, as I show below, also in 1380. Mooney and Stubbs argue that, given Forster's work in city courts, this dual appointment makes it more likely that Gower was associated with city rather than with royal courts (*Scribes and the City*, 136), but appointing a city and a Chancery lawyer would allow Chaucer to enjoy better legal protection, particularly if he had property interests to look after.

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tion, and the production of the oldest surviving manuscripts of his works, are intertwined with Gower. Since Chaucer opens his best-known work, *The Canterbury Tales*, in Southwark, where Gower certainly lived by the mid-1390s if not before then, I will examine Chaucer's and Gower's shared network in Southwark in the late 1380s and 90s.

William of Wykeham

William of Wykeham, bishop of Winchester from 1366 and chancellor of England in 1367–71 and again in 1389–91, was not only a frequent Southwark resident but, as I hope to show, also an important acquaintance of both poets. If Gower worked at the Court of Chancery during the 1360s and 70s, he would have witnessed William of Wykeham's meteoric rise. Despite having come from a humble background, Wykeham's career is among the most impressive in fourteenth-century England. His appointment as chancellor was almost immediately surpassed by his installation to the lucrative bishopric of Winchester, the most desirable post in his already bulging pluralist portfolio. Often referred to as one of medieval England's leading builders, his long public career under three monarchs—Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV—permitted him to exert lasting influence over politics, architecture, and education.[44]

One individual linking both men was Lord Cobham, who acquired the major part of the manor of Aldington Septvauns from Gower.[45] The head of a leading Kentish family, Cobham was one of Wykeham's closest friends and supporters. Cobham had helped to make Wykeham bishop of Winchester: in the 1360s, he had led two vital embassies to persuade Pope Urban V to appoint Wykeham to the see of Winchester, despite the pope's initial hesitation.[46] During the 1380s Cobham participated in a series of commissions for Wykeham,[47] and he maintained his close association or friendship with the bishop throughout his life. Not only was Cobham connected to Gower through the Septvauns case,[48] but Cobham receives highest marks from Gower in the *Cronica Tripertita*, where the baron is singled out for lavish praise:

[44] On Wykeham's life, see Virginia Davis, *William Wykeham* (London, 2007); and Peter Partner, "Wykeham, William (c. 1324–1404)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). His educational foundations, Winchester College and New College, Oxford, are discussed by Mackenzie Edward Charles Walcott, *William of Wykeham and His Colleges* (London, 1852); for an overview of his patronage over building, see William Hayter, *William of Wykeham: Patron of the Arts* (London, 1970).

[45] Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 53.

[46] Rosamund Allen, "Cobham, John, Third Baron Cobham of Cobham (c. 1320–1408)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); Partner, "Wykeham, William (c. 1324–1404)"; and C. N. L. Brooke, J. R. L. Highfield, and W. Swann, *Oxford and Cambridge* (Cambridge, UK, 1988). There has survived a personal letter from Wykeham to Cobham, written in French and dating from the time of Cobham's embassies to the pope (G. H. Moberly, *Life of William of Wykeham: Sometime Bishop of Winchester and Lord High Chancellor of England* [Winchester, 1887], xix).

[47] Davis, *William Wykeham*, 102.

[48] On Cobham and his links with Gower, see Nigel Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobham Family and Their Monuments, 1300–1500* (Oxford, 2001); and Elliot Kendall, *Lordship and Literature: John Gower and the Politics of the Great Household* (Oxford, 2008), 37–43.

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Vnus erat dignus, paciens, pius atque benignus,
Prouidus et iustus, morum virtute robustus,
Non erat obliqus, regni sed verus amicus.
Hunc rex odiuit, in quo bona talia sciuit:
Vt dicunt mille, dominus Cobham fuit ille
. . . . . .
Hinc rogo quot purus redeat cum laude futurus,
Vt sic felici reditu letentur amici.

[A pious patient man there was, upright and kind,
Farsighted, just—a better would be hard to find.
He wasn't crooked—England's friend in loyalty—
The king disliked him, since he showed such quality.
Lord Cobham was his name, by thousands then acclaimed
. . . . . .
I beg that he return, unsoiled, for future fame
And happily come back, to all his friends' acclaim.][49]

Gower only sparingly employs compliments in this poem, but he extols Cobham's exemplary virtues, calling him "pious," "upright," and "just"—"England's friend in loyalty," who is "acclaimed" by thousands. The Septvauns case and the *Cronica* are twenty-seven years apart, but Gower enjoyed long-standing ties with the Cobham family, and Kentwell, one of the manors the poet sold to Cobham, may have been his own childhood home.[50]

Given their links, it is likely that Cobham would have heard or read at least a section of this poem after his return to England in 1399. That the baron did not object to political verse is brought out by Cobham's public display of poetry, the four-line charter poem carved in stone above the east gate of Cooling Castle, his family seat (Fig. 6). Cobham had this poem added during the crenellation of the castle in the years following the Peasants' Revolt of 1381:

Knouwyth that beth and schul be
That i am mad in help of the cuntre
In knowyng of whyche thyng
Thys is chartre and wytnessyng.[51]

The poem and the crenellation work have been read as synchronized responses to the events of 1381,[52] and, together with Gower's contemporaneous *Visio Anglie*, Cobham's poem articulates a formal, and defiant, Kentish reply—preserved in the media of stone and parchment—to the equally Kentish Peasants' Revolt. The concrete poetry above the gate to his own castle, if read next to Gower's laudatory

[49] The text and translation are taken from John Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events: The "Visio Anglie" (1381) and "Cronica Tripertita" (1400)*, ed. and transl. David R. Carlson and A. G. Rigg (Toronto, 2011), 284–85.

[50] See Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 50–53; and Kendall, *Lordship and Literature*, 41.

[51] C. M. Cervone, "John de Cobham and Cooling Castle's Charter Poem," *Speculum* 83/4 (2008): 884.

[52] On the poem as part of post-1381 documentary culture, see Cervone, "John de Cobham and Cooling Castle's Charter Poem."

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Fig. 6. Cooling Castle charter poem, East Gate, Cooling Castle, Kent. Photograph: Cristina Maria Cervone.

verses, places Cobham on the margins of a budding regional literary culture emanating from Southwark.

In the 1380s or 1390s, Gower moved to live within the grounds of the priory of St. Mary Overy in Southwark, now a borough of London.[53] His townhouse in the precinct of the priory was a stone's throw from Winchester House, the Southwark residence of the bishops of Winchester, and one of Wykeham's preferred homes at the time.[54] Gower's association with Wykeham in Southwark is most probable during the 1390s, when the bishop was in frequent residence there. Since Southwark belonged to the diocese of Winchester, and Wykeham was a highly competent administrator with a lifelong passion for building, he took an active interest in Southwark's churches, hospital, and priory. He also interfered with the property

[53] Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 58, suggests that Gower resided in Southwark since at least 1377, but there is no support for such a precise claim. Martha Carlin adduces evidence for Gower's residence in Southwark in 1394/95 and argues that his move to the priory occurred between 1385 and 1394 ("Gower's Southwark," in *The Routledge Research Companion to John Gower*, ed. Brian Gastle, Ana Sáez-Hidalgo, and R. F. Yeager (London, 2017), 260. The earlier date, based on Gower's documentary association with Kent, is unpersuasive, particularly since so many Kentish residents rented or owned properties in Southwark.

[54] Carlin argues for a location nearer High Street ("Gower's Southwark"), though this argument depends on the conjectural location of the priory's makeshift wooden bell tower in the fifteenth century.

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transactions of religious institutions, preventing the alienation of priory lands.[55] In March 1398, Prior Robert Weston of St. Mary Overy, with which Gower was closely associated, "was licensed by the bishop to let benefices appropriated to the priory, with a proviso that none of the buildings belonging to these rectories were to be used as taverns or for any illicit or dishonorable trades that might bring discredit on the church. In the following month the bishop visited the priory."[56] Less than a year earlier, in the summer of 1397, Wykeham had led a commission into the seemingly lax discipline at Gower's priory.[57] At the time, the new prior, John Kyngeston, was found to be infirm, and subprior John Stacy was tasked with returning rule in the house to normalcy by punishing "excesses and delinquencies."[58] Wykeham's 1397 commission, the disciplinary problems in its wake, and the aftermath of this affair coincided with two astonishing events in Gower's life. At the time when Prior Kyngeston was incapacitated and Wykeham openly attacked discipline at St. Mary Overy, Gower once again turned to the court of Chancery, this time obtaining an injunction on December 11, 1397, against a canon of the priory, Thomas Caudre, "that he shall do or procure no harm to John Gower."[59] Only a month later, when the priory was still without a prior and under the state of exception imposed by Wykeham, it would appear that with the bishop's help the poet took advantage of the sliding standards at St. Mary Overy: on January 2, 1398, Wykeham licensed William, curate of Gower's parish church of St. Mary Magdalen, to celebrate the wedding of Gower and Agnes Groundolf in the poet's private chapel, located in his house on the priory's grounds, on January 23, under a special license and without the publishing of wedding banns.[60] This event, commented on by countless Gower scholars, is remarkable because this ceremony was performed not in St. Mary Magdalen but in Gower's private home.[61] The dispute with the

[55] The majority of Wykeham's activities in Southwark are contained in his episcopal register, *Wykeham's Register*, ed. T. F. Kirby, 2 vols. (London, 1896). Given his policy against alienation, Wykeham may have curbed the sale of corrodies.

[56] Henry Elliot Malden, *The Victoria History of the County of Surrey*, 4 vols. (Westminster, 1902–1912), 2:110. A year later, in February 1399, "Prior Weston was admonished by Bishop Wykeham not to alienate the endowments of the house," ibid., 2:109.

[57] Ibid., 2:109.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 342 n. 9. This is earliest certain reference to Gower's presence in Southwark.

[60] See the discussion in Salisbury, "Promiscuous Contexts," especially 226: "extra ecclesiam parochialem, in oratorio ipsius Joannis Gower infra hospicium cum in prioratu B. Mariae de Overee in Suthwerk praedicta situatum." The keywords here are *hospicium* and *prioratu*. His parish church was St. Mary Magdalen, which was attached to St. Mary Overy, and the bishop effectively granted him permission to marry outside his parish church in his private chapel within his inn (*infra hospicium*), which is located in the priory (*prioratu*). "Hospicium" denotes a bigger house or residence; it is the word used for the Inns of Court and for the many Southwark inns owned by local aristocrats. See also Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 69. The new prior, Robert Weston, was not elected until January 30 (Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, 285).

[61] There is a possibility that Gower was not a corrodian but a conversus or lay brother, and the bishop's dispensation would have been required, especially since he was visitor to the priory. Such lay brothers certainly existed at the priory between 1369 and 1408: John Wickham Flower, "Notices of the Family of Cobham of Sterborough Castle, Lingfield, Surrey," *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 2 (1864): 170, gives Joan de Cobham's will of 1369 and mentions that at the time the priory also in-

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canon so close to the wedding may point to the controversial nature of Gower's decision—perhaps because Agnes's social status and reputation constituted an affront to the religious house.[62] Wykeham's generous license may suggest that he and the poet were acquainted with one another.

There is good reason to believe that this was the case, even beyond their possible Chancery contact in the 1360s. Following a disastrous fire at St. Mary Overy, Wykeham initiated considerable building and reconstruction work at the priory in the late 1380s, some of which must have been completed by 1390, since on February 7 of that year Wykeham commissioned one of his suffragan bishops to reconcile the priory and an annexed church and to dedicate the altars and graveyard.[63] Architectural historians believe that Wykeham's friend and medieval England's greatest architect, Henry Yevele, was responsible for parts of the nave.[64] John Leland reports that this reconstruction work was partly paid for by Gower, and partly by his many and powerful friends.[65] If Leland is to be believed here, it would be difficult not to count Wykeham, who oversaw this work, among Gower's powerful friends. At any rate, Gower's income at the time was considerable, and he could have taken the knighthood during any year of his later life had he so wished.[66] As a corrodian or, at the very least, a precinct resident of such considerable means, he would have been expected to support his priory in its time of need.

Chaucer, Gower, and Wykeham

Not only does Southwark connect Wykeham with Gower, and Gower with Chaucer, but there also appears to be a significant link between Chaucer and Wykeham. The bishop's reconstruction of St. Mary Overy with the help of Yevele, and perhaps even Gower, took place during the bishop's brief second tenure as chancellor, when Chaucer, by then already Gower's acquaintance, began his equally short stint as clerk of the king's works.

In 1386, Chaucer lost his post as controller of customs and, with it, his rent-free lodgings above Aldgate. Out of a job and apparently not sufficiently wealthy to make an independent living, Chaucer was certainly in need of either gainful employment or patronage. From 1385 he served on the peace commission for Kent, at times together with Wykeham's friend Lord Cobham.[67] Cobham and Chaucer

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cluded lay brothers, to each of whom she made a modest bequest. Gower's will of 1408 contains similar information.

[62] The idea that Agnes may have been a prostitute was first suggested by Rosamund S. Allen, "John Gower and Southwark: The Paradox of the Social Self," in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Boffey and Pamela King (London, 1995), 140; and by Isabella Neale Yeager, "Did Gower Love His Wife? And What Has It to Do with the Poetry?," *Poetica: An International Journal of Linguistic-Literary Studies* 73 (2010): 86 n. 61. Eve Salisbury pursues this further, arguing that Agnes was a prostitute, perhaps from one of the stews on land owned by the bishop of Winchester (Salisbury, "Promiscuous Contexts").

[63] Malden, *The Victoria History of the County of Surrey*, 2:109.

[64] John H. Harvey, "Some Details and Mouldings Used by Yevele," *Antiquaries Journal* 27/1–2 (April 1, 1947): 51–60.

[65] John Leland, *Commentarii de scriptoribus Britannicis*, ed. Anthony Hall (Oxford, 1709), 416.

[66] See my comments below on knighthood, distraint, and Gower's income.

[67] Allen, "Cobham, John, Third Baron Cobham of Cobham (c. 1320–1408)."

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had also traveled abroad as part of the same diplomatic missions.[68] Chaucer's departure from London has been cast by Paul Strohm as the upshot of political and personal crisis, which appears to have led to some kind of punitive rustication in Kent.[69] I will argue that Chaucer spent much of his time in Southwark during the late 1380s and 1390s, and that he was writing or rewriting the constituent narratives of *The Canterbury Tales* for a Southwark audience.

One of the most vexing questions in this period of Chaucer's life continues to be why, in 1389, Chaucer was all of a sudden appointed clerk of the king's works, overseeing construction at the Tower, Westminster Abbey, and Windsor Castle, among other places. Chaucer was hardly qualified for this position. Although the main function of this post was to pay the wages of builders, masons, and carpenters, he was also responsible for the supply chain, for supervising building sites, and for finding qualified laborers in the first place.[70] There is no explanation as to who facilitated this much-needed position for Chaucer, and readers are usually content to believe that he was appointed by Richard II. But there is no evidence to suggest that the king knew Chaucer or would have taken a personal or even a professional interest in so lowly a subject of his.

However, Chaucer's tenure of his office as clerk of the king's works coincides almost exactly with William of Wykeham's second term as chancellor of England. Wykeham was appointed two months before Chaucer, in May 1389, and he resigned the chancellorship three months after Chaucer's employment had ended, in September 1391.[71] As the incoming chancellor, Wykeham would have been able to make a number of appointments, particularly to offices that mattered to him personally. The warrant under the privy seal of July 12, 1389, that nominates Chaucer for this office is formally written in the voice of the king (as was the case with virtually every legal writ) but is addressed to Wykeham, who, as "bishop of Winchester and our chancellor," was to issue the appointment.[72] Wykeham certainly knew a thing or two about building: before he became the Keeper of the Privy Seal, he had served as clerk of the king's works from 1356 to 1361, defining this office for the future.[73] To put it in Thomas Tout's words: "[Chaucer's] appointment in 1389 as clerk of the king's works made him the successor of William of Wykeham in the post which led his predecessor to greatness both in church and state."[74] From this period in Wykeham's life stems his lasting association with a number of craftsmen, first among them his friend and master mason Henry Yevele. During his tenure as clerk of the king's works Wykeham supervised the construction of the royal

[68] John H. Pratt, *Chaucer and War* (Lanham, 2000), 13; and Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 204 n. 1.

[69] Paul Strohm, *The Poet's Tale: Chaucer and the Year That Made the "Canterbury Tales"* (London, 2015), chapter 7.

[70] John Harvey, "The Medieval Office of Works," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd ser., 6 (1941): 20–98.

[71] Partner, "Wykeham, William (c. 1324–1404)."

[72] Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 402.

[73] Partner, "Wykeham, William (c. 1324–1404)."

[74] Thomas Frederick Tout, "Literature and Learning in the English Civil Service in the Fourteenth Century," *Speculum* 4/4 (1929): 387.

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lodgings and the upper ward at Windsor[75]—the chapel at Windsor was added to Chaucer's list of responsibilities in July 1390, under the chancellor's great seal.[76] Throughout his long career, Wykeham remained heavily involved in building projects: among his larger enterprises, he poured money and time over a twenty-year period into the ongoing construction of his two academic foundations, New College, Oxford (1379–86, 1398–1402), and Winchester College (1387–94), and he had the nave in Winchester Cathedral reconstructed as late as 1394.[77] During the forty years of his episcopate Wykeham instigated and advised on, oversaw, and paid for building work virtually everywhere in his diocese, including Southwark. Wykeham's keen interest and deep expertise in building also led him to act as facilitator among his friends and acquaintances: for instance, he almost certainly arranged for Yevele to work on the above-mentioned redesign of Lord Cobham's Cooling Castle. Given Wykeham's lifelong passion and reputation for building, it is difficult to believe that he would have appointed to the one office that he had helped to define a man whose qualities he did not know, especially since Chaucer was an acquaintance of two of Wykeham's friends and neighbors, Cobham and Gower, respectively. This network further tightened during Chaucer's tenure of this post, when the poet worked very closely with Yevele; in fact, Chaucer was responsible for paying Yevele's wages. During his second term as chancellor Wykeham spent much of his time in Southwark,[78] and Yevele, too, had a residence and investments there. Wykeham and Yevele met particularly often during these years: the bishop's kitchen accounts reveal that Yevele dined with Wykeham in Southwark on at least nine occasions in 1393 alone.[79] Recent archaeological evidence from Southwark's Winchester House shows that Wykeham had a considerable amount of work done during this period, on the kitchens, the hall, and his private chambers; some of this work was conducted by Yevele.[80] So while Chaucer, who was appointed by Wykeham, paid Yevele's wages, Yevele advised and worked for Wykeham on a number of construction projects in Southwark, including modifications to Winchester House and St. Mary Overy, to which Gower may have contributed.

Wykeham exercised patronage over artists and artisans in the areas of architecture, sculpture, stained glass, goldsmiths' work, and jewelry. Although we have no evidence of Wykeham supporting literature, his patronage of learning and education exceeds his contributions to building. His Oxford foundation, New College, surpassed others in the size of its endowment: during the 1380s and 1390s, Wyke-

[75] Hayter, *William of Wykeham*, 1. These were designed by William Wynford.

[76] Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 408–9.

[77] Hayter, *William of Wykeham*, 16.

[78] Davis, *William Wykeham*, 89–90.

[79] John Harvey, *Henry Yevele, c. 1320 to 1400: The Life of an English Architect* (London, 1944), 46.

[80] Derek Seeley, Christopher Phillpotts, and Mark Wycliffe Samuel, *Winchester Palace: Excavations at the Southwark Residence of the Bishops of Winchester* (London, 2006), 60. A new kitchen block was constructed in Winchester Place in the second half of the fourteenth century, and "it is likely that the final remodelling of the kitchens at Southwark occurred during Wykeham's long episcopacy," ibid., 73. Earlier, Yevele "repaired and enlarged" Wykeham's private chamber in Winchester House in July 1376 (Martha Carlin, "The Reconstruction of Winchester House, Southwark," *London Topographical Record* 25 [1985]: 33–57).

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ham donated a staggering 243 books to his college and 62 books to the chapel.[81] Given his own background and the scholarly mission of his foundations to blaze career paths for bright students from humble origins, he could not have been averse to helping Chaucer at a time when he most needed it, particularly if someone such as Gower or Cobham, or even Chaucer's friend Philip de la Vache—who was Wykeham's ward—vouched for Chaucer's reliability or, perhaps, flexibility.[82]

Chaucer in Southwark

But where would Chaucer and Gower meet during the late 1380s and 1390s, when their mutual networks converged on Southwark and when they were clearly reading one another's writings? Social rank, if not class, goes some way towards answering this question. Chaucer's records show frequently unpaid debts in later life; his *Complaint to His Purse* clamors for continued financial support; and his income during his two years as clerk of the king's works, although handsome, fell considerably short of Gower's annual rental income from his properties. Gower's situation and social station were altogether different. His sole financial inconvenience may have been distraint—the payment of a fine for refusing to take the knighthood.[83] In the late fourteenth century, an income of £40 from landed property over a period of three years qualified a person for such a distinction.[84] Gower's two manors of Feltwell and Multon alone yielded this combined sum per annum, as a close rolls entry of 1382 documents.[85] Some of Gower's acquaintances appear to have resided in or near Southwark, where Gower lived at the time, paying distraint to avoid the responsibilities and costs of accepting a knighthood.[86] To put the social difference between Gower and Chaucer in the numerical idiom of a stratified society, Gower's documented net worth was probably at least three times that

[81] Richard William Hunt, "The Medieval Library," in *New College 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford, 1979), 317–45; Arthur F. Leach, "Wykeham's Books at New College," *Collectanea*, 3rd ser. (1896): 213–44; and M. B. Parkes, "The Provision of Books," in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2, *Late Medieval Oxford* (Oxford, 1992), 460–61. On Wykeham's early fifteenth-century reputation as a patron of learning and humanist scholarship, see Andrew Cole, "Heresy and Humanism," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford, 2007), 428.

[82] James Simpson reminds me that the motto of New College is "Manners Makyth Man," a position on social mobility that is echoed in the "Wife of Bath's Prologue."

[83] John Fisher and Isabel Davis note that Gower may have declined knighthood (Davis, *Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* [Cambridge, UK, 2007], 93–94; and Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 59).

[84] D. V. Smith, *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary* (Minneapolis, 2003), 25–36.

[85] Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 340 n. 94. Gower's will specifies that his widow Agnes was to receive half of that amount (Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*, 2:15–26).

[86] One such example is Gower's acquaintance William Weston: in "October 1378, and again in 1392, Weston was fined 40s. for not taking the order of knighthood—a privilege which he eschewed for the rest of his life," C. Rawcliffe, "Weston, William I (c. 1351–c. 1419), of West Clandon, Surr," in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* (Woodbridge, 1993), http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/member/weston-william-i-1351-1419.

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of Chaucer.[87] To boot, Gower could afford to live in his inn—or *hospicium*, as the entry for his wedding states—alongside the Southwark inns of the Kentish gentry.[88] As Martha Carlin shows, the house Gower rented in Southwark must have been grand.[89] Given the considerable disparity in their status, Chaucer had more reasons to visit Gower in Southwark than Gower had for journeys to Kent, should Chaucer ever have spent a significant amount of time there.

Gower resided in the best part of Southwark, an area extending east from Winchester House and St. Mary Overy along Tooley Street—a neighborhood described by Carlin as an "aristocratic 'enclave,'"[90] where many landed Kentish families had their townhouses, among them also Chaucer's and Gower's mutual acquaintance Sir Arnold Savage.[91] Whereas Gower, Savage, and many knights and esquires nominally resident in Kent appear to have spent their time in Southwark, Chaucer has been confined to a residence in Kent by his modern readers. Paul Strohm has recently suggested that the poet may have found a "Kentish refuge" in Savage's manor in Bobbing, while Linne Mooney argues that he may have owned property in Greenwich.[92] But a regular Kent residence would have been far from convenient for Chaucer. His job as clerk of the king's works from 1389 to 1391 was based in Westminster and took him mostly to the Tower and to those parts of Kent that are close to Southwark. Judging from his accounts and the surviving audit record, he must have divided his working time among these three locations, with the Tower taking up the lion's share. While it is likely that Chaucer may have spent some of his time in Greenwich, where he may have been resident for official purposes, would not Southwark, as suggested by Carlin and Caroline Barron, therefore have been an obvious location for Chaucer's pied-à-terre, much as Aldgate used to be during his time as controller of customs?[93] From there he could commute by boat to Westminster, cross London Bridge to get to the Tower, or travel along the road to Kent.

[87] Possible savings and assets asides, Chaucer's highest income was during the two-year period of his tenure as clerk of the king's works, which earned him just over £40 per annum in salary, in addition to his regular annuity of £20–26 (Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 466–69; and Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* [Oxford, 1994], 223).

[88] See my discussion of his wedding above. Carlin locates Gower's house not far off, on High Street ("Gower's Southwark").

[89] Carlin, "Gower's Southwark."

[90] Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London, 1996), 30 and 51. Carlin suggests in a forthcoming chapter that Gower lived nearer High Street from 1395 and possibly before that ("Gower's Southwark"), but this location is conjectural.

[91] Savage bought his permanent inn in 1404 at the latest (Graham Dawson, "The 'Great' Houses of Medieval Southwark," *London Archaeologist* [Summer 2010]: 231–34).

[92] Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, 189–90; Donald R. Howard, *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World*, William Abrahams Book (New York, 1987), 384; and Linne R. Mooney, "Chaucer and Interest in Astronomy at the Court of Richard II," in *Chaucer in Perspective: Middle English Essays in Honour of Norman Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Lester (Sheffield, 1999), 139–60.

[93] On Chaucer's residence above Aldgate as a pied-à-terre, see Mooney, "Chaucer and Interest in Astronomy at the Court of Richard II," 147. The spartan conditions of his quarters above Aldgate make this property a highly unattractive venue for writing. For a Southwark pied-à-terre, see Caroline Barron, "Chaucer the Poet and Chaucer the Pilgrim," in *Historians on Chaucer: The "General Prologue" to the "Canterbury Tales"*, ed. Stephen Rigby and Alastair Minnis (Oxford, 2014), 31; and Martha Carlin, "The Host," in Rigby and Minnis, *Historians on Chaucer*, 479.

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For some reason, Southwark has only very recently been considered as Chaucer's home during this period of his life, when he was composing *The Canterbury Tales*.[94] One problem may be the timeless fascination with London. Southwark, Westminster, and London were already on a trajectory to share one urban identity in the future—Marion Turner speaks of "Greater London" and Andrew Galloway calls the three locales a "conurbation."[95] Attempts to view Chaucer as a peculiarly detached London writer after 1386, and, by association, to read *The Canterbury Tales* as the work of a London writer, gained momentum following the publication of David Wallace's milestone chapter, "The Absent City," in which Wallace asks why there is little if any presence of London in *The Canterbury Tales*.[96] One solution has been put forward by Turner, who finds that "the concept of a diverse group of people coming together in a tavern setting is inherently urban, and emphasizes the fact that Southwark was intimately bound up with the City."[97] Perhaps these and similar questions keep arising in the first place because we continue to view Chaucer as a London writer after 1386, and, by association, we read *The Canterbury Tales* as the work of a London writer. I do not wish to deny the close ties between London, Westminster, and Southwark, but the idea that Southwark's urban identity is derivative of London's civic grandeur strikes me as teleological. Chaucer's literary Southwark is not a metonymy for London; it is still a distinct and distinctly urban phenomenon, with a growing and vibrant population.[98] In addition, it is no secret that Southwark residents did not have to walk very far for their thrills. Even as the concept of "Greater London" was emerging, the "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* witnesses that Southwark possessed its own urbanity and that the area was independently cosmopolitan, not because of London, but because Southwark saw pass through its streets pilgrims "from every shires ende / of Engelond."[99] Southwark brought together, on a relatively compact surface, a small population of the most diverse kind: aristocrats and scriveners, church officers and inn keepers, bishops and masons, pilgrims and poets. But since Southwark hosted no government or central administrative offices, this bustling unincorporated urban cluster generated relatively fluid contact zones for people from distinct social groups and geographical areas to intersect with one another. The centrality of Southwark is enshrined in the proposed structure of the work: if the pilgrims were meant to complete their journey by returning to the Tabard so as to have their per-

[94] See Barron, "Chaucer the Poet and Chaucer the Pilgrim," 31; Carlin, "The Host," 479.

[95] Marion Turner, "Greater London," in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 25–40; and Andrew Galloway, "London, Southwark, Westminster," in *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418*, 2 vols., ed. David Wallace (Oxford, 2016), 1:322.

[96] On the starting point of the pilgrimage, see David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy*, Chaucerian Polity (Stanford, 1997), 157–58: "Having emphasized the centrifugal impulse of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrimage—its quick self-distancing from London as a point of origin—we should also recognize that there was much movement in the opposite direction in late fourteenth-century England."

[97] Turner, "Greater London," 30.

[98] Southwark's population was just over two thousand people in 1381, or 5 percent of that of London (Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, 142).

[99] Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 23, lines 15–16.

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formances judged by Harry Bailey, is the ultimate narrative destination of *The Canterbury Tales* not Southwark?

In his reading of *The Canterbury Tales* as city writing, David Benson shrewdly observes that "although several pilgrims have been assumed to be London residents, almost none is definitely so."[100] Many of Chaucer's pilgrims hail from places that would not even have required travel through London to reach Southwark, such as Dartmouth or Bath. Instead, they would have journeyed along the Pilgrims' Way, England's very own *camino* from Winchester to Canterbury. Half of the Pilgrims' Way lay entirely in the diocese of Winchester and was a regular windfall for its wealthy bishops. It is easy to assume that the Canterbury pilgrimage industry lined the coffers of Canterbury Cathedral, but in fact much of the revenue was generated along the way for the diocese of Winchester. To put this into perspective, Wykeham's diocese was by far the wealthiest in England, with almost double the annual income of the archbishop of Canterbury.[101] So whereas some of Chaucer's pilgrims may or may not have come from London, we know that a number of them arrived on the Pilgrims' Way, and they were already on pilgrimage by the time they reached Southwark.

I believe that Chaucer composed or, in the case of prior compositions, recast the narratives constituting the early *Canterbury Tales* not for a London but for a Southwark audience, though one that was a "'clubby' kind of male coterie audience," as Derek Pearsall puts it.[102] This audience most likely included Gower and the Kentish magnates of the Tooley Street enclave, such as Lord Cobham and Sir Arnold Savage, civil servants and scriveners based in Southwark and acquainted with Southwark life, and perhaps even the household of Wykeham's Winchester residence. Only a Southwark audience could have appreciated certain aspects of Chaucer's portrayal of this area. No doubt Chaucer would have had ready examples in Southwark of most of his pilgrims, or—following Jill Mann's literary reading of the "General Prologue"—of categories of pilgrims; not least since Wykeham kept a prison in Winchester House where clerics and corrupt church officials "of the Winchester diocese . . . were taken to Southwark for trial."[103] But one of the most local allusions to Southwark beside the Tabard may be to the Prioress of Stratford-atte-Bowe. A considerable stretch of property along the bankside, which included a part of the stews or stew-houses and was adjacent to the holdings of the bishop of Winchester, belonged to the Benedictine nunnery of St. Leonard's, Bromley, usually designated as Stratford-at-Bow and headed by a prioress.[104] A

[100] C. David Benson, "Literary Contests and London Records in the *Canterbury Tales*," in Butterfield, *Chaucer and the City*, 131.

[101] Mark Page, "William Wykeham and the Management of the Winchester Estate, 1366–1404," in *The Fourteenth Century*, vol. 3, ed. Nigel Saul, W. M. Ormrod, and Chris Given-Wilson (Woodbridge, 2004), 99.

[102] Derek Pearsall, "*The Canterbury Tales* and London Club Culture," in Butterfield, *Chaucer and the City*, 99. Although I disagree with Pearsall that *The Canterbury Tales* is "pre-eminently a London poem with a London audience," I share his objective in arguing for Chaucer's intended, implied, and actual audience (97).

[103] Seeley, Phillpotts, and Samuel, *Winchester Palace: Excavations*, 45.

[104] Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, 213; H. Ansgar Kelly, "Bishop, Prioress, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark," *Speculum* 75/2 (2000): 342–88.

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number of brothels or stews were located on this site. Rather unsurprisingly, critical discussion has therefore tended to concentrate on this colorful dimension of the convent's property politics.[105] In his 1926 work *Some New Light on Chaucer*, which consists of at times quixotic attempts to identify historical persons behind Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, John M. Manly identifies Chaucer's Madame Eglantyne with a nun at St. Leonard's named Argentyne.[106] Only a year later Manly changed his mind, and in a *Times Literary Supplement* article of 1928 he reports a suit of 1380 enrolled in the Plea and Memoranda Roll at Guildhall that shows Mary Syward, the then prioress of St. Leonard's, suing a goldsmith.[107] For Manly, Mary Syward was a better match than Argentyne, yet since neither woman bore the name Eglantyne, he ended his efforts there. However, since Manly never printed the document, the text has been forgotten by Chaucer studies. It is worth looking at the suit in full:

> Dame Mary Syward, Prioress of the House of St. Leonard of Stratford, offered herself by Richard Forster her attorney against William Bartilmeu, goldsmith, in a plea of debt upon demand. . . . At the plaintiff's request the attachment was valued by oath . . . as follows: A cage and a bird called "*thrusshe*," 2s.; a lance, 12d.; a counter, 20d.; an *ambry*, 20d.; a *fenestrall* [lattice], 20d.; a *kemelyng* [tub], a *verinysshbarell*, and a bench (*scannum*), 8d.; a *standyngbassin* and four leaden weights each of one lb., 4d.; a brass pot, 3d.; 2 cups, 2d.; a candelabrum, 1d.; a tub, 2d.; a *banker* and a *dosser*, 12d.; a chair (*sedile*), 2d.; a *bultyngtubbe* [a tub for bran], 12d.; a *reele*, 4d.; 2 *belyes* [bellows], 4d.; a *worchyngstol*, 8d.; 3 *chairs* (*sedilia*), 4d.; one *sper* [wooden partition or screen], 12d.; a mortar and pestle, 4d.; a pair of *tongues*, 1d.; 12 pairs of pigeons, 3s.; *fagettes*, 10d.; a fother of coal, 4s.; also pots *daberam* [of brass?] touching the craft of *goldsnytherye*, 6d.; a *stondyngbed*, 2s.; a sword, a *bolle*, 2 trestles, and a *paner* [basket], 6d.; a *tye* [casket], 4d.; a *bord*, 2d.; 2 *trebulettes* [a goldsmith's tool for making rings], 2d.; a *sarcebox*, 1d.; a form and a *banker* and *dosser*, 6d.; 3 *stokkes* [pieces of timber], 2d.; 8 lbs. of lead, 8d.; 3 tables and one pair of trestles, 2s. 6d.; a chest and long stool, 20d.; a chair, 4d.; 2 *longstoles*, 12d.; 2 stools and a *cheker*, 12d.; a candelabrum and a *corndyssh*, a yardstick (*virga*) of iron, and a brass pan, 6d.; a *herthe*, 4d.; a stool and a *dressyngburd*, 2d.; a *marbilston*, 1d.; total 35s. 5d. The above goods were handed to the prioress under mainprise to restore them if the debtor should appear within a year and a day and disprove his debt.[108]

It ought to have been of interest that the historical prioress sued a goldsmith. As a consequence, the document produces a remarkable catalog of curiosities she acquired as security. In addition to a list of expensive furnishings and multiple candelabra, she obtained an entire goldsmithy, including "a cage and a bird called '*thrusshe*.'" This record inadvertently evokes Chaucer's portrait of the socialite Prioress, whose affectations and antics aspire to courtly circles—"and peyned hire

[105] Although Kelly, "Bishop, Prioress, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark," argues against the idea that these stews were brothels, Martha Carlin informs me that "the priory's Bankside properties undoubtedly contained brothel houses" (personal communication).

[106] J. M. Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (London, 1926), 205.

[107] J. M. Manly, "The Prioress of Stratford," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 10, 1927.

[108] A. H. Thomas, ed., *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls, 1364–1381* (Cambridge, UK, 1929), 267–68.

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to countrefete cheere / Of court."[109] Whether the prioress held on to these objects, and the bird called "thrush," or, after a year or so, tried to sell these items, makes little difference: either option would have enhanced her reputation for very discerning taste. But the most significant aspect of this record has been overlooked in this context: the attorney who represented her in this 1380 case was Richard Forster, whose name appears next to that of John Gower as one of the two individuals tasked with the power of attorney by Chaucer two years earlier, when the poet prepared for his mission to the Continent.[110] He may have been the same Richard Forster who is linked to Chaucer in 1369 and who took over the lease of Aldgate following the poet's departure in 1386.[111] Forster, a lawyer and longtime acquaintance of Chaucer, would thus appear to have related the case about the prioress of Stratford-at-Bow and the goldsmith to the poet.

The 1381 Poll Tax and *The Canterbury Tales*

The sole character in the framework narrative who can be securely identified with a real-life alter ego is Harry Bailey, host of the traveling party in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's Bailey also runs the Tabard Inn. Both man and inn have their historical equivalents.[112] Caroline Barron and Martha Carlin have recently even suggested that Chaucer may have lived at the Tabard in Southwark for some time during 1380s and 1390s.[113] Carlin, who painstakingly identified all historical references to Bailey, has captured this point best: "There can be no question that members of Chaucer's immediate audience would have been able to identify his Host, 'Herry Bailly,' with the Southwark MP and innkeeper of the same name."[114] But to my mind, the reason why Bailey would have been familiar to each and every resident of Southwark is not because he was an MP or innkeeper, but because he was an assessor of the poll tax in 1377 and, more importantly, a controller of the poll tax of 1379 and 1381, the same poll tax that led to the Peasants' Revolt in neighboring Kent and that made the local nobility and gentry, including Lord Cobham, so insecure in their Kentish estates. Although long known to historians, this aspect of Bailey's identity has never been linked to *The Canterbury Tales*. In an altogether different context, Carlin observes in her magisterial study of medieval Southwark that the population figures for this area are remarkably accurate because of the poll tax return of 1381.[115] The only surviving document from this poll tax, the so-called check-roll or counter roll, is among the most detailed and extensive of any produced in England at the time, and it was prepared by Bailey and his

[109] Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 25, lines 139–40.

[110] Fisher notes Forster's presence here but does not connect Syward to Chaucer or the Prioress in *The Canterbury Tales* (*John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 333 n. 50).

[111] Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 99 and 146.

[112] Carlin, "The Host." The historical Bailey appears in documents as "Bailly" or "Bailif."

[113] Barron, "Chaucer the Poet and Chaucer the Pilgrim," 31; Carlin, "The Host," 479.

[114] Carlin, "The Host," 473. Carlin gives the documented encounters between Bailey and Chaucer in 1383/84, at the Customs House.

[115] "The 1381 poll tax return is by far the most detailed extant source for the population and occupational structure of medieval Southwark" (Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, 136).

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fellow controllers.[116] Harry Bailey must have counted every priest, poet, and prostitute in Southwark. His name may not have meant much in London, but Bailey was—in every sense of the word—a household name south of London Bridge.

Jill Mann is certainly correct in noting that the literary form of the "General Prologue," which introduces each of Chaucer's pilgrims, responds to a number of the conventions of medieval estates satire—a moralizing mockery of the three broad segments of medieval society: the church, nobility, and peasantry. However, I would argue that the form of this section of *The Canterbury Tales* and the purpose of the work as a whole draws on Harry Bailey's check-roll of the poll tax reassessment of 1381—after all, Chaucer was a customs controller and a specialist in working with check-rolls. In a passing footnote in her breakthrough 1973 book, Mann enlists the principles behind the earlier 1379 poll tax, calling it a "scheme" that, "like that of estates literature, divides the clergy from the laity and works from top to bottom in each group."[117] The presentation of the "General Prologue" in the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, with the name of each pilgrim's profession in the margin, continues the vernacular practice of the 1381 check-roll, where, unusually for the poll tax, Bailey and his fellow controllers give the name of the profession not in Latin but in English. The check-roll shows that the controllers assembled an estates overview much like that chaired by Bailey's literary alter ego in *The Canterbury Tales*. There is considerable overlap in professions, with fifteen of Chaucer's thirty travelers represented: the check-roll includes cooks, millers, clerks, widows, a serjeant (perhaps a serjeant-at-law such as the Man of Law), physicians, boat- or shipmen, innkeepers, the trades of four of the five Guildsmen: there is a carpenter, dyer, weaver, and a tapicer, or upholsterer; furthermore, there is a merchant (chapman), a squire, and, rather surprisingly, even a pardoner.[118]

Chaucer concludes the portraits with having Bailey express the preceding seven hundred lines of the "General Prologue" as an account-like list, a lexical check-roll articulated by the controller of the pilgrims' tally: "Now have I toold you soothly, in a clause, / Th'estaat, th'array, the nombre, and eek the cause" (lines 715–16). Estates satire does not usually proceed by counting "the nombre" of those satirized. The allusion is clearly to an account-like list of the pilgrims produced by Bailey. Mann herself notes that the "General Prologue," unlike many other instances of estates satire, is essentially "a list of estates."[119] The collection of portraits of the pilgrims is, as Mann adds, "a secondary consideration."[120]

More significantly, Chaucer's list differs profoundly from many examples of estates satire because "the higher echelons of both clergy and laity are unrepresented"—there are no bishops or kings in the "General Prologue."[121] And while Mann suggests that this omission is not significant because "bishops and priests, kings and knights are on the whole admonished in the same way," important in-

[116] Carlin, "The Host," 462–64.

[117] Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the "General Prologue" to the "Canterbury Tales"* (Cambridge, UK, 1973), 215 n. 18.

[118] For a detailed overview of the professions in the 1381 records, see Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, appendix 4.

[119] Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 4.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., 5.

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stances of this genre, such as Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, charge bishops and kings with expectations of collective responsibility and political acumen, neither of which pertains to priests or knights. The absence of such exalted ranks is therefore indeed a serious omission, not least because this lack denies Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* the political dimension characteristic of Gower's estates satires in the *Mirour de l'Omme* and the *Vox Clamantis*. For the same reason it cannot be said that "it can only have been with the aim of providing a full version of an estates list that Chaucer chose to introduce as many as thirty pilgrims."[122] Since the omission of high-status pilgrims is an important lacuna, the sheer number of pilgrims points to a different justification. Mann calls this number "unwieldy for description," adding the apt rhetorical question, "Is there any other collection with so large a number of narrators?"[123] But what is "a full version of an estates list"? As a number, thirty exceeds the number of estates listed in all known estates satires by a considerable margin, turning the "General Prologue" into an abbreviated overview of the estates contained in the 1381 poll-tax reassessment for Southwark, which features just over one hundred different professions grouped by Carlin into thirteen different labor categories.[124] Chaucer's selection of estates represents almost all of these thirteen categories. A further discrepancy between estates satire and the "General Prologue," as noted by Mann, is that "estates literature always proceeds, in an orderly way, from the top to the bottom of the social scale, in contrast to the fairly haphazard method of the *Prologue*."[125] But a quick glance at the check-roll of 1381 shows that the controllers' list of Southwark residents and their professions is equally haphazard as the list in the "General Prologue," having been structured by the order in which the collectors listed the area's inhabitants.

By February 1381 it had emerged that the tally of residents was too low, as a result of tax evasion, and a reassessment was commissioned. The pilgrimage in *The Canterbury Tales* takes place in April, with most readers arguing for a date late in the month. John North's influential discussion places the final tale, that of the Parson, on or near April 20.[126] And this date fits the deadline of the reassessment, which was to be submitted to the exchequer by April 22, 1381.[127] Although North himself argues that that year was not an improbable date for the setting of the "Nun's Priest's Tale," given the reference to the poll-tax-related Peasants' Revolt ("Jakke Straw and his meynee," at line 3394) and the astronomical information contained in the tale, he subsequently opted for a different year, and Marijane Osborn has since persuasively argued for April 20, 1384.[128] The reassessment check-roll of March and April, produced by Bailey and his controllers, drove up the num-

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*, 280–84. See column 6 for the poll-tax reassessment of 1381.

[125] Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 5.

[126] J. D. North, "Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They: Part III," *Review of English Studies* 20, no. 80 (1969): 418–44. Reprinted with changes in J. D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford, 1988).

[127] Carolyn Christine Fenwick, "The English Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381: A Critical Examination of the Returns" (PhD diss., University of London, 1983), 41, http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.263359.

[128] North, "Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They," 419; and Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in "The Canterbury Tales"* (Norman, 2002).

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ber of taxpayers by a quarter, or, in the words of the opening lines, "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote / the drought of March hath perced to the roote" (perhaps a clued-in Southwark audience may even have been tempted to read these lines fiscally). But not much poll tax was paid in Kent: the rebels destroyed all records and, as Thomas Walsingham reports, even forced Canterbury pilgrims to swear oaths of allegiance to them.[129] The historical Harry Bailey, whose check-roll of March–April 1381 provided the final verification of all Southwark residents who were being counted on pain of imprisonment, is echoed in the persona of Harry Bailey who warns the pilgrims three times that if his "juggements" are not followed, he will fine the travelers (he even pronounces his "voirdit," line 787). Later in the "General Prologue," when the text has the pilgrims settle their bills with Bailey, the phrase used is "Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynges" (line 760). A "rekenyng" is primarily more than just paying a bill; it is a computation, a statement of account, a balance sheet, or the act of accounting. What Bailey produced for the poll tax, the check-roll, was such a "rekenynge," and the representatives of the various estates paying the fictional Bailey their "rekenynge" echo the historical inhabitants of Southwark paying the poll tax owed.[130] Yet the clearest lexical reference to Bailey as poll-tax controller comes from the pilgrims themselves:

> With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
> That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,
> And that he wolde been oure governour,
> And of oure tales juge and reportour.
>
> (lines 811–14)

Bailey's three roles in assessing the tales—those of "governour," "juge," and "reportour"—mirror the responsibilities of his historical alter ego to verify and finalize the check-roll, which captures the amount owed by the population of Southwark, while the last function, "reportour," turns him into a record keeper, a controller. Finally, as the party leave Southwark in the morning and cross into Kent, the territory of the Peasants' Revolt, Bailey's words can hardly have missed their point for a Southwark audience: "Whoso be rebel to my juggement / Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent" (lines 833–34). Although "rebel" is used here ironically, it also is an unmistakable pun: coming from the controller of the 1381 poll tax for Southwark, an area that contained many Kentish residents during the day, the word "rebel" must have evoked memories of the Peasants' Revolt—an uprising directed against the "juggements" of Bailey's Kentish colleagues in 1381.

Yet Chaucer's joke may be entirely at Bailey's expense: the tax controller leads a cross section of the population—represented here as a sample from his check-roll—into the tax evasion zone of Kent. The match holds even on a literary level: just as Boccaccio had his nobles bide their time outside Florence to escape the plague, so a Southwark audience would not have missed the almost satirical analogy with a tax collector leading a sizable section of the population into tax-record-

[129] T. Walsingham, D. Preest, and J. G. Clark, *The "Chronica maiora" of Thomas Walsingham, 1376–1422* (Woodbridge, 2005), 121.

[130] On the meaning of "rekenynge" in *The Canterbury Tales* as "the kind of detailed calculations associated (most commonly) with mercantile trade," see Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 185.

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free Kent perhaps to avoid the predations of the poll tax.[131] After all, Bailey promises them that the tale-telling shall be a favor to pilgrims, "And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght, / To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght" (lines 767–68). Unlike the 1379 poll tax, in 1381 the clergy did not have to pay the regular poll tax but were nevertheless expected to make a contribution. Most tellingly, a number of the pilgrims' professions are missing from Bailey's 1381 records, whereas many of them appear in the 1379 poll tax and in subsequent taxation records. It is as if someone had made the Canterbury pilgrims disappear in time for the reassessment. If the "General Prologue" is an estates satire, it is one that gently mocks Harry Bailey's poll-tax check-roll of 1381.

So where would Chaucer have found out about Bailey's check-roll? Carlin has shown that Bailey took substantial taxation income from Southwark to the Customs House in 1383 and 1384, while Chaucer was still employed there.[132] After all, Chaucer was a customs controller and, like Bailey, a specialist in producing and working with check-rolls. But another striking connection between the poll tax and *The Canterbury Tales* has been missed: one of the officials working with Bailey on the poll tax of 1381 as an assessor was the Southwark-based John Brynchele, who would later become clerk of the Taylors' Guild and is known to us as the earliest identified owner of a copy of *The Canterbury Tales*, in 1420.[133]

Southwark Writing

In closing a chapter on Chaucer's shifting audiences in the late 1380s, Helen Cooper suggests that "when the pilgrim Chaucer rode out of the city to join Harry Bailey and the company of pilgrims in the inn at Southwark, he was turning his back on a certain kind of civic performance as well as on the poetry of princely courts."[134] That Chaucer's audience had become different after 1386 has been noted by other readers, too. Derek Pearsall speaks of "a change after 1387," and Paul Strohm ingeniously argues that in *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer invents an audience to compensate for the loss in 1386 of his city readers and listeners.[135] Yet it seems to me that there already was an audience in Southwark made up of the Kentish gentry, the fellow poet Gower, Wykeham and his household, civil servants, and scriveners who resided there. We have no evidence for a Kentish dissemination of Chaucer's writings at this early stage, nor do we have any reliable evidence, for that matter, for a circulation of *The Canterbury Tales* during Chaucer's lifetime, though versions of individual tales may of course have been shared. What

[131] Carolyn C. Fenwick, *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1998–2005), 1:411–33, gives records for Kent from the Cinque Ports, and from Canterbury for 1377, 1381, and reassessment of 1381, yet nothing from the intervening locations.

[132] Carlin, "The Host," 473.

[133] In 1381, Brynchele was an assessor of the poll tax (Fenwick, "The English Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381," 641). Brynchele resided in London in later years, when he owned a copy of *The Canterbury Tales*.

[134] Helen Cooper, "London and Southwark Poetic Companies," in Butterfield, *Chaucer and the City*, 117.

[135] Derek Pearsall, "*The Canterbury Tales* and London Club Culture," in Butterfield, *Chaucer and the City*, 98; Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, 187–200.

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we do have, however, is every indication for Chaucer's Southwark audience between the mid-1380s and his death: if we consider that Gower was a Southwark resident and treat Chaucer's and Gower's mutual praise during the late 1380s as instances of reception, then the case of a Southwark-based scrivener, Thomas Spencer, who in 1394 used a copy of what may have been Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* to repay a debt,[136] gives us a second independent point of reference for a Southwark audience for the *Troilus*. To this audience we can add John Brynchele, the later clerk of the Tailor's Company who lived in Southwark from at least 1378, was one of the assessors of the 1381 poll tax, and who as a Londoner in later life bequeathed in his will of 1420 copies of *The Canterbury Tales* and, most probably, Chaucer's *Boece*.[137] I have shown elsewhere that Gower's Trentham manuscript, London, British Library, Additional MS 59495, which gathers a number of French, Latin, and English poems, never left St. Mary Overy and must therefore have been in Gower's possession until his death.[138] The same authorizing and authorial hand of Gower, Scribe 10, also closes a second manuscript, of the *Vox Clamantis* in London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iv.[139] So at least one but perhaps both manuscripts remained in Southwark and were being worked on by Gower while Chaucer was still alive. As a result, it strikes me as safe to say that prior to Chaucer's death, only two of his works enjoyed documented reception and circulation in multiple instances: *Boece* and *Troilus*.[140] This point is further confirmed by the fact that these are the only two texts mentioned in *To Adam, Scriveyn*, a poem suggesting—at the very least—that Chaucer was engaged in composing poetry at the time of its composition.[141] For this very reason, I would date this brief poem to Chaucer's Southwark period, during the late 1380s. (The accurate reference to what we now know about the earliest circulation of Chaucer's works is a strong argument for attributing this poem to Chaucer.) Furthermore, except for Usk, the majority of the evidence for the *Troilus* and *Boece* points either directly to Southwark or to individuals who lived in Southwark at one stage of their lives. With the scrivener Spencer and the later clerk Brynchele residing in Southwark, at least for some time, it is possible that more scribes and clerks involved in the copying of literary texts lived there.

The Canterbury Tales as envisaged by Chaucer were in all likelihood initially designed for a Southwark audience, but it was only after Chaucer's death that they are documented to have circulated in manuscript, either as prototypical collections or individually, with some of the earliest evidence having a Southwark connection, such as Brynchele. At the end of the fourteenth century Gower wrote poetry in Southwark, while both his and Chaucer's poems were being read and owned in

[136] Martha Carlin, "Thomas Spencer, Southwark Scrivener (d. 1428): Owner of a Copy of Chaucer's *Troilus* in 1394?," *Chaucer Review* 49/4 (2015): 387–401.

[137] Ibid., 393–94. See also Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375–1425* (Woodbridge, 2013), 119.

[138] Sobecki, "'*Ecce patet tensus*'."

[139] Ibid.

[140] Outside of these two works, there is Deschamps' praise, delivered by Sir Lewis Clifford, for Chaucer as the author of a translation of *The Romance of the Rose* (Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 110).

[141] The implied close working relationship between Adam and Chaucer's persona appears to describe a compositional practice rather than a later instance of supervised copying.

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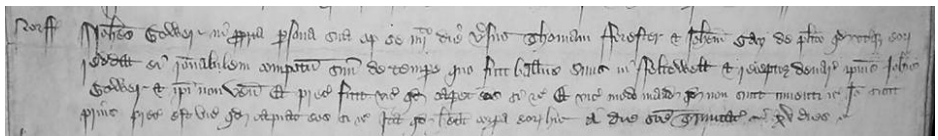
the same location. Furthermore, the fact that the *Confessio* is Gower's earliest English poem and that its earliest version dates from the years immediately following Chaucer's departure from London in 1386 suggests that Southwark's Middle English literary scene was carried by these two writers and that it came into being in the second half of the 1380s, when Chaucer connected with Gower through the *Troilus*.

Appendix



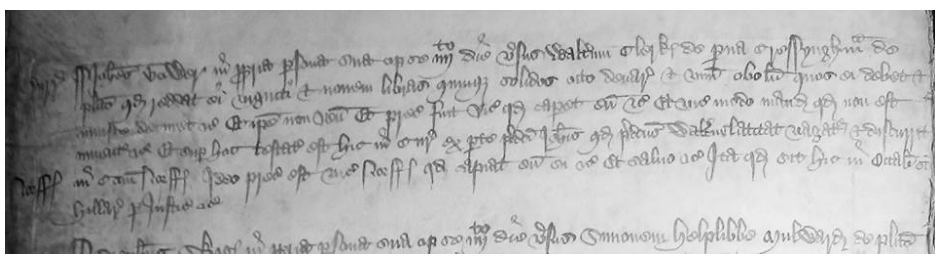
1. Common Pleas, CP40/541, m. 46f. John Gower submits a plea of account against Thomas Forester and John Gay in connection with his manor in Feltwell, 1396.

Transcription:

[Margin: Norf*olkscira*] Ioh*ann*es Gower in p*r*opria p*er*sona sua opt*ulit* se iiij^to^ die v*er*sus Thomam Forester & Ioh*ann*em Gay de pl*ac*ito q*uo*d vt*erque* eor*um* reddat ei r*ati*onabilem compotu*m* suu*m* de tempo*re* quo fuit ball*iv*us suus in Feltewell & receptor denari*orum* ipsius Ioh*ann*is Gower & ipsi non vene*runt* & prec*eptum* fuit vic*ecomiti* q*uo*d capiet eos si etc*etera* & vic*ecomes* modo mand*at* quod non sunt inventi etc*etera* Id*eo* sicut prius prec*eptum* est vic*ecomiti* q*uo*d capiat eos si etc*etera* Ita q*uo*d h*ab*eat corpo*ra* eor*um* hic a die s*anc*ti Trinitat*is* in xv dies etc*etera*

Translation:

[*Margin*: Norfolk] John Gower, in his own person, offered himself on the fourth day against Thomas Forester and John Gay in a plea that each of them render to him his reasonable account of the time when he was the said John Gower's bailiff in Feltwell and receiver of his money. And they did not come. And the sheriff was ordered to arrest them if etc. And the sheriff reports that they were not found etc. Therefore, as before, the sheriff is commanded to arrest them if etc. So that he have their bodies here at the quindene[142] of Trinity etc.



2. Common Pleas, CP40/555, m. 165d. John Gower submits a plea of debt against Walter Clerk of Little Cressingham in Norfolk, 1399.

[142] The quindene of Trinity begins two weeks and one day after Trinity Sunday.

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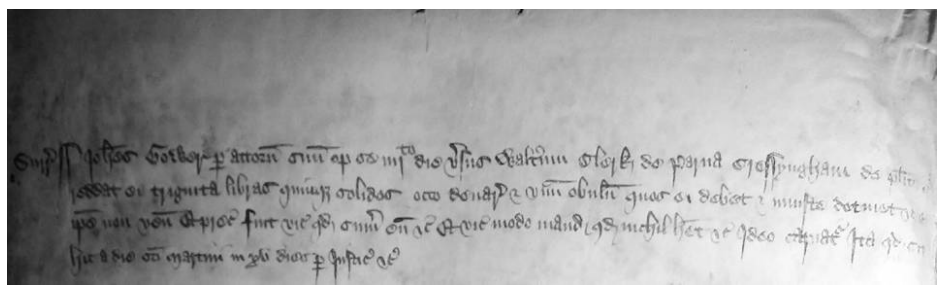
Transcription:

[*Margin*: Surr*egia*] Ioh*ann*es Gower in pr*o*pria p*er*sona sua op*tulit* se iiij^to^ die*s* v*er*sus Walt*er*um clerke de p*ar*va cressyngham*a* de pl*aci*to q*uo*d reddat ei viginti & novem libras quinq*ue* solidos octo denar*ios* & vn*u*m obolu*m* quod ei debet & iniuste detinet et*cetera* Et ipse non ven*it* Et prec*eptum* fuit vic*ecomiti* q*uo*d caper*et* eu*m* et*cetera* Et vic*ecomes* modo mand*at* q*uo*d non est inuent*us* et*cetera* Et sup*er* hoc testat*um* est hic in cur*ia* ex p*ar*te pr*edicti* Ioh*ann*is q*uo*d pr*edic*to Walterus latitat vagat*ur* et discurrit [*margin:* Norf*olkscira*] in com*itatu* Norf*olkscira* Ideo prec*eptum* est vic*ecomes* Norf*olkscirae* q*uo*d capiat eu*m* si et*cetera* Et salvo et*cetera* Ita q*uo*d sit hic in Octab*is* s*ancti* hillar*ii* p*ro* Iusti*tiae* et*cetera*

Translation:

[*Margin*: Surrey] John Gower, in his own person, offered himself on the fourth day against Walter Clerk of Little Cressingham in a plea that he render to him £29 5s. 8d. and one halfpenny, which he owes to him and unjustly withholds etc. And he did not come. And the sheriff was ordered to arrest him etc. And the sheriff reports that he was not found etc. On behalf of the aforesaid John it has been attested in court that the aforesaid Walter hides, roams, and runs [*margin:* Norfolk] about in the county of Norfolk. Therefore the sheriff of Norfolk is commanded to arrest him if etc. And safely etc. So that he be here at the octave[143] of Saint Hilary for Justice etc.



3. Common Pleas, CP40/555, m. 74d. John Gower submits a second plea of debt against Walter Clerk of Little Cressingham in Norfolk, 1399.

Transcription:

[*Margin*: Surr*egia*] Ioh*ann*es Gower p*er* attorn*atum* suu*m* op*tulit* se iiij^to^ die v*er*sus Walt*er*um clerke de parva cressyngham de pl*aci*to q*uo*d reddat ei triginta libras quinq*ue* solidos octo denar*ios* & vn*u*m obolu*m* quod ei debet & iniuste detinet et*cetera* et ips*e* non ven*it* Et prec*eptum* fuit vic*ecomiti* q*uo*d sum*moniat* eu*m* et*cetera* Et vic*ecomes* modo mand*at* q*uo*d nichil h*ab*et et*cetera* Ideo capiat Ita q*uo*d sit hic a die s*ancti* martini in xv dies p*ro* Iusti*tiae* et*cetera*

Translation:

[*Margin*: Surrey] John Gower, through his attorney, offered himself on the fourth day against Walter Clerk of Little Cressingham in a plea that he render to him £30 5s. 8d. and one halfpenny, which he owes to him and unjustly withholds etc. And he did not come. And the sheriff was ordered to summon him etc. And the sheriff reports that

[143] The octave of Saint Hilary runs from January 20 to 26.

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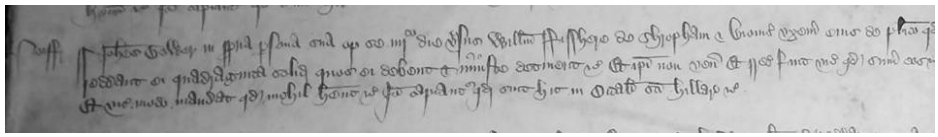
he had nothing etc. Therefore [the sheriff is commanded to] arrest [him]. So that he be here within fifteen days from the Feast of Saint Martin for Justice etc.



4. Common Pleas, CP40/555, m. 118f. John Gower submits a plea of debt against William Fisher of Shropham in Norfolk and his wife Denise, 1399.

Transcription:

[*Margin*: Norf*olkscira*] Ioh*ann*es Gower in p*ro*pria p*er*sona sua op*tulit* se iiij^{to} die v*er*sus Will*ia*m Fisshere de shropham & Denis*e* vx*or*em suus de pl*aci*to q*uo*d reddant ei quadraginta solid*os* quod ei debent & iniuste detinent et*cetera* Et ipsi non ven*ient* Et prec*eptum* fuit vic*ecomiti* q*uo*d sum*moniat* eos et*cetera* Et vic*ecomes* modo mand*at* q*uo*d nichil h*ab*ent et*cetera* I*t*a capiant q*uo*d sint hic in Octab*is* s*ancti* hillar*ii* et*cetera*

Translation:

[*Margin*: Norfolk] John Gower, in his own person, offered himself on the fourth day against Walter Fisher of Shropham and his wife Denise in a plea that they render to him forty shillings, which they owe to him and unjustly withhold etc. And they did not come. And the sheriff was ordered to summon them etc. And the sheriff reports that he had nothing etc. So [the sheriff is commanded to] arrest [them]. [So] that they be here at the octave of Saint Hilary.

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