

County office and county society in Dublin and Meath, c.1399 – c.1513

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Declaration

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And to Ciara, for her unfailing love and support, without which this thesis could never have been completed -

- this work is dedicated.

Summary

This thesis consists of a study of office-holding across two of the 'four obedient shires' of the Dublin hinterland. To attempt to compensate for the paucity of information on any individual office-holder or office-holding family, it was decided to undertake as broad a study as possible, taking in a range of offices over a long period. As a result the study embraces a very large number of individuals. Having identified those who held office, it was necessary to try and establish their status, both individually and as a group. Individual officers were examined to see if their connections, lands, titles, or other marks of social status converged to give a consistent picture of the ranks of society that took part in office, and at what levels. Evidence for the restriction of particular offices to certain ranks of society, should it appear, would then provide a means of determining the status of the many obscure individuals who appear in the records of the fifteenth-century lordship of Ireland. Participation in office at certain ranks is used, despite some reservations, as a marker of gentry status by most historians of the English gentry; if it should prove possible, the ability to determine status, even roughly, by office-holding would be especially valuable in Ireland, where many of the other means of identifying the local elite (such as tax returns) are extremely scarce or non-existent, but records for office-holding are comparatively well-preserved. To this end, a great deal of information, much of it in itself trivial, was gathered on the men who held office, in the hope of transforming lists of sheriffs and lists of subserjeants into a coherent narrative of social class.

The first and most obvious finding revealed (or rather confirmed) by the research undertaken is that in both Meath and Dublin a very large number of families took part in county office over the course of the period 1399-1513. The second was that a high degree of social stratification existed within these groups of families. A very large gulf separated the keeper of the peace from the subserjeant. Both of these findings would of course be familiar to historians of the English gentry. The dominance of a small group of around thirty leading gentry families (the numbers fluctuated with time as certain families died off and others appeared for the first time) in the leading county offices of Dublin was very pronounced. In Meath there would appear to have been opportunity for a larger number of individuals and families to play a role in county government,

although there was also a larger number of gentry families that might seek to serve. It would appear that this was in fact a reflection of a more pronounced hierarchy of office; as the magnates ceded the shrievalty to the leading gentry and especially their own relatives from cadet lines, the greater gentry, above all the cadet branches of magnate families, appear to have abandoned the other, less prestigious county office to others. The great majority of those who took part in county office in both Meath and Dublin during the period did so as collectors of the general subsidy. It is clear that many of those who held this office were from very minor gentry families, while in Dublin they certainly included many individuals from yeoman or even husbandman families.

The study reveals patterns that were common to both counties, such as comparatively broad participation in office, as well as some notable differences. The role of the cadet branches of the magnate and leading gentry families in Meath is not replicated in Dublin; while there is little evidence in Meath for the very close bonds between urban and county elite that was such a striking feature of the office-holders of Dublin. Ultimately it reveals a stratified society where service in office demanded both a certain level of standing in the landed society of the county, and the inclination to serve; it is clear that many men from respectable gentry families, especially in Meath, never, or very rarely, did so. Office-holding can be used to identify members of the gentry, but it cannot be used to define the gentry as a group.

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Abbreviations

<i>8th report of the Record Commiss.</i>	<i>8th report of the Record Commissioners of Ireland, in Reports of the commissioners appointed by His Majesty to execute the measures recommended in an address to the House of Commons respecting the public records of Ireland, with supplement and appendixes (3 vols., London, 1815-25), ii, 11-638</i>
<i>Alen's reg.</i>	<i>Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register, c.1172-1534, ed. Charles McNeill (Dublin, 1950)</i>
<i>Ann. MacFirb.</i>	'The annals of Ireland, from the year 1443 to 1468, translated from the Irish by Dudley Firbisse, or, as he is more usually called, Duaid Mac Firbis, for Sir James Ware, in the 1666', ed. J. O'Donovan, in <i>The Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society</i> , i (Dublin, 1846)
BL	The British Library
<i>Cal. Carew MSS</i>	<i>Calendar of Carew Manuscripts, preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth, ed. J. S. Brewer and William Bullen (London, 1871)</i>
<i>Cal. Inquis. Dublin</i>	<i>Calendar of inquisitions formerly in the office of the Chief Remembrancer of the Exchequer prepared from the MSS of the Irish Record Commission, ed. Margaret Griffith (Dublin, 1991)</i>
<i>Cal. Justiciary Rolls Ire.</i>	<i>Calendar of Justiciary rolls (3 vols., Dublin 1905-)</i>
CARD	<i>Calendar of ancient records of Dublin, ed. J. T. Gilbert (18 vols., 1889-1922)</i>
<i>Close Rolls</i>	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls preserved in the Public Records Office (P.R.O., London, 1892-1963)</i>
CDI	<i>Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, ed. H. S. Sweetman, (5 vols., London, 1875-86)</i>

<i>Cal. Fine Rolls</i>	<i>Calendar of the Fine rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (London, 1911-62)
<i>Chart. St Mary's</i>	<i>Chartularies of St. Mary's Abbey, Dublin: with the register of its house at Dunbrody and annals of Ireland</i> , ed. J. T. Gilbert (London, 2 vols., 1884)
CIRCLE	<i>A Calendar of Irish Chancery Letters, c. 1244–1509</i> ed. Peter Crooks (online edition, Dublin, 2012), available at http://chancery.tcd.ie/
Cl.	Close (roll)
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (P.R.O., London, 1891-2009)
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Ferguson Coll	NAI, Ferguson collection of memoranda roll extracts, vols. ii-iv. [Ferguson MSS 2-4]
Ferguson repertory	Ferguson repertory of memoranda rolls, vols. ii-iv
<i>Gormanston register</i>	<i>Calendar of the Gormanston register, from the original in the possession of the Right Honourable the Viscount of Gormanston</i> , ed. J. Mills and M. J. McEnery (Dublin , 1916)
<i>IHS</i>	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
<i>Inquisitions and extents</i>	<i>Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland</i> , ed. Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith (Kew, 2007)
<i>Ir. Exch. Payments</i>	<i>Irish exchequer payments, 1270-1446</i> , ed. Philomena Connolly (Dublin, 1998)
<i>JRSAI</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
Lodge, <i>Peerage</i>	John Lodge, <i>The peerage of Ireland</i> , revised by Mervyn Archdall (7 vols, Dublin, 1789)
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
Pat.	Patent (roll)

PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academey</i>
RDKPRI	<i>Reports of the deputy keeper of the public records of Ireland</i> (Dublin, 1869-)
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
<i>Wills and inventories</i>	<i>Register of wills and inventories of the diocese of Dublin, in the time of Archbishops Tregury and Walton, 1457-1483</i> , ed. Henry F. Berry (Dublin, 1898)
RCH	<i>Rotulorum Patentium et Clausorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Calendarium</i> , ed. E. Tresham (Dublin, 1828)
<i>State Papers Hen. VIII</i>	<i>State Papers, Henry VIII</i> (11 vols., London, 1830-52)
<i>Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V</i>	<i>Statutes and ordinances, and acts of the Parliament of Ireland. King John to Henry V</i> , ed. by H. F. Berry (Dublin, 1907)
<i>Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI</i>	<i>Statute rolls of the Parliament of Ireland: Reign of King Henry VI</i> , ed. by H. F. Berry (Dublin 1910)
<i>Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV, i</i>	<i>Statute rolls of the Parliament of Ireland: 1st to 12th of King Edward IV</i> , ed. by H. F. Berry (Dublin, 1914)
<i>Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV, ii</i>	<i>Statute rolls of the Parliament of Ireland: 12th & 13th to 21st & 22nd of King Edward IV</i> , ed. by James Morrissey (Dublin, 1939)
<i>Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII</i>	<i>Statute rolls of the Irish Parliament: Richard III-Henry VIII</i> , ed. Philomena Connolly (Dublin, 2002)

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a detailed study of office-holding in Dublin and Meath, two of the 'four obedient shires' of fifteenth-century English Ireland where the structure of English county government remained to a large degree intact. While it considers the duties and role of the office in question – particularly the lesser county and barony offices – its primary focus is on the men who held the offices.¹ It is hoped that by a detailed examination of a number of the men that held the offices in question it will be possible to shed light on sections of fifteenth-century society that are otherwise invisible. In particular, it aims to shed light on the gentry of fifteenth-century Dublin and Meath.

The possession of county office, together with certain levels of landed income and the status titles of knight, esquire and gentleman, has been recognised as one of the primary means of identifying members of the English medieval gentry.² By the mid-fourteenth century in England the gentry controlled local government – with the power of magnates manifested informally through their gentry retainers.³ Although sceptical of the importance of the county as a focus for the political loyalties and ambitions of the gentry, Carpenter recognised the vital importance of office records for identification of the leading gentry and for analysis of their mutual interaction, interests, and careers; the main criterion she used to identify the gentry of Warwickshire is participation in county affairs through office-holding or association with those who held office.⁴ The historian of medieval Ireland lacks the detailed taxation records extant for many English counties in the fifteenth century, while the Irish *inquisitions post mortem* tail off toward the end of the fourteenth century.⁵ Records of distraint for knighthood – the fiscal

¹ For existing work on the subject see A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish Shire Government in the Thirteenth Century' *Irish Historical Studies*, v, no. 17 (Mar., 1946), pp. 1-28; D. B. Quinn, 'Anglo-Irish local government, 1485-1534', *IHS*, i, no. 4 (Sep., 1939), pp. 354-381.

² Michael J. Bennett, *Community, class and careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire in the age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 83; Christine Carpenter, 'The fifteenth-century English gentry and their estates' in Michael Jones (ed.) *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe* (Gloucester 1986), pp. 36-60, p. 38; P. R. Coss, 'The Formation of the English Gentry' in *Past & Present*, No. 147 (May, 1995), pp. 38-64, pp. 43-4

³ Colin Richmond, 'Ruling Classes and Agents of the State: Formal and Informal Networks of Power' *Journal of Historical Sociology*, x, no. 1 (March 1997), pp. 1-26, p. 16

⁴ Carpenter, 'Fifteenth-Century English Gentry and their Estates', pp. 37-8

⁵ Paul Dryburgh and Brendan Smith (eds.) *Inquisitions and extents of medieval Ireland* (Kew, 2007)

punishment for refusing to become a knight – are absent. The use of heraldry is another possible means of identifying members of the nascent gentry. In the fourteenth century men who were not themselves knights increasingly adopted coats of arms to display their claim to gentle birth.⁶ The leading landholding families of Meath certainly made use of heraldic imagery to assert ownership of social goods from church fonts to the highways.⁷ However, the use of heraldry on such monuments appears to have become common only in the sixteenth century; in any case, the surviving physical material, while valuable, is too scarce and too late to be a useful means of identifying the gentry of the county in the fifteenth century.⁸ The earliest heraldic visitations of Ireland date to the second half of the sixteenth century and are patchy at best.⁹

Attempts to identify gentlemen by their landed income are likewise fraught with difficulty. No equivalent to the records of the English taxes of 1412 and 1436 are available to record the incomes of the nobles and gentry of Ireland. No detailed records survive for the county subsidies,¹⁰ which were in any case a tax on particular pieces of land and not on the landed income of particular individuals like the English subsidies.¹¹ Valuations of whole estates are exceedingly rare. The calendars of the memoranda rolls occasionally record values of landholdings, but it is rarely possible to determine whether the landholdings in question formed the entirety or merely a part of the owner's possessions.¹²

⁶ Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 20-25.

⁷ Heather A. King, 'Late medieval crosses in County Meath c. 1470-1635' *PRIA*, C, lxxxiv (1984), pp. 79-115; Elizabeth Hickey, 'Royal heraldry and some Irish arms at Trim, County Meath', *Ríocht na Midhe*, viii, no. 2 (1988/9), pp. 129-40.

⁸ King, 'Late medieval crosses', pp. 91-2, 98-113.

⁹ Visitations of the Irish chief herald, N.L.I., G(enealogical) O(ffice) MSS 47-49 (Microfilm, N.L.I. P 8286)

¹⁰ The surviving returns for the fifteenth century are restricted to the sums received and recorded by undertreasurer William Hattecliff; they simply note the names of the collectors and of the barony in question and the total sum received. Nonetheless the records of the subsidy are an underutilised source, as Steven Ellis has demonstrated; by combining the extents of the subsidy for 1479, 1502 and the detailed subsidy returns of 1533-4, he has been able to trace the expansion of tillage in the Pale at the turn of the sixteenth century – BL Royal MS 18 C xiv, ff. 9, 25, 33, and *passim*; Steven Ellis, *Defending English ground: War and peace in Meath and Northumberland, 1460-1542* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 45-51.

¹¹ Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c. 1422-c. 1485* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 38-9; Carpenter, *Locality and polity: A study of Warwickshire landed society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge 1992), p. 36; G. L. Harriss, *Shaping the nation: England 1360-1461* (Oxford, 2005), p. 138.

¹² For example, RC 8/36, pp.468-79, 527-9.

Steven Ellis has reconstructed the value of the estates of Sir William Darcy of Platin from a variety of sources and arrived at a figure of around £120 per annum from his patrimony, to which he added over the course of his lifetime.¹³ William was clearly exceptionally wealthy by the standards of the gentry of the early sixteenth century; his recognizance not to impose coign and livery was of the same magnitude as that given by the leading nobles of Meath. His wife was the widow of Walter Mareward, baron of Screen, who owned the manor of Santry and other lands in north Dublin in addition to his Meath estates. Her dower was valued at £16 3s 4d, and thus presumably the total value of the Mareward inheritance was just under £50 per year.¹⁴ After the suppression of Thomas Fitzgerald's rebellion, Piers Butler sought a grant of the lands of John Burnell, who had been attainted for his support of Fitzgerald, as recompense for his efforts on the king's behalf. He claimed that the estate was worth no more than £80 a year, with a town house in Dublin that would not bring in more than £4 'at the utmost penny rent'. He had reason to downplay the value of the estate, but the figure must have had at least some level of credibility.¹⁵ Burnell was among the most prominent gentry of county Dublin. Both he and especially William Darcy's incomes are likely to have been at the upper end of the scale of gentry wealth. Information on incomes at the other end of the scale is yet scarcer. In 1410 the commons of the Irish parliament requested that the jurors selected by the escheator for his inquests be 'inheritable of 100 shillings in land or rent by the year at least', or if such were lacking, 'the best inheritors within the barony'; while in 1494 legislation concerned with the use of English weaponry distinguished between those having goods to the value of £20, who were expected to have a quilted jacket, bow and arrows, equipment classified in the same act as appropriate to the yeoman of a knight or esquire's household, and the freeholder having land to the value of £4, who was expected to have the same gear and a horse in addition.¹⁶ The freeholder here occupies the space in the social hierarchy where we might expect to find a gentleman, but the correspondence is not as neat as we might

¹³ Ellis, 'An English gentleman and his community: Sir William Darcy of Platten' in Vincent P. Carey and Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Taking sides? Colonial and confessional mentalités in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 19-41, p. 29.

¹⁴ Ellis, 'Sir William Darcy of Platten', p. 29.

¹⁵ *State Papers, Henry VIII* (11 vols., London, 1830-52), ii, pp. 476-7.

¹⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V*, p. 525; *The statutes at large passed in the parliaments held in Ireland, vol. I: 1310 to 1612*, ed. Francis Vesey (Dublin, 1786), pp. 48-9.

like. It might be contrasted with legislation of 1537 which laid down the fines for those using the Irish language or wearing Irish clothes at 40s for a knight or esquire, 20s for a gentleman or merchant, and 10s for a freeholder or yeoman.¹⁷

In 1450 the sheriff of Dublin carried out an extent of the lands of Piers Coolock, gentleman, and found that he had lands worth 100s in Dubber and a further parcel of land in Coolocks Rath (now Coolatrath) worth 18s per year; that is, a total just under £6.¹⁸ Piers Coolock's £6 is not likely to have sufficed to provide a gentry lifestyle in contemporary England; J. M. W. Bean, working from the taxation records of the fifteenth century, suggested that £5 of annual landed income was roughly indicative of a wealthy member of the yeomanry, while the gentry might be expected to have something more in the line of £20-£40; historians of the English gentry have tended to follow his lead.¹⁹ It seems probable that the English gentry of Ireland, like the nobility of the lordship, were comparatively much poorer than their English counterparts; even allowing for this, however, Coolock's income is likely to have been at the lower end of the scale. The only member of the family to hold office in Dublin was Simon Coolock, collector of a subsidy in 1404.

Perhaps the simplest way of identifying members of the gentry is through the use of status titles. In England the Statute of Additions of 1413 was intended to standardize personal titles used in legal cases and writs. It identified knight, esquire and gentleman as appropriate designations, in descending order, for men occupying the social space between the peerage and the peasantry.²⁰ Of the three titles, only knighthood was clearly defined – either one had been knighted or one had not.²¹ Esquires were men of some wealth and status; they might acquire knighthood over the

¹⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 238-9.

¹⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 704-7.

¹⁹ J. M. W. Bean, 'Landlords', in E. Miller (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, iii: 1348-1500* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 526-86, p. 536; Susan M. Wright, *The Derbyshire gentry in the fifteenth century* (Chesterfield, 1983), pp. 5-6; Acheson, *A gentry community*, pp. 38-9; Coss, 'The Formation of the English Gentry', p. 43.

²⁰ D.A.L Morgan, 'The Individual Style of the English Gentleman', in Michael Jones (ed.) *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, 15-35, p. 16; Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 34; Rosemary Horrox, 'The urban gentry in the fifteenth century' in John A. F. Thomson (ed.) *Towns and townspeople in the fifteenth century* (Gloucester, 1988) pp. 22-44, p. 37; Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 19.

²¹ Dorothy J. Clayton, *The administration of the county palatine of Chester, 1442-1485* (Manchester, 1990), p. 136

course of their career. In Ireland this progression is exemplified by the entry in the memoranda rolls in which Robert Howth is described as 'Robert Howth, knight, lately esquire'.²² Both knights and esquires were undoubtedly members of the gentry, and the most prominent members at that. The status of gentleman was a comparative innovation. The earliest example of the use of gentleman as a title in Ireland that I have found is from 1430, when it appears on the plea roll (which is of course exactly where one would expect to find it, following the English example).²³ The earliest use in the statute rolls is in 1450, but it immediately enters frequent use as a designation thereafter.²⁴ The distinction between a poor gentleman and a wealthy yeoman could be a fine one. In 1473 William Tipper, gentleman, petitioned for and received an act annulling indictments against him by the name of William Tipper of the New Street near Dublin, gentleman, and also by the name of William Tipper of Dublin, yeoman.²⁵ Such fluidity was however exceptional, and insofar as they can be traced titles were usually applied consistently. Most changes in an individual's title appear to reflect a genuine change in status. For example, Peter Travers, serjeant-at-law, is named as Peter Travers, gentleman when despatched to England in the company of Richard duke of York in 1460.²⁶ In 1461, having benefited from the change of regime, he was granted the office of clerk of the rolls of Ireland, with a fee of £20 annually, as Peter Travers esquire; he had also succeeded in wresting his family's patrimony in Baldongan, north county Dublin, from their Bermingham rivals, who sided with the house of Lancaster.²⁷

However, the use of status titles to identify the gentry of English Ireland is hampered by a lack of sources comparable to the English indictment rolls and chancery rolls, which enabled Clayton to identify the title of several hundred Cheshire jurors.²⁸ Generally status titles are only preserved when an individual came into contact with the central administration (if then). The context for such contact was often office-holding, leaving us to a certain degree back where we started. Nonetheless such titles will be an

²² RC 8/41, pp. 7-8.

²³ NLI GO MS 192, pp. 377-8.

²⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 206-7.

²⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 172-9.

²⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 792-5.

²⁷ *CPR, 1461-67*, p. 26.

²⁸ Clayton, *Administration of Chester*, p. 135, 219, p. 271 n. 18

important consideration when attempting to identify the status of the men who held office in Meath and Dublin in the fifteenth century.

Lacking the sources which provide the historian of the English counties with an alternative point of entry to the study of the gentry, we are even more reliant on the information to be gained from a study of the county officers of the lordship.²⁹ That being the case, we must be doubly aware of the difficulties raised by a reliance on the records of the central government, particularly given the lack of information that many records of office-holders provide. Simon Payling observes: 'It is difficult to make sense of an apparently random series of appointments and elections. Rarely is it possible to discover why a particular individual was appointed to a particular office at a particular time, still less what motivated him to either seek or shirk the responsibilities that office brought with it: motive has to be inferred.'³⁰ Reliance on records of office-holding may lead to an exaggerated sense of the importance of office in the lives of the gentry. While county offices were dominated by the gentry in the fifteenth century, service in government was far from universal, even among the most prominent families.³¹ Office was a consequence of local importance as much or more than it was a contributor to it. Records of offices might provide the framework of the public lives of the gentry while failing to reveal the politics that lay behind patterns of service.³² Again, the organization of offices on a county basis may exaggerate the importance of county boundaries to the gentry. Christine Carpenter and others have emphasised that the elite gentry families often held lands and not infrequently office in multiple counties.³³ Possession of certain offices was a consequence rather than a cause of high status, as we shall see; and maintaining that status did not rely on government service.

²⁹ P. W. Fleming, 'Charity, Faith and the Gentry of Kent, 1422-1529' in T. Pollard (ed.) *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 36-58, p. 54 n. 1

³⁰ Simon Payling, *Political society in Lancastrian England: The greater gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991), p. 109

³¹ Christine Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, xxxiii, no. 4, Vill, Guild, and Gentry: Forces of Community in Later Medieval England (Oct., 1994), pp. 340-380, p. 345; Coss, 'Formation of the English Gentry', p. 43

³² Peter Fleming, 'Politics' in Radelescu, R., and Truelove, A., (eds.) *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 50-62, p. 55; Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, pp. 272-3

³³ Carpenter, 'Gentry and community', p. 348; Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, p. 9

As such, this thesis makes no claim to be a study of the gentry. Such a study would need to consider a much broader range of topics relevant to gentry life, including, but not limited to, their relationship with the magnates, the church, each other, and their tenants. It would also have to consider their role in the constant, small-scale warfare that defined fifteenth-century Ireland; a role that was doubtless a deal more central to the identity of the gentry than office-holding.³⁴ While it will touch on many of these topics, this thesis is instead the study of a single aspect of gentry life, albeit an important and indeed a defining one. Its purpose is to explore office-holding in fifteenth-century Meath and Dublin as a means of studying the gentry and the wider society of those counties; to consider the size of the office-holding class and to what extent it was coterminous with the gentry, to explore hierarchies of office and their relationship with social hierarchies, and to generally consider the men who carried out 'self-government at the king's command' in fifteenth-century English Ireland and their place in society.

County government in fifteenth-century Ireland

The apparatus of government in late medieval Ireland was in its origins identical to that of the mother society, with the creation of shires, boroughs and legal institutions following swiftly on the heels of the twelfth-century conquest. The structure of the central administration too was in its parent's image, with its chancery, exchequer, and courts of common and king's (or justiciar's) bench.³⁵ The government of the shires was exactly modelled on that of England, with the same offices of sheriff, coroner, and later the keepers of the peace; although the subsequent evolution of these offices in England and Ireland diverged somewhat as the centuries progressed. It is notable that the military role of the sheriffs and especially of the keepers of the peace remained far more important in Ireland than in England, where it was eclipsed by judicial and administrative functions.³⁶ As in England, the men who staffed these positions were 'gentlemen

³⁴ For two such studies, see Brendan Smith, *Crisis and survival in late medieval Ireland: The English of Louth and their neighbours, 1330-1450* (Oxford, 2013), and Ellis, *Defending English ground*.

³⁵ Robin Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169-1369* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2012; 1st ed. 1981), p. 109

³⁶ A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *History of Medieval Ireland* (2nd ed., London, 1980; 1st ed. 1968), Robin Frame, 'The judicial powers of the medieval Irish keepers of the peace' in idem, *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450* (London, 1998), pp. 301-317, pp. 301-303; idem, *English Lordship in Ireland 1318-1361* (Oxford, 1982), p. 39

amateurs', local landowners acting on the crown's behalf.³⁷ In Ireland as in England the county offices were increasingly limited to members of the leading families of the shire as the fourteenth century progressed.³⁸ A petition of Irish parliament to the king in 1342 concerning the improper appointment of sheriffs asked that the sheriff be elected each year by the people of his county, and that he should be 'a sufficient person who is resident, and has whereof to answer to the king in the same county for the office of sheriff' and furthermore that his term should be limited to a year.³⁹ The importance to the commons of this principle – that the sheriff should be a landholder in his bailiwick – and the tendency for abuse is shown by its repetition in varying but essentially similar forms every generation or two up into the seventeenth century.⁴⁰ Minimum requirements of landed income were introduced for offices from the late fourteenth century; although lacking as we are in detailed records of landed incomes, it is difficult to determine how far such precepts were adhered to.⁴¹ As in England, the gentry of the lordship of Ireland came by the middle of the fourteenth century to dominate the offices of local government in their counties.⁴² This thesis will consider the role they played in local government, taking as its area of investigation two of the four obedient shires.

There are some very practical difficulties involved in the study of office-holding in Ireland, above all the absence of comprehensive lists of officers. The compilation of such lists was made a great deal more difficult by the destruction of the Public Records Office in 1922 with much of the Irish chancery, exchequer, and judicial records whose English equivalents enabled the creation of the lists of English sheriffs.⁴³ Some efforts have been made to rectify this lacuna. H. F. Berry was able to compile a reasonably

³⁷ Christine Carpenter and Olivier Mattéoni, 'Offices and officers' in Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Philippe Genet and John Watts (eds.), *Government and Political Life in England and France c.1300–c.1500* (Cambridge, 2015), 78-115, p. 83.

³⁸ Otway-Ruthven, *History of medieval Ireland*, p. 179; Áine Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin in the fourteenth century' in Sean Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin XII: Proceedings of the Friends of Medieval Dublin Symposium, 2010* (Dublin, 2012) pp. 264-88, p. 264, Fleming, 'Politics', p. 51

³⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 354-7.

⁴⁰ Henry F. Berry, 'Sheriffs of the County Cork: Henry III to 1660', *JRSAI*, Fifth Series, Vol. 35, No. 1, (Mar. 31, 1905), pp. 39-52, p. 43.

⁴¹ Fleming, 'Politics' p. 51.

⁴² Otway-Ruthven, *History of medieval Ireland*, p. 179; Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 264; Michael Potterton, *Medieval Trim: History and Archaeology* (Dublin, 2005), p. 122.

⁴³ Philomena Connolly, *Medieval record sources* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 9-11, 25; Lydon, 'Survey of the memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer, 1294-1509' *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 23 (1966), pp. 49, 51-134, pp. 51-2; Berry 'Sheriffs of the County Cork', p. 41.

comprehensive list of the sheriffs of Cork before the catastrophe of 1922. Genealogist T. B. Butler drew on the Ormond deeds to create a detailed list of the seneschals of the Butler liberty of Tipperary in the 1950s, while more recently, Áine Foley, Brendan Smith and Michael Potterton have attempted to do the same for Dublin, Louth and the liberty of Trim respectively.⁴⁴ Steven Ellis in his PhD thesis compiled lists of sheriffs for each of the counties for the period 1484-1547.⁴⁵ He has since expanded on this work, with his most recent monograph including an appendix providing lists of the officers of the county and liberty of Meath from 1463 to 1545.⁴⁶ These lists make a start, but the vast majority of the work remains to be completed. Apart from those compiled by Ellis and Potterton for Meath, all these lists concern themselves solely with the most prominent county offices of sheriff, seneschal or (in the case of Louth) keeper of the peace. The less prominent county positions, from the escheatorship down, have yet to receive any systematic attention. Potterton includes all positions of the liberty jurisdiction down to the keeper of the park and seneschal of the betaghry; but as his work is concerned solely with the liberty of Trim, the officers of the county of Meath are omitted, leaving in obscurity the connections between liberty and county service and the overlap – which as we shall see was significant – in personnel between the royal and seigniorial administrations.⁴⁷ The keepers of the peace have fared better, with the surviving commissions comprehensively laid out for the entire lordship by Robin Frame.⁴⁸

I have attempted to reconstruct lists of officers for the county of Dublin and the county and liberty of Meath between 1399 and 1513. The officers in question are the sheriffs, the seneschals and sheriffs of the liberty of Meath, the escheators and clerks of the market, the coroners, the chief serjeants and subserjeants, the undersheriffs and

⁴⁴ Berry, 'Sheriffs of Cork', pp. 44-8; T. Blake Butler, 'Seneschals of the liberty of Tipperary' *Irish Genealogist*, ii (1953), pp. 294-302, 326-36, 368-76, pp. 297-8; Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 284-8; Smith, *Crisis and survival*, pp. 15-17; Potterton, *Medieval Trim*, pp. 370-81, 413

⁴⁵ Ellis, *The administration of the lordship of Ireland under the early Tudors* (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1978), Appendix 1: Tables of officials, 380-91, pp. 390-1.

⁴⁶ Ellis, 'Sir William Darcy of Platten', p. 41; *idem*, *Defending English ground*, Appendix 2: Local government officers, Co. Meath, 178-83.

⁴⁷ Potterton's lists of officers are compromised by a reliance on a list in NLI MS 13, pp. 150-1, which is flawed, misleading or outright wrong in certain instances; notably the assertion that Thomas Fitzmaurice was seneschal in 1425, thirty years too early – see appendix; Vincent Gorman, 'Richard, duke of York, and the development of an Irish faction', *PRIA*, C, lxxxv (1985), 169-79, p. 171.

⁴⁸ Robin Frame (ed.), 'Commissions of the Peace in Ireland, 1302-1461' in *Analecta Hibernica*, xxxv (1992), pp. 1, 3-43, pp. 8-35

other members of the sheriff's staff, and finally the assessors, receivers and collectors of subsidy. It was through the last-named office that by far the largest number of individuals and families had direct experience of 'self-government at the king's command'.⁴⁹ I have only been able to add a handful of commissioners of the peace to those compiled by Robin Frame.⁵⁰ For this reason and for reasons of space I have not included lists of commissioners of the peace, which would simply be to reproduce Frame's work. The commissioners of the peace are however discussed in detail, as an important and prestigious office of local government.

An English gentry abroad

Before we go any further, we should consider a matter of some importance: terminology. Specifically, we must consider whether it is appropriate to speak of a 'gentry' in fifteenth-century English Ireland.

Given that the English colony in Ireland shared the same institutions of government and the same social organization – at least in its origins – as the mother society, it might be taken as read that the lordship had a gentry like that in England.⁵¹ But historians of the lordship of Ireland have been extremely reluctant to use the term. When Robin Frame speaks of Louth and Dublin being a 'society of lesser noble, or 'gentry', families', he is careful to ring the word round with inverted commas.⁵² Elsewhere he remarked that whether the lordship may be said to have had a gentry was one of the many unposed questions of Irish medieval historiography.⁵³ Brendan Smith, who has produced two monographs on the sub-magnate landowning families of the medieval colony, studiously avoids using the term gentry to describe the leading families of county Louth, preferring instead such constructions as 'prominent Louth families' 'the

⁴⁹ See appendix.

⁵⁰ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace'.

⁵¹ For the similarity of colonial institutions to those of England, see Robin Frame *Colonial Ireland*, pp. 108-27; James Lydon, *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 2nd ed., 2003; 1st ed. 1972), 66-8; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *History of Medieval Ireland*, pp. 144-90

⁵² Robin Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. 116. Frame has been less reticent to use the term 'gentry' in more recent works – see for example idem, 'Exporting state and nation: being English in medieval Ireland' in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds.) *Power and the nation in European history* (Cambridge, 2005), 143-65, pp. 148, 152.

⁵³ Robin Frame, 'Commissions of the Peace', p. 5.

political elite of late medieval Louth' 'the most important settlers in Louth' and 'families below the level of magnate'.⁵⁴ In contrast, Steven Ellis, writing on Meath in the last decades of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, uses the term gentry without any caveat.⁵⁵ He is followed in this by Gerald Power, whose focus, however, is primarily sixteenth-century.⁵⁶ The essential 'Englishness' of English Ireland is of course a central theme of Ellis' work, so his application of English terminology to this English society is unsurprising.⁵⁷ How may we decide whether this 'settler elite' deserves to be called a 'gentry'?

In 1984 a colloquium was held in Nottingham which discussed the lesser nobility of late medieval Europe. The contributors considered the distinctive features of the gentry landholders of England as a social class and whether this class formed a distinct type of lesser nobility; and if so whether other examples of this type could be identified elsewhere in Europe. The consensus reached was that, for a variety of reasons, none of the lesser nobilities of Europe outside England merited the title of 'gentry'.⁵⁸ The disqualifying factors varied in each polity, but they can be roughly summarized as follows. Firstly, the existence of a monolithic nobility in which the lesser nobility were differentiated from the greater only by the informal measures of prestige and wealth; secondly, the absence of a public authority with which the lesser nobility operated in partnership in the administration of their localities, and thirdly a formal division between noble and non-noble that prevented the informal accession to the minor nobility by successful practitioners of trade and the law.⁵⁹

Unfortunately in the thirty years since the conference there has been little effort to expand on this promising beginning. The English gentry have been the focus of much

⁵⁴ Smith, *Crisis and Survival*, pp. 5, 13, 14, 21; see also the comments of Steven Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors, 1447-1603: English expansion and the end of Gaelic rule* (London, 1998), pp. 33-4

⁵⁵ Ellis, 'Sir William Darcy of Platten', p. 29; *idem*, *Defending English ground*, pp. 29, 92-6, and *passim*.

⁵⁶ Gerald Power, *A European frontier elite: the nobility of the English Pale in Tudor Ireland, 1496-1566* (Hannover, 2012), p. 54, and *passim*.

⁵⁷ Ellis, 'Nationalist historiography and the English and Gaelic worlds in the late Middle Ages', *IHS*, xxv, no. 97 (May, 1986), pp. 1-18.

⁵⁸ Michael Jones (ed.) *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*.

⁵⁹ Paul De Win, 'The Lesser Nobility of the Burgundian Netherlands' in Jones (ed.) *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, 95-118; F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'Was There a German 'Gentry'?' *ibid.*, 119-132; Angus MacKay, 'The Lesser Nobility in the Kingdom of Castile', *ibid.*, 159-180; Jenny Wormald, 'Lords and Lairds in Fifteenth-Century Scotland: Nobles and Gentry?' *ibid.*, 181-200; Philippe Contamine, 'France at the End of the Middle Ages: Who was Then the Gentleman?' *ibid.*, 201-217.

study, but in general, satisfied that they are studying a 'gentry', English historians have been content to ask 'who are the gentry' – that is, who qualifies for inclusion in the class – without asking what precisely defined the class itself.⁶⁰ An exception is Peter Coss, who in 1995 proposed a six-point definition of the gentry as a social formation.⁶¹ His definition agrees in several key respects with the points raised by the 1984 Nottingham colloquium. Drawing on the definition proposed by Coss and the findings of the 1984 colloquium, I propose that the lesser nobility of the lordship of Ireland should be termed a 'gentry' if it meets the following conditions:

- It is a form of lesser nobility
- It is clearly separated at the top from the higher nobility, but open at the bottom to new families that acquire a local landed presence through trade, successful husbandry, the law or administration. It is subject to internal gradations of status.
- It exists in a relationship with a central authority that is sufficiently strong to provide public rather than private justice and a system of local government not directly reliant on the magnates, but too weak to support a paid bureaucracy, and thus reliant on the co-operation of the local elite. In return the local authority and prestige of the elite – which is based first and foremost on wealth, lordship over men and a noble lifestyle – is bolstered by the support of the central authority
- It is able to exercise collective judicial control over its tenantry and social inferiors.
- It has a collective identity, as revealed by the expression of shared interests and concerns. Participation in government on a territorial basis is combined with a forum for the expression of collective self-interest, again on a territorial basis: in the case of the English gentry, this is provided by the county court and the parliamentary Commons.

⁶⁰ Three examples are Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, pp. 29-44; Payling, *Political Society*, pp. 19-62; and Saul, *Knights and esquires*, pp. 1-35.

⁶¹ Peter Coss, 'The Formation of the English Gentry', edited and republished in *idem, The origins of the English gentry* (Cambridge, 2003), 1-19.

The region that most closely adhered to English practice in law, language and social organization in fifteenth-century Ireland was the Dublin hinterland – the ‘four obedient shires’ of Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth. If a gentry is to be found in fifteenth-century Ireland, it will be found here.

To begin, the ‘families below the level of magnate’ in these counties recognizably constituted a form of lesser nobility. Their way of life was based on the ownership of land that they did not physically work themselves – a crude but in many ways the most fundamental marker of a gentleman in the broad sense.⁶² What labour they performed was in those fields recognised as fitting for men of gentle estate – service, of the crown or the magnates, and above all military service. In England the chivalric, military ideal remained the basis of gentry identity, and even men whose lives had been spent practicing in the law chose to portray themselves on funerary monuments as armoured knights.⁶³ In fifteenth-century Ireland, military service remained very much a part of the daily life of the county elite. Their typical dwelling was the fortified tower house.⁶⁴ Service in the *posse comitatus* was frequent in the constant, small-scale warfare of the fifteenth century.⁶⁵ A sixteenth-century record of the general hosting of the gentlemen of Meath records the armed service in person of such minor figures as Map of Maprath, a family whose most prestigious office in the fifteenth century was that of collector of subsidies in the barony of Kells.⁶⁶ Furthermore, as Brendan Smith demonstrated, the landholders of the four obedient shires retained a keen sense of lordship, with very minor figures describing themselves as lord of their principal estate, such as the Peter Paris, soi-disant ‘lord of Aghir’ who granted land in Termonfeckin to Walter Dowdall in 1372.⁶⁷

⁶² Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, p. 45.

⁶³ Maurice Keen, ‘Chivalry’ in R. Radelescu and A. Truelove (eds.), *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), 35-49.

⁶⁴ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: Feudal power in a Gaelic world* (London, 1997), 201-25.

⁶⁵ For example, the entry for 1412 in the annals of Ulster - *Annals of Ulster*, ed. and trans. W. M. Hennessy & B. Mac Carthy, 4 vols. (Dublin 1887–1901, repr. Dublin, 1998), iii, p. 63.

⁶⁶ *Calendar of Carew Manuscripts, preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth*, ed. J. S. Brewer and William Bullen (London, 1871), iii, p.194; Peter Crooks (ed.), *A Calendar of Irish Chancery Letters, c. 1244–1509* (online edition, Dublin, 2012), available at <http://chancery.tcd.ie/> [hereafter CIRCLE], Patent Roll 1 Henry VI, no. 124

⁶⁷ Smith, *Crisis and survival*, p. 9; Charles McNeill and A. J. Otway-Ruthven (eds.), *Dowdall Deeds* (Dublin, 1960), no. 252.

As in England, the existence of the parliamentary peerage separated these landholders from the higher nobility. While the Irish parliament had been divided into lords and commons by the late fourteenth century, the peerage was not strictly defined. The distinction between the parliamentary peers and the feudal barons was a new feature of the social and political landscape of the lordship in the early years of the fifteenth century, the culmination of a process of underway by the end of the reign of Edward III.⁶⁸ In the first half of the century the distinction between the Hussey barons of Galtrim and the Nugent barons of Delvin and the Darcy family of Platin was a fine one indeed. Barons of Delvin and of Galtrim, and those who made no claim to a baronial title, might equally expect to be personally summoned to attend parliament.⁶⁹ By 1442 however the restriction of the peerage had so advanced that the Irish council requested the power to make temporal peers to undo the shortage.⁷⁰ The creation by patent of Irish peers for the first time in the 1460s marks a conscious distinction between the peers and those who were not peers.⁷¹

The small size of the Irish peerage meant that many leading landholders who were not peers played a very prominent role in the lordship. The Irish peerage was highly stratified, with a large gulf separating the great comital families of Kildare, Ormond and Desmond from the lesser magnates, such as the barons of Slane, both in wealth and political power; while the gap in wealth between the lesser peers and the greater non-peer families might be slim or non-existent.⁷² Nonetheless, the peers jealously guarded their status. The Irish parliament in 1460 decried the 'inordinate and false presumption of Thomas Bathe' for claiming to be a peer as lord of Louth 'to which he has no title of inheritance'.⁷³ In 1449 the parliament decreed that no lord of parliament (significantly drawing a distinction between the peers and those who held a

⁶⁸ H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The Irish parliament in the middle ages* (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 129-35; William Lynch, *A view of the legal institutions, honorary hereditary offices, and feudal baronies established in Ireland during the reign of Henry II* (London, 1830), pp. 122-32.

⁶⁹ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, pp. 303-4; Lynch, *Legal institutions*, pp. 325-35.

⁷⁰ Sir Harris Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and ordinances of the Privy Council of England* (7 vols, London, 1834-7), v, pp. 184-5; Richardson and Sayles *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 177.

⁷¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 134.

⁷² Power, *European frontier elite*, p. 54.

⁷³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 652-9

purely customary title) was to be made serve as sheriff.⁷⁴ When James Fleming, lord of Slane, was appointed sheriff of Meath in 1472 in contravention of this act he received £20 rather than the usual £10 from the issues of the county 'in aid and support of his honour and charge', because as 'a baron and lord of parliament' James was '*of greater honour and reputation than divers other persons who have occupied the said office in the said county*'.⁷⁵

At the other end of the scale, the unsettled conditions may have meant that investment in land was less tempting for merchants, lawyers and administrators in Ireland than for their contemporaries in England. Nonetheless the meteoric rise of the Prestons from Lancashire merchants to members of the Irish peerage demonstrated that service in the central administration and practice of the law could be an entry to landed society in Ireland as in England. Several other patrician families made the same transition to landed society. In Dublin the urban families of Sargent, Burnell and Mareward entered the highest ranks of county society in the late fourteenth century through the classic gentry mechanisms of marriage, purchasing land and practice of the law. A century later the Usshers achieved the same feat.⁷⁶ The Sherlock family of Athboy would appear to have done the same in Meath, albeit with less spectacular success. Indeed the service of Sir Robert Burnell of Balgriffin as sheriff of the county and mayor of the city of Dublin in alternating years in the 1450s and 60s demonstrates a connection between civic and county elite that if anything exceeds anything known from contemporary England.⁷⁷

Thus the landholding elite of English Ireland was a form of lesser nobility, and in the Dublin hinterland at least it mirrored the English gentry in its permeability to those rising from below and the much clearer division between it and the nobility above. Moving on, can we say that the participation of this lesser nobility in local government constituted a partnership similar to that between crown and gentry in England? County

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-17.

⁷⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 4-7

⁷⁶ James Moynes, 'The Prestons of Gormanston, c. 1300-1532: an Anglo-Irish gentry family' *Riocht na Midhe*, xiv, (2003), 26-54; Charles Smith, 'Patricians in medieval Dublin: the career of the Sargent family' in Seán Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin XI: Proceedings of the Friends of Medieval Dublin Symposium 2009* (Dublin, 2011), 219-28.

⁷⁷ Horrox, 'Urban gentry', p. 34.

government in the lordship was exactly modelled on that of England, with the same offices of sheriff, coroner, and keepers of the peace; although the subsequent evolution of these offices in England and Ireland diverged somewhat as the centuries progressed.⁷⁸ It is notable that the military role of the sheriffs and especially, as we shall see, of the keepers of the peace remained far more important in Ireland than in England, where it was eclipsed by judicial and administrative functions. As in England, the county offices were increasingly limited to members of the leading landholding families of the shire as the fourteenth century progressed.⁷⁹ Requirements of residency and minimum landed income were introduced for county offices during the early fourteenth century, as in England; it would appear that few served outside their county of residence.⁸⁰ As we lack detailed records of landed incomes in Ireland, it is impossible to say to what extent the income restrictions were adhered to, but as we shall see patterns of office-holding display clear gradations of status in county society which appear to have accorded roughly with differences in wealth.

It is clear that in later medieval Ireland there was a large number of families that contributed to the government of their counties. If we exclude men who were outsiders appointed as seneschal of the liberty of Meath, 55 individuals from 41 county families served as sheriff, seneschal of the liberty, sheriff of the cross, or sheriff of the liberty of Meath between 1399 and 1513; 30 individuals (eight of them churchmen) from 27 families served on commissions of the peace (which, however, do not survive after 1431), while 28 men, half of whom came from families that did not provide a sheriff during this period, were elected as escheator and clerk of the market of Meath between 1454 and 1513. If we extend our gaze to the collectors of subsidies, which as we shall see included a mixture of prominent and minor landholding families, we find more than 200 individuals from 185 families taking part in local office, albeit at a very low level. In Meath then, it is clear that there existed a considerable body of landholding families that participated at a high level in the administration of their county, and a very much larger body that could be called on to serve the royal administration in their immediate localities. Broad participation seems to have been the rule in all four shires of the Dublin

⁷⁸ A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish Shire Government', pp. 1-28.

⁷⁹ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 264-88.

⁸⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V*, pp. 298-9.

hinterland. In County Dublin, 41 individuals from 22 families held the office of sheriff; 21 individuals from 15 county families (the elite of the shrieval families) served on the commissions of the peace. Thus in the four obedient shires the royal government could draw on a large body of local men to carry out the administration of their shires. As we shall see these numbers likely conceal a much wider gentry society of families whose service is hidden by the gaps in the record or who simply never held county office in the period.

Moving on to the fourth of our five definitions, can the county elite of English Ireland be said to have exercised collective control over its tenantry and social inferiors? The archetype of this form of social control is the commission of the peace, by which means the normal exercise of justice in the English counties was increasingly delegated to a group of 'amateur landlord-magistrates'. Although the Commons were unsuccessful in their efforts to attain control of the appointment of justices, the presence of leading county gentry on these commissions was a clear recognition of their importance in the counties and a co-option of local power structures into royal administration; in return the gentry, through their leading members, acquired collective judicial power over their tenantry.⁸¹

On its introduction at the end of the thirteenth century, the Irish commission of the peace exactly mirrored the English archetype. Its focus was military – arraying arms, leading the military forces of the county, conducting negotiations with neighbouring Gaelic lordships – and policing, being used to bolster the sheriff's power by co-opting the major landowners of the county. Any judicial powers held by those receiving commissions were directly linked to these duties – for example, the imposition of fines for those failing to fulfil their military duties or those insufficiently equipped for their station in society. However, while the English keepers of the peace fairly swiftly lost their military focus and were gradually transformed into justices of the peace, their Irish colleagues diverged. Robin Frame has demonstrated that the pre-eminent role of the commissioners remained that of directing the military forces of the county. They remained commissioners of array a century after their English equivalents had lost this

⁸¹ Coss, 'Formation of the English gentry', 49-50

role. Their commissions occasionally included powers to hear and determine or to deliver the gaols, but these remained the exception rather than the rule.⁸² This military emphasis is clear in the surviving commissions.

However, it would not be correct to conclude from this that the leading county landholders of English Ireland did not exercise collective control in a manner comparable to the English gentry. Peter Coss has emphasised the importance of studying the personnel of the fourteenth-century English commissions over a narrower constitutional focus on their changing judicial powers. He points out the very large overlap in personnel between commissions of the peace and specific judicial commissions which suggests that even before the judicial competence of the commissions of the peace was fully established, their members were already exercising these powers in the localities.⁸³

A shift in focus from the institution of the keeper or justice of the peace to the personnel that featured on commissions of the peace and other commissions of an unambiguously judicial nature makes it clear that in the lordship of Ireland the leading men of the counties – who made up the main body of the keepers of the peace – also played a very significant role in the exercise of justice in their localities. Unfortunately the nineteenth-century record commissioners, whose calendars provide the main surviving sources for the Irish administration, had a lamentable tendency to shorten lengthy and detailed judicial commissions to ‘appointment of X to inquire, etc.’ thus obscuring niceties of purview and judicial competence.⁸⁴

Bearing this in mind, let us examine the personnel of the judicial commissions. Taking the commissions of the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V, excluding commissions which were unambiguously restricted to financial matters, we arrive at a figure of ninety-five individuals taking part in fifty commissions involving one or more of the four

⁸² Frame, ‘Judicial powers of the medieval Irish keepers of the peace’, pp. 301-17

⁸³ Coss, *Origins of the English gentry*, pp. 181-7

⁸⁴ An excellent example is the difference between the 1403 commission of the peace for county Dublin as presented in the nineteenth-century calendar of the chancery material and as preserved among the materials of the eighteenth-century antiquarian Walter Harris: CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 82; *Rotulorum Patentium et Clausorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Calendarium*, ed. E. Tresham (Dublin, 1828) [henceforth RCH], p. 178 no. 77(a)

'obedient shires'.⁸⁵ It is immediately clear that the Dublin government had a distinct preference for its own personnel. These included such career administrators such as William Tynbegh, veteran of 15 commissions who held office at various times as King's attorney, justice of the king's bench and chief baron of the exchequer. A large number, unsurprisingly, were members of the Irish judiciary; 8 individuals with a known judicial position amassed 39 appointments between them.⁸⁶ The legal expertise these men possessed obviously made them ideal candidates. However, it is clear that the county landholders of the obedient shires played a significant role in these commissions. At least thirty-nine of those appointed to judicial commissions in Dublin, Meath, Louth and Kildare in the first two reigns of the fifteenth century were not members of the royal administration and had no obvious qualification apart from their position as leading county landholders. Furthermore, many of those who held government or judicial office came from a gentry background. Richard Rede, of a relatively minor Meath family, had a legal education and served on commissions both in Ireland and England, and served in Ireland in the exchequer and on the king's bench; it is notable that he featured most frequently on commissions involving that county. Similarly Robert Burnell, member of a commission of assize of *novel disseisin* in 1402, was a baron of the Irish exchequer, but he was also a leading Dublin landholder.⁸⁷ Thus the leading landholders of the four obedient shires had a strong presence in the judicial commissions for their counties. Importantly, the commissions they received had the same powers as those featuring senior government figures. Many landholders figured on commissions concerned with a single assize of *novel disseisin*, but then so did the chief justice of the common bench, while other landholders held commissions to hear and determine or of gaol delivery, albeit that commissions with power to determine featured experienced administrators in addition to leading county landholders, presumably to provide the necessary legal expertise.

⁸⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 141; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 15, 221, 223, 238, 239, 247, 254; Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 160, 278, 281, 357; Pat. 5 Hen. IV, nos. 127, 128; Pat. 7 Hen. IV, nos. 151-3; Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 28; Pat. 10 Hen. IV, nos. 15, 194-6, 198; Pat. 11 Hen. IV, nos. 80, 94-6; Cl. 12 Hen. IV, no. 14; Pat. 13 Hen. IV, nos. 119, 121; Pat. 2 Hen. V, nos. 178, 196, 202, 203, 205, 206; Pat. 3 Hen. V, nos. 125, 126, 140; Pat. 5 Hen. V, no. 41; Pat. 8 Hen. V nos. 4-6, 8-11; Pat. 9 Hen. V, nos. 118-20

⁸⁶ F. Elrington Ball, *The judges in Ireland, 1221-1921* (2 vols., London, 1926), i, pp. 163-230

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 167, 171

The presence of county landholders on commissions of assize of *novel disseisin* is significant, as these commissions touched on their very basis of their social position – their landed wealth and that of their neighbours.⁸⁸ But what of collective social control? Control of the ownership of land, as vested in the assize of *novel disseisin*, was an important factor, but indirect. Commissions of gaol delivery and commissions to hear and determine involved the power of punishment, which was vital for social control, and as we have seen the landholding elite of these counties played an important but by no means dominant role on these commissions. It is possible that some of the commissions simply recorded in the nineteenth-century as commissions to inquire into ‘treasons etc.’, some of which were exclusively staffed by county landholders, included power to determine, but unfortunately the vague calendar records make definitive conclusions impossible. More significant for social control was enforcement of labour laws. The role of enforcing the statute and ordinance of labourers had by the fifteenth century been invested in the English justices of the peace.⁸⁹ In Ireland however as always the position was more vague. Fourteenth-century justices of labourers were appointed from among leading county landholders.⁹⁰ However, their efforts were perhaps too zealous. Emigration of workers, for which the justices were blamed, led to the cancellation of their commissions in 1366.⁹¹ Henceforth, though wage regulation remained on the books, the focus of Irish labour legislation was to combat emigration by punishing mariners who enabled workers to cross the Irish Sea.⁹² The exercise of this legislation followed the flexible practice of most Irish legislation, being issued as part of wider judicial commissions, though its inclusion or exclusion followed no readily identifiable logic. There are only five commissions from the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V that specifically include labour legislation, of which three concern one or more of the ‘obedient shires’.⁹³ Of these, two are wide commissions concerning treasons, felonies, and other areas of competence, and all include power to hear and determine the same.

⁸⁸ Smith, *Crisis and survival*, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Bertha Haven Putnam, ‘The Transformation of the Keepers of the Peace into the Justices of the Peace 1327-1380’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fourth series, xii (1929), 19-48, pp. 43-7.

⁹⁰ For example, John Darcy and Nicholas Taaffe in Meath and William Sutton and John Herbert in Louth, 1386 - CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Ric. II, nos. 206, 207.

⁹¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V*, pp. 464-7.

⁹² *Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V*, pp. 516-19; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 18-19.

⁹³ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 221; Pat. 7 Hen. IV, no. 153; Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 28; Pat. 2 Hen. V, no. 206; Pat. 8 Hen. V, no. 1.

The most detailed of these was issued for Dublin, Meath, Louth and Drogheda in 1415; it included such senior officials as the treasurer of Ireland and the chief justice of the common bench, but also Thomas Talbot of Malahide, John Netterville of Ballygarth and John Fleming of Moretown, esquires. It is possible that the bowdlerized commissions of 'treasons etc.' in the record commissioners' calendars conceal many more such appointments. However it would appear that the enforcement of this legislation was a general responsibility both of local officers and judicial commissioners. A statute of the Irish parliament of 1410 gave responsibility for the punishment of mariners guilty of transporting labourers out of Ireland to the mayors and sovereigns of the towns, the seneschals of the liberties and the sheriffs and justices of the peace in the counties.⁹⁴ As we have seen, these county offices were dominated by the leading landholders of the shire; thus their participation in government enabled them to exercise collective social control over their tenants and labourers. In concluding this treatment of the exercise of justice in the lordship of Ireland, it may be said that while unsettled conditions of Ireland meant that the leading landholders did not acquire so firm a control of justice in the localities as that gained by the English justices of the peace, it is clear that they had a very significant role to play in the exercise of justice in the four 'obedient shires' of the Dublin hinterland, and their participation in the judicial commissions and in local government gave them important powers of collective social control.

Finally we must ask if these leading families shared a collective identity and were capable of expressing and pursuing their shared interests. In the lordship of Ireland as in England, parliament provided the forum for the expression of the interests of the county and urban elite.⁹⁵ The statutes of this parliament are full of decisions purportedly taken 'at the request of the Commons'. It is of course not the case that each of these represented the bona fide voice of the people. It was part of the usual machinery of the parliament that measures which the government sought to implement were supplied to the Commons to be formally requested; as in 1470, when the request of the Commons that all the acts passed in a previous parliament to the 'prejudice, injury or derogation of the most noble and good and gracious lord Thomas Fitzmaurice, earl of

⁹⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V*, pp. 516-19.

⁹⁵ Coss, 'Formation of the English gentry', pp. 51-52.

Kildare' was generously granted by the justiciar, Thomas Fitzmaurice, earl of Kildare.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it is possible to see in many of these petitions the genuine expression of the collective interests of the commons of the counties. It is unsurprising that in the turbulent conditions of fifteenth-century Ireland, a large number of such petitions involved collective defence, as in the frequent issues of subsidies and grants to private individuals and towns to build fortifications, for the defence and at the request of the commons of the county. In 1465 an act was passed 'at the request of the commons' empowering the leading men of the counties of Meath, Kildare, Dublin and Louth to establish bodies of armed men for the defence of their county by consultation with the gentry (the word used is *gentils*) thereof.⁹⁷ Other petitions concerned local administration. The commons of county Meath claimed in 1465 that the shrievalty was 'so chargeable an office that divers of the *gentils* of the said county have been greatly injured, and some of them utterly ruined by the holding the said office'; they succeeded in attaining a grant to the sheriff of £10 of the county's issues.⁹⁸ In 1475, the dearth of eligible sheriffs in the four counties and especially in Dublin resulted in the revocation of grants of exemption from service in return for a similar grant to the sheriff, again at the request of the commons of the county.⁹⁹ Other concerns were more prosaic. In 1463 the commons of Meath secured 6 acres of land to support the maintenance of Babesbridge, considered 'a great ease to all the commons of the said county'.¹⁰⁰

Nowhere perhaps is the use of parliament by the gentry to pursue their collective interests more clearly displayed than in the series of 20 petitions presented to Thomas Butler, the deputy lieutenant, in a parliament of 1410.¹⁰¹ The first petition sought the outlawry of those practising coigne and livery, a method of supporting an armed force by billeting it on the inhabitants of the countryside which was the *bete noire* of the lesser landholders, particularly those of the nascent Pale, well into the sixteenth century. The next sought affirmation of the principal that the sheriff be appointed by election of the leading men of the county, specifically by the 'most able

⁹⁶ *Stat. Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 660-1.

⁹⁷ *Stat. Ire. Edw. IV.*, i, pp. 344-7.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 368-9.

⁹⁹ *Stat. Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 256-7

¹⁰⁰ *Stat. Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 206-7

¹⁰¹ *Stat. Ire. John-Hen. V*, pp. 520-7

and wisest men, [that is] to say, 2 or 3 of every barony'. Others concerned the behaviour of royal officials in the shires. Amongst other requests they asked that the jurors selected by the escheator for his inquests be 'inheritable of 100 shillings in land or rent by the year at least', or if such were lacking, 'the best inheritors within the barony'. Perhaps most significant is the penultimate bill, concerned with the justices of the peace. The Commons asked that the justices of the peace in each county 'be henceforth of the most able persons dwelling in the same counties and not otherwise.' This was an uncontroversial request and it is recorded that the deputy was pleased to grant it. However, the Commons went further and requested that the selection of the justices be made 'by the election of honest men living in the shire'. This attempt to achieve local control over the commissions of the peace exactly mirrors that of the English commons, and like the English commons they were rebuffed: 'as to the election, [the deputy's] pleasure is that the order heretofore used shall be continued.'¹⁰² These petitions clearly reflect the interests of the county elite – local control of the appointment of officers, the elimination of coign and livery, and the recognition of the preeminent role of those who held the most land. These leading landholders, then, were aware of collective interests and were capable of formulating and pursuing these in parliament. Did this sense of collective identity have a territorial basis?

The principal that only those resident in a county, and possessed of a sufficient amount of land, should serve in local office was defended by the commons of the lordship of Ireland, just as it was by the English gentry; and the principal was accepted by the Dublin government. It was rare for men to hold office in more than one county. Although it is difficult to judge from these sources how closely the landholders of English Ireland identified with their county of residence, their attachment to the principals of county residency and county election for the officers is suggestive of at least some conception of 'belonging' to a county. Participation in parliament and in local office-holding, and taxation organised on the basis of county-by-county subsidies, together with the organisation of defence may be expected to have contributed to such a conception. A rare insight into the mental world of this landed elite is provided by a commonplace book of the early sixteenth century belonging to Christopher Cusack of

¹⁰² Putnam, 'Transformation of the Keepers of the Peace', pp. 19-48.

Meath. It includes a list of the gentry of Meath in the early years of the sixteenth century, listed on a barony-by-barony basis.¹⁰³ The list is suggestive of a sense both of collective and territorial identity. Nevertheless the importance of the county for a sense of identity should not be exaggerated: the leading families of the four obedient shires, including Cusack's own, married and held lands across county borders, and it is clear that together the four counties of Meath, Louth, Dublin and Kildare formed a single fairly cohesive social region.¹⁰⁴

So, to conclude, the leading county families of the Dublin hinterland recognizably formed a class of lesser nobility. This form of lesser nobility was sharply segregated from the true 'nobility' above but open to the ingress of new families from below in the same manner, *mutatis mutandis*, as the gentry of England; and within it there were perceptible gradations of status reflected in titles and patterns of office-holding, as we shall see. The members of this class participated in government in their counties on a broad scale, and were the principal agents in their localities of the public authority. Through this service and their participation on the judicial commissions they gained a high degree of collective control over their tenants and social inferiors on a territorial basis; while in the lordship's parliament and the county court they had a forum for the expression of a collective identity and the pursuit of their shared interests. As a result, I propose that the leading landholders of the four obedient shires constituted an English gentry in Ireland.

Geography, chronology and terminology

I have chosen to set this study in the period between the departure of Richard II and the death of the eighth earl of Kildare. This period represents the nadir of active English political, fiscal and military intervention in the lordship, and consequently a

¹⁰³ TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v (reproduced in Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 170-5).

¹⁰⁴ Cusack's mother was Joan Owen of Diswellstown (bar. Castleknock, Co. Dublin), though the family's marriages were generally with other Meath families – TCD MS 594, ff. 35-35v; Smith, *Crisis and Survival*, 14-20; D. B. Quinn and K. W. Nicholls, 'Ireland in 1534' in T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin, and F. J. Byrne (eds.) *A new history of Ireland III: Early modern Ireland, 1534-1691* (Oxford, 1991; 1st edn. 1976), pp. 1-38.

period during which the under-resourced government of the lordship was especially reliant on local elites to carry out 'self-government at the king's command.'¹⁰⁵

Setting the work in this period has the advantage of drawing on work done for fourteenth-century officers by Frame, Smith, Foley and others, and continuing this to meet the work of D. B. Quinn and Steven Ellis at the close of the middle ages. It has the added advantage that in shedding light on families and individuals who do not usually feature in histories of medieval Ireland it might also shed light on a period that has historically received less attention than it deserves. The period of the study is long enough to show both consistent patterns and changes over time, while remaining short enough to be manageable.

The reader may feel that the bookmarks so chosen are somewhat arbitrary. While the Lancastrian revolution led to an immediate step-change in the government of Ireland, it did not produce an immediate change in the offices of local government or in patterns of office-holding. Similarly, it can hardly be maintained that the death of the eighth earl of Kildare had an impact on the coronership of Dublin. I can only plead that having chosen to set my study in the fifteenth century, some cut-off point was needed to make it manageable. The year 1500 marks no greater change than 1513, and would have cut off valuable evidence from later years of Henry VII; 1509 again marked no great turning point in history of office, while 1513 allowed me to draw with a clear conscience on the invaluable evidence of the Cusack commonplace book.¹⁰⁶

Turning from the chronological to the geographical boundaries of our study, it is asserted above that if a gentry is to be found in Ireland it will be found in the four obedient shires of Dublin, Meath, Louth and Kildare. Not by coincidence, this is also the only part of Ireland for which sufficient government and other records exist to make a study of officeholding feasible. Louth has enjoyed an exceptional degree of serious historical attention, being the subject of two monographs by Brendan Smith, among other publications.¹⁰⁷ While Kildare has not been quite so well served, the lack of

¹⁰⁵ Lydon, *Lordship of Ireland in the middle ages*, pp. 184-94.

¹⁰⁶ TCD MS 594.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *Crisis and survival*; *idem*, *Colonisation and conquest: The English in Louth, 1170-1330* (Cambridge, 1999).

recorded collectors of subsidy for the county in the late fifteenth century removes a key office for comparative purposes.¹⁰⁸ The pairing of Meath and Dublin provides a sufficiently large field of study – several hundred officers, at various levels, in our period – with sufficient similarities and sufficient differences (especially the existence of the liberty of Meath for most of our period, the relative size of the counties and extent of their frontier, the presence of several noble families in Meath, and the connections between the gentry of Dublin and the city of Dublin) to illuminate consistent patterns of officeholding as well as specific local trends. By focusing on these two counties alone it is possible to undertake a more comprehensive and thorough study of the individual officers and families in question, allowing us to better assess their origins, status, and patterns of service.

Of the two counties, Dublin was much the smaller. While no county in Ireland was without a frontier, Dublin, or rather Fingal, the part of the county that lay north of the river Liffey, was comparatively sheltered. In the north the river Delvin separated it from Duleek, the most sheltered barony of Meath, while to the west the Meath baronies of Skreen, Ratoath and Dunboyne, and the county of Kildare, provided a buffer. It was only to the south that the county lay exposed. The county notionally extended far south into the Wicklow mountains, but by the fifteenth century areas like Tallaght and Saggart not far southwest of the city might be considered to lie in the march, while in the middle of the fifteenth century those landholders lucky enough to live north of the Liffey felt the need to fortify the river crossings against the ‘sundry Irish enemies and English rebels’ entering Fingal by night.¹⁰⁹ The indistinct frontier zone in the south of the county was populated by a number of English lineage groups, the Harolds, Lawlesses, Archbolds and Walshes, whose relationship with the royal government and their neighbours to the north varied from cooperation to outright conflict.¹¹⁰ Though they did not stand totally aloof from the machinery of royal government, as we shall see, they played only an occasional role in the offices of the county.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ The collection of subsidies in Kildare differed from the other counties in several respects, not least in the lack of a fixed assessment – see below, pp. 268-9.

¹⁰⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 402-5; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 262-5; and see below, pp. 255-6.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Maginn, ‘English marcher lineages in south Dublin in the late middle ages’ *IHS*, xxxiv, no. 134 (Nov., 2004), 113-136, *passim*; and see below, pp. 285-88.

¹¹¹ See below, pp. 285-88.

In Meath the frontier and its demands led to the dominance in office of the gentry of the more sheltered eastern baronies, as Steven Ellis has observed.¹¹² Ellis notes Christopher Plunkett of Clone, from the frontier barony of Fore, as a solitary exception among the late fifteenth-century sheriffs.¹¹³ Another possible exception to this trend was Andrew Nugent. The record commissioner's report on the Irish memoranda rolls, compiled in the early nineteenth century, gives the first entry of the roll of 22 Hen. VII (1506-7) as Michaelmas proffers by Andrew Nugent and Robert Taaffe.¹¹⁴ While their offices are not specified, the history of both families and comparison with the more fully transcribed memoranda rolls suggest that they were sheriffs of Meath and Louth respectively. Andrew Nugent would appear to have been the Andrew Nugent of Multyfarnham who was listed among the gentry of the barony of Corkaree in 1511 and was collector of a subsidy there in 1508.¹¹⁵ Essentially, however, one must concur with Steven Ellis in recognising the 'virtual monopoly' of the gentry of the eastern baronies over the office of sheriff.¹¹⁶

In Dublin most of our officers whose landed base can be identified came from north of the Liffey, though there were exceptions, such as Thomas Sherlock of Rathcreedan (bar. Newcastle), sheriff 1470-1472. The relative security of Fingal doubtless favoured the appointment of its gentry to the county offices, but it is important not to overstate the significance of the divide. Several of the leading office-holding families, including the Burnells, Barnewalls of Drimnagh, and (especially) the Talbots of Feltrim/Belgard, held lands on both sides of the Liffey; and there is no particular evidence that geography served to split the gentry of Dublin.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 93.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹¹⁴ 8th report of the Record Commissioners of Ireland, supplement 7, p. 539; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 178, n. 33.

¹¹⁵ TCD MS 594, f. 28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 174; RC 8/43, pp. 274-5. The Nugents of Multyfarnham may have been the family of 'Teffernan' descended from William, younger brother of Sir Richard Nugent, baron of Delvin; alternatively, Andrew of Multyfarnham may be identical Andrew Nugent of Donore, fourth son of James Nugent, Richard's son. The Nugents of Donore were buried in the church of Multyfarnham in the seventeenth century – John Lodge, *The peerage of Ireland*, revised by Mervyn Archdall (7 vols, Dublin, 1789, i, pp. 217, 222-25).

¹¹⁶ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 93.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Nigel Saul, *Scenes from provincial life: Knightly families in Sussex, 1280-1400* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 60-1; Peter Fleming, 'The landed elite, 1300-1500' in Sheila Sweetinburgh (ed.), *Later Medieval Kent, c.1220-1540* (Woodbridge, 2010), 209-233.

The royal county of Dublin surrounded two significant independent jurisdictions. These were the very extensive liberties of the archbishop of Dublin, and the franchises of Dublin city. The archiepiscopal liberty, only roughly represented by the modern incarnation of the baronies of Uppercross and Nethercross, contained not far short of a quarter of the lands of the modern county.¹¹⁸ The coroners of Dublin and the sheriff's officers were excluded from the liberty, with warrants to be delivered instead to the chief officer of the liberty, the seneschal of St Sepulchre, who accounted for the issues of Dublin alongside the sheriff.¹¹⁹ Any king's officer who trespassed on the rights of the archbishops risked ecclesiastical censure or worse.¹²⁰ Under the seneschal or bailiff of St Sepulchre served the bailiffs of the various archiepiscopal manors. The archbishop's administration thus offered an alternative field for service. Few of the Dublin gentry can be shown to have taken up office in the administration of the liberty, with the majority of those who can be shown to have held office coming from the same class of semi-professional administrator that served as undersheriff or sheriff's attorney.¹²¹ These were men like John Barret, who in addition to serving as undersheriff of the county and bailiff of the city of Dublin held at various times the offices of seneschal of St. Mary's Abbey and the archbishop's seneschal of St Sepulchre.¹²² John Woodlock, who was 'a pleader and one of the constables' (*narrator et unus Constabulariorum*) of Archbishop Richard Talbot in 1442, represents a unique surviving example of a Dublin gentleman holding a named office in the archbishop's service in our period.¹²³ While John's family provided sheriffs and knights of the shire for county Dublin, they had a landed base in the archbishop's manor of Fingal, providing an obvious gateway to such service. In general however the men who held the office of bailiff or seneschal of St Sepulchre's – the most important position in the archiepiscopal liberty – were not members of the

¹¹⁸ A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The mediaeval church lands of Co. Dublin' in J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall, and F. X. Martin (eds.) *Medieval studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S. J.* (Dublin, 1961), 54-73, pp. 54, 56.

¹¹⁹ Attachments for the four crown pleas were served jointly by the serjeants of the royal county and the bailiffs of the archbishops – Charles McNeill, 'The secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops of Dublin' *JRSAI*, sixth series, v, no. 2 (Jun. 30, 1915), 81-108, pp. 91, 93-6 and *passim*; NAI, MS 761, pp. 251, 267, 287, 301-3.

¹²⁰ McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', pp. 97, 105; and see below, p. 210.

¹²¹ See below, pp. 241-3.

¹²² See below, pp. 236-7.

¹²³ CIRCLE, Pat. 21 Hen. VI, no. 1; Rev. James Graves (ed.) *A Roll of the Proceedings of the King's Council in Ireland For a Portion of the Sixteenth Year of the Reign of Richard the Second, AD 1392-93* (London, 1877), appendix, pp. 298-9.

Dublin gentry, tending instead to be men with experience in the exchequer or chancery.¹²⁴

Nonetheless it is likely that the records of office greatly underestimate the significance of the archbishop's service to the gentry of the county. If the records of the archbishops had been better served, it is likely that we would find equivalents in Dublin of men like Laurence Taaffe, frequent sheriff of Louth and servant of the archbishop of Armagh.¹²⁵ Even without such records, the presence at Tallaght in July 1433 of two 'gentlemen of the diocese of Dublin' (*generosis dioc' Dublin'*), John Fitzwilliam and Robert Barnewall (both from prominent office-holding families but neither, apparently, an officer of local government themselves), alongside the mayor of Dublin, as witnesses to Archbishop Richard Talbot's appointment of delegates to the council of Basel, gives us a glimpse of a world of service to lay and ecclesiastical lords that must have been of great importance to the gentry of Dublin.¹²⁶ Other men found employment in the service of the earls of Ormond, administering the earl's estates in the north of the county.¹²⁷ Such service might well complement service to the crown – John Woodlock, the archbishop's constable, is likely identical with or a very close relative of the man of the same name who served as sheriff of Dublin in c. 1475; while Walter Bermingham served both as chief serjeant of Ormond's north Dublin lordship and as the escheator and clerk of the market of county Dublin.¹²⁸ The service of lay and ecclesiastical lords, whether a complement to service in county government or as an alternative to it, was a key part of the activity of the English gentry, and deserves much more study in an Irish context.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Examples include William Tynbegh, seneschal in 1401, and Clement FitzLyons, bailiff in 1496 - *Christ church deeds*, ed. M. J. McEnery and Raymond Refaüssé (Dublin, 2001), no. 802; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 252-3.

¹²⁵ *Registrum Iohannis Mey: The register of John Mey, Archbishop of Armagh, 1443-1456*, ed. W. G. H. Quigley and E. F. D. Roberts (Belfast, 1972), no. 141, pp. 135-6.

¹²⁶ NAI, Ferguson coll. iii, ff. 85-6.

¹²⁷ *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172-1603*, ed. Edmund Curtis (6 vols., Dublin, 1942-43), iv, pp. 316-17, 349; and see below, pp. 169-70.

¹²⁸ See below, pp. 169-70.

¹²⁹ Richmond 'Ruling Classes and Agents of the State', pp. 14-16; Jessica Freeman, 'Middlesex in the Fifteenth Century: Community or Communities?' in Michael Hicks (ed.) *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2001), 89-103, p. 93.

Like the archbishops, the mayor, bailiffs and citizens of Dublin jealously guarded their franchises against the intrusions of the officers of the county.¹³⁰ These franchises grew at least once during the fifteenth century, when Thomas Bermingham had his lands at Cabra redefined as part of the city for tax purposes.¹³¹ The potential friction between the officers of the county and the citizens of Dublin was however greatly reduced by the remarkably extensive overlap between the landed elite of the county and the city's patrician elite. This relationship between the county elite and the civic elite of Dublin represents an important finding of this thesis.¹³²

Meath lacked an equivalent urban centre to Dublin, though here too men of the towns might play a not insignificant role in the government of the county.¹³³ The medieval county of Meath was by far the largest and almost certainly the most populous of the 'four obedient shires' of the lordship of Ireland in the fifteenth century. In the parliamentary subsidy of 1346, incomes from the county, liberty and clergy of Meath were greater than those of Dublin, Kildare and Louth combined.¹³⁴ To an even greater extent than Dublin, the government of this large territory, with hostile frontiers to the north, west, and south-west, was complicated by the existence of a private jurisdiction – in this case, the liberty of Trim (or simply the liberty of Meath). During the periods of the liberty's operation, the greater part by far of the county was at a remove from the usual machinery of county government, with quasi-regal powers invested in its lords and their descendants, represented locally by their seneschals. At such times the county was divided into the liberty and the county of the cross of Meath, the latter consisting of the lands of the church as they stood at the close of the twelfth century.¹³⁵ The sheriff of the cross was elected by the community of the cross of Meath.¹³⁶ However, as the

¹³⁰ See, for example, the conflict between the king's coroner and the city bailiffs in 1327 - J. T. Gilbert (ed.) *Chartularies of St. Mary's Abbey, Dublin: with the register of its house at Dunbrody and annals of Ireland* (London, 2 vols., 1884), i, pp. 6-10; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Ric. II, no. 2.

¹³¹ Quinn (ed.) 'The bills and statutes of the Irish parliaments of Henry VII and Henry VIII', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 10 (Jul., 1941), 71-169, p. 78; RC 8/43, pp. 106-11.

¹³² See below, pp. 69-80.

¹³³ See below, pp. 80-2.

¹³⁴ Robin Frame, *English Lordship in Ireland 1318-1361* (Oxford, 1982), p. 83.

¹³⁵ Keith Stringer, 'States, liberties and communities in medieval Britain and Ireland (c. 1100-1400)' in Prestwich (ed.), *Liberties and identities in the medieval British Isles* (Woodbridge, 2008), 5-36, p. 5; Beth Hartland, 'The liberties of Ireland in the reign of Edward I' in *op cit*, 200-16, pp. 201-2, 210.

¹³⁶ Otway-Ruthven, *History of medieval Ireland*, pp. 100, 174, 187, 212-13; *eadem*, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', pp. 4 n. 5, 5-6; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 400-3.

lords of Meath underwent a series of prolonged minorities in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the liberty was frequently in the king's hand, at which point the jurisdictions of the seneschal and sheriff of the cross were merged into one shrievalty of Meath.¹³⁷ In 1461 the lord of the liberty ascended the English throne as Edward IV. At this point a degree of indecision appears to have set in with regard to the liberty's status. In 1472 the liberty was restored, with a seneschal representing the King in his persona of lord of Meath. However, in December of that year the liberty was demolished once more and a sheriff reinstated, with seneschal Edward Plunkett accused of abuse of his position. Next March, both the liberty and Plunkett were restored, only to be dissolved again in 1476 and revived yet once more in 1478. In 1479 the liberty was dissolved for what would prove to be the final time.¹³⁸

The reasons for this indecision perhaps lie in the competing impulses of centralisation and decentralisation. Liberty jurisdictions gave the inhabitants of the lordship freedom from accountability at the exchequer, and gave them access to justice without having to make the journey to Dublin, enabling a degree of flexibility that could be great advantage in the unsettled conditions of late fifteenth-century Ireland.¹³⁹ Across the Irish Sea, the gentry of the liberty of Chester were vocal in the defence of their liberty privileges.¹⁴⁰ From the point of view of the royal government, the Irish franchises were a mixed blessing. In a time of difficult communications and the fluid politics, with lordships both Gaelic and English engaged in almost continuous, multivalent (though small-scale) warfare, the delegation of control and defence to the local community was a much cheaper and often more effective approach than direct governance.¹⁴¹ The advantages of liberty jurisdictions in troubled regions were recognised by some members of the royal government. William Brabazon, writing in June 1536, advised that the recently resumed liberty of Wexford should be 'used as a liberty, and [the officers] not forced to repair to Dublin till the country between be more

¹³⁷ Potterton, *Trim*, p. 112.

¹³⁸ Steven Ellis, 'The destruction of the liberties: some further evidence' in *Historical Research*, liv, no. 130 (Nov 1981), pp. 150–161, p. 153; Potterton, *Trim*, pp. 114–15

¹³⁹ Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, p. 176

¹⁴⁰ Clayton, *Administration of Chester*, pp. 47–8, 51.

¹⁴¹ Ellis, 'Destruction of the liberties', p. 160

clear.¹⁴² Nonetheless the general outlook of the Dublin administration remained habitually hostile to liberties as inimical to its oversight and incomes.¹⁴³

D. B. Quinn posited that the restoration of the liberty, although welcomed by the landholders of Meath, was opposed by the earl of Kildare.¹⁴⁴ It is surely suggestive that the abolitions of the liberty were made at parliaments before Thomas and Gerald Fitzgerald, the seventh and eighth earls of Kildare; while the restorations of the liberty, barring the 1473 restoration before Kildare 'at the request of the commons', all appear to have been made either before an English deputy governor, as in 1478 before Henry, lord Grey, or by express command of the king, as in 1472 when Edward 'directed his writing under his sign manual and signet to Thomas earl of Kildare... that the said liberty be held with a seneschal and all other officers'.¹⁴⁵ The position of the earls of Kildare in this regard is surely the result of a natural opposition to the creation of an alternative centre of power in Meath at a time when Geraldine influence was reaching its zenith.¹⁴⁶

The existence of the liberty naturally had several important effects on office in Meath. One, the most obvious, is the appointment of outsiders to key posts, as we shall see. In Dublin, in contrast, county office was generally filled by election, especially after 1454 when the escheator joined the sheriff and the coroners as an elected officer. In Meath, when the liberty was in existence, the key relationship for appointment, thus changed from local electors to usually absentee lord.

Nonetheless it is important not to overstate the importance of the liberty. Richard, duke of York, spent an unusually long time physically present in Ireland, in 1449 and again ten years later. Even so this represented only a small fraction of the period for which he was lord of the liberty. The liberty and its offices certainly provided York with a source of patronage, as Vincent Gorman has shown.¹⁴⁷ Disposing of such patronage did not require York to be physically present in Ireland. But it is questionable just how much of a personal connection an appointment to liberty office – particularly

¹⁴² Brewer, J. S. and others (eds.), *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII* (23 vols, London, 1862-1932), x, n. 1032

¹⁴³ D. B. Quinn, 'Anglo-Irish local government', p. 377; Frame, *English lordship in Ireland*, p. 25

¹⁴⁴ D. B. Quinn, 'Aristocratic Autonomy', in Cosgrove (ed.), *NHI* ii, pp. 591-618; Potterton, *Trim*, p. 114

¹⁴⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, p. 765; ii, pp. 3-5, 95-7, 669, 731-3.

¹⁴⁶ Quinn, 'Aristocratic autonomy', pp. 602-3.

¹⁴⁷ Gorman, 'Richard, duke of York, and the development of an Irish faction', pp. 170, 172-3 and *passim*.

one made during the lord's absence – might represent. The appointment of William FitzEustace as chief serjeant of Meath in 1422, cited by Gorman as an example of the use of such patronage to establish a connection with an important Meath/Kildare gentry family, would in fact appear to have been a royal appointment while the liberty was in the king's hand.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, the appointment of John Darcy to stand in for William Welles as seneschal in September 1433 is dated 'by our council at Trim'.¹⁴⁹ Despite the later personal connection between Darcy and York, the initiative behind this appointment clearly lay with the men on the ground, in this case William Welles, rather than representing a deliberate act of patronage on the part of the young duke.¹⁵⁰

The career of Darcy's father, also John, demonstrates that there was often little distinction between those who served the royal government and those who served in the administration of the liberty. He was sheriff for several years during the reign of Henry IV, before serving as seneschal to Edmund Mortimer from 1414 to his death two years later. His younger contemporary Richard Nugent, baron of Delvin, served as seneschal for several years up to the death of Edmund Mortimer, as sheriff for several years immediately thereafter, before serving as seneschal again under Richard, duke of York.¹⁵¹ The key to Nugent's appointments both as sheriff and seneschal surely lie in his own prestige and the resources he could deploy for the county's administration and defence.¹⁵² At the other end of the century, during the liberty's flickering half-life between 1462 and 1480, Robert Bold, Edward Plunkett, and Oliver Plunkett each served both as sheriff and as seneschal, emphasising the extent to which both offices relied on the same type of individual. All in all, it is the career of William Welles (seneschal on and off from 1432 to 1452) that appears as exceptional. He was the only outsider to spend any length of time in the office during the fifteenth century. Even he felt the need to establish roots in Meath, marrying into the local gentry. He married the widow of John

¹⁴⁸ Gorman, 'Richard, duke of York, and the development of an Irish faction', p. 173; Gorman mistakenly places this appointment in 1432 - cf. NAI, Ferguson coll. 3, f. 55v; RC 8/39, p. 238; CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. V, no. 22.

¹⁴⁹ NAI, Ferguson coll. 3, f. 55.

¹⁵⁰ Gorman, 'Richard, duke of York, and the development of an Irish faction', p. 173. Gorman cites this appointment as having taken place in 1437; the reference he provides is in error.

¹⁵¹ In addition, his father William served as sheriff of Meath on several occasions during the reign of Henry IV.

¹⁵² Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, p. 276.

Darcy, who had served as Welles' stand-in as seneschal in 1433 and who was from a family which frequently served as sheriffs of Meath when it was in the king's hand.¹⁵³ Robert Bold too married into the local gentry and acquired the landed stake in the county that the gentry had come to expect from their sheriffs.¹⁵⁴

The administration of the liberty required a greater variety of officers than a royal county. These included judges, such as William Boys, who was justice to hold pleas in 1447. His family, though certainly numbered among the gentry of Meath, make no other appearance in office in our period.¹⁵⁵ Other theoretically specialised positions included the treasurer of the liberty, though it must be admitted that the role of this officer appears to have been rather more martial than we might have expected. An entry in the Irish annals for 1443 recorded conflict between the men of Meath and the Berminghams of Carbury started when the treasurer of Meath, 'i. the Barnwalls sonn' insulted a prominent member of the Bermingham family 'in the greate court in the town of Ath-truim'.¹⁵⁶ Two years later the same annals record the capture of 'innumberable greate preyes... by the Threasurer, .i. Barnwall'.¹⁵⁷ While the treasurer, Nicholas Barnewall (who had been in office since at least 1436) does appear in a more orthodox role paying rent on behalf of his lord for the site of the castle of Trim,¹⁵⁸ the office appears to have been a flexible one. His other appearances as treasurer include an appointment to hear an assize of novel disseisin and on another occasion a command to carry out an enquiry concerning the election of an abbot of St Mary's, Trim.¹⁵⁹ The office thus appears less as a specialised administrative position and more as a general position of leadership in the liberty. Other men served in humbler administrative positions such as seneschal's clerk or keeper of the rolls. The existence of the exchequer and other liberty institutions at Trim created a demand for men with clerical and legal

¹⁵³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 408-13.

¹⁵⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 226; *Stat. Roll Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 622-5; Lodge, *Peerage*, v, pp. 30-1; Smith, 'Patricians in medieval Dublin', pp. 226-7.

¹⁵⁵ TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v.

¹⁵⁶ 'The annals of Ireland, from the year 1443 to 1468, translated from the Irish by Dudley Firbisse, or, as he is more usually called, Duaid Mac Firbis, for Sir James Ware, in the 1666', ed. J. O'Donovan, in *The Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society*, i (Dublin, 1846), 198-302, p. 202.

¹⁵⁷ It is possible that Christopher Barnewall, who served as treasurer of Ireland for a few months in 1437, is meant - *Ann. MacFirbis*, p. 210.

¹⁵⁸ *The Register of John Swayne, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland 1418-1439*, ed. D. A. Chart (Belfast, 1935), p. 40.

¹⁵⁹ *CPR 1436-41*, p. 501; NLI MS 13, p. 151.

abilities in the town and in Newtown Trim, which in turn created a pool of experienced administrators available for service in the liberty, the county, and in the royal administration.¹⁶⁰ In this the liberty of Meath mirrored the example of the English palatinates of Chester and Lancaster.¹⁶¹

The liberty of Trim thus introduced a separate hierarchy of office, and gave the initiative in appointments to the lord of the liberty in place of local electors. And yet the men who staffed the liberty positions were, with few exceptions, men based in the liberty; while even when the seneschalship was held by an outsider, men from local gentry families like Caddell, Delahide and Ford might expect to hold the office of sheriff of the liberty.¹⁶² The liberty spent much of the first third of the century in the king's hand, and existed only sporadically during the last third of the century. Key to this study is the fact that Meath did not retain institutional independence when it was in the king's hand, unlike the English royal appendage of Cheshire, despite some flirtation with this possibility during the reign of Edward IV.¹⁶³ The merger of the county of the cross and the liberty during the minority of the lord presumably did not destroy the administrative machinery of the liberty, but it may have gone into hibernation. There is no record of an appointment of a treasurer or chancellor of the liberty while it was in the king's hand during this period. Nor is there any record to show any such officer continuing to carry out their functions under a royal sheriff.¹⁶⁴ In contrast we might cite the example of William Smith, appointed serjeant of the archiepiscopal lordship of Swords when the temporalities were in the king's hand; a shorter window in which to replace officers than the minorities of Edmund Mortimer and Richard of York.¹⁶⁵

The liberty, while it existed, was of course a major feature of office-holding in Meath. And yet, even at its height, the great majority of those holding office in the liberty were either the same individuals or were men from the same families as those who held royal office when the liberty was in abeyance; that is, the leading men and

¹⁶⁰ See below, p. 134.

¹⁶¹ Carpenter and Mattéoni, 'Offices and officers', pp. 88-9.

¹⁶² See below, pp. 63-5.

¹⁶³ Philip Morgan, *War and society in Medieval Cheshire, 1277-1403* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 2-3, 63-4.

¹⁶⁴ A rare example of the appointment by the crown of a lesser officer of the liberty occurred in 1400, when Thomas Everdon was made keeper of the rolls of the liberty – CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 34.

¹⁶⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 28 Hen. VI, no. 9.

leading landholding families of the liberty. Finally, the demise of the liberty after 1461 left Meath identical in its organisation to the other royal counties. The different patterns we see in Meath in the latter half of the century – for example, the prevalence of sheriffs from the cadet branches of the noble families – do not bear any discernable relationship to liberty's existence. The administration of Meath – both as a liberty and as a royal county – may thus reasonably be studied as a complement to the royal county of Dublin.

Chapter one: The chief officers

The sheriffs of Dublin in the fifteenth century

It has been possible to reconstruct a fairly complete list of those who held the office of sheriff of Dublin in the period 1399-1513. While gaps in the record remain, these rarely exceed more than one or two consecutive years for which no sheriff is named. Unusually long gaps occur for the four years 1410-1413, for the seven years 1486-1493, and for the three years 1510-1512. For the rest of the period 1399 to 1513 a sheriff is named for at least every third year and usually more.¹ Even in the case of these exceptional periods of drought it is possible to go some way toward rectifying the gap. Walter Tyrell, for example, was sheriff in 1409 and again in 1414 and in 1416, part of a long career as a sheriff of the county. It is highly likely that he was sheriff for at least some of the interim period, possibly alternating with John fitz Reginald Talbot, as he did in subsequent years.² Similarly, we can be fairly certain that John Burnell served as sheriff during the long lacuna at the start of the reign of Henry VII, as he is named as lately sheriff in 1494.³ When it comes to the office of sheriff, then, we may hope to draw conclusions regarding patterns of service – and changes therein over the course of the century – without being wildly inaccurate.

What conclusions, then, may be drawn? Forty-one individual sheriffs of Dublin can be identified for the period 1399-1513.⁴ A forty-second was elected but did not take office, as we shall see. Some of these men served over long periods of time, while a few apparently served only single terms. Between them, the men who served as sheriff of Dublin bore a total of twenty-two surnames. Thirty of our forty-one sheriffs came from families that supplied at least two members to the office. Four families – the Talbots of Feltrim, the Holywoods of Artane, the Baths of Lanestown/Cappoge, and the Burnells of

¹ The nature of the record often forbids absolute certainty concerning a sheriff's date of service; not infrequently a sheriff is named as 'late sheriff' with no indication of when he ceased to hold office.

² Áine Foley draws just such a conclusion – Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 287.

³ Nicholas Holywood was sheriff in 1493, so Burnell's service was presumably 1492-3 or earlier.

⁴ See Appendix. This figure assumes that Thomas Tyrell - listed as sheriff of Dublin in Michaelmas term 1414 - is in error for Walter Tyrell, who was listed for the Easter preceding. A forty-third man, Alexander Ever, is named as sheriff in 1433-4 in NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 60. This is almost certainly in error. Ever, as bailiff of St Sepulchre's, appeared alongside sheriff Nicholas Holywood to account for the county of Dublin in 1436 - NLI MS 761, p. 301.

Balgriffin – supplied three sheriffs or more.⁵ The number of families that supplied only a single sheriff during this period in fact exactly equalled the number that supplied at least two; and as we shall see even those that only provided one sheriff frequently had a prominent role in the other county offices. It is thus instantly clear that the shrievalty of Dublin was dominated during this period by a small number of leading families.

Sheriffs, seneschals, and sheriffs of the cross of Meath

Regardless of whether Meath functioned as a liberty or county, its administration required staff. Between 1399 and 1513, 35 individuals are named as having served as sheriff of the county of Meath during the years when the liberty was not in existence, while 17 seneschals and 14 sheriffs of the cross are named for the years when the liberty was in operation.⁶ Five seneschals also served as sheriff of the county and have been numbered among the 35.⁷ In addition, the names of three of the men who served as sheriff of the liberty (subordinate to the seneschals) have also been preserved.⁸ These 62 officers shared 48 surnames. At least seven were certainly outsiders, in many cases English, while the principle interests of men like Edward FitzEustace and Thomas fitz Maurice lay outside the county. Others, such as Gilbert Hendeley, sheriff of the cross of Meath in c. 1420 and William Opole, esq., sheriff of the county of Meath in 1432, are the only members of their families to appear in the county,

⁵ The three Cruise sheriffs come from two different branches of the family; two from the family of Naul, and one from the family of Killsallaghan.

⁶ Thomas, earl of Desmond, had a grant in 1462 of the office of steward (seneschal) of Connacht ‘and all other lordships belonging to the king’s earldom of March in Ireland’, drawing his fee from the revenues of the liberty of Meath; it is possible that he should be counted as an 18th seneschal – *CPR, 1461-67*, p. 196. Other individuals are named as officers of the county or liberty, apparently in error. A highly suspect list of seneschals is given in NLI MS 13, ff. 150-1. Among other questionable claims, it claims that Thomas fitz Maurice was seneschal of the liberty in 1425, which is about thirty years earlier than would appear from other sources, and that Richard Chamberlain, who is otherwise unknown, was seneschal in 1467, when the liberty was not in existence. It also names Richard Wells kt. as seneschal and chancellor in 1450; this is almost certainly in error for William Welles who is known to have held both offices in that year - *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 280-1. The list in NLI MS 13 is reproduced without criticism in Potterton, *Trim*, appendices 2-5, pp. 370-4.

⁷ These were John Darcy, Richard Nugent, Robert Bold, Edward Plunkett, and Oliver Plunkett.

⁸ This figure excludes John Fagan, kt., and his son Richard, named as ‘high sheriff of the liberties of Meath’ for 1423 and 1457 respectively by D’Alton. Neither John nor Richard appear in any other record. D’Alton’s account of the history of the family appears highly fanciful, including a dramatic battlefield escape, and contrasts with the mercantile origins of the family attested elsewhere – D’Alton, John, *The history of the county of Dublin* (Dublin, 1838), pp. 215-17; F. Elrington Ball, *A history of the county Dublin* (6 vols., Dublin, 1902-20), i, p. 37.

but cannot be shown to be outsiders.⁹ Thus fewer than forty county families supplied sheriffs or seneschals of Meath in the fifteenth century. Participation in these offices was thus shared by a larger group of families than was the case for the shrievalty of Dublin. This is of course unsurprising given the relative size of the two counties. Other factors included the larger number of available offices, with the shrievalty of the liberty and that of the crosslands providing opportunity to serve to individuals and families for whom the seneschalship was out of reach, as we shall see.

Residents and outsiders

As in England, the fourteenth century saw increasing demands, reflected in statute, that the most important county offices be staffed by men whose lands lay in the bailiwick. In the fifteenth century the office of sheriff of Dublin was held – with one exception – by men whose lands and interests lay principally in that county. The exception is John Fitzmaurice, appointed sheriff of the county in 1404 and still holding that office in 1406.¹⁰ John Fitzmaurice of Blackhall, Co. Kildare, was a cadet of the Fitzgerald earls of Kildare, and his lands and interests were situated in that county.¹¹ I have been unable to identify any lands belonging to him in county Dublin. A tenuous link is provided by the fact that the Owens of Blundelstown, a prominent Dublin gentry family, held lands in Kildare of his manor of Celbridge; but such a connection would certainly not suffice for Fitzmaurice to qualify as a sheriff of the county.¹² Fitzmaurice served frequently on commissions involving county Kildare, and indeed as sheriff of that county.¹³ That his tenure as sheriff of Dublin is not simply a clerical error is confirmed by a pardon granted to him in April 1407 of all debts from the time that he was sheriff of counties Kildare and Dublin.¹⁴ Service in two separate counties is extremely rare in

⁹ Opole is a figure entirely obscure. From his addition – esquire – and the fact that he was sheriff of the county and not seneschal, it is probable that Opole is a highly corrupt version of a surname borne by an at least moderately prominent county family. It is possible that he was a relative of Thomas de la Pylle, collector of subsidies in the barony of Duleek in 1420. Such a position was by no means indicative of gentry status and the family do not appear among the landholders or officeholders of Meath thereafter – CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 54; *RCH*, p. 253b; H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles (eds.), *Parliaments and Councils of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1947), p. 163.

¹⁰ D'Alton, *The history of the county of Dublin* (Dublin, 1838), p. 47.

¹¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Ric. II, no. 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 304.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 16 Ric. II, no. 12; Cl. 17 Ric. II, no. 14; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 212; Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 277; Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Pat. 8 Hen. IV, no. 67.

the fifteenth century, all the more so when the individual in question had no visible connection with or presence in the county in question. The reasons for this unusual appointment are unclear but it is surely significant that Fitzmaurice's appointment was made in England. The appointment, dated at Pontefract castle in July 1404, describes Fitzmaurice as 'of county Dublin', which suggests that he may have had a landed base in the county after all.¹⁵ But the appointment of a sheriff by English letters patent is highly unusual. It is notable that other letters patent dated at Pontefract within days of this appointment also deal with Ireland. One appointed Janico Dartas admiral of Ireland, while another was a grant of protection to a William Prentys, 'going to Ireland in the company of the king's son Thomas of Lancaster, steward of England, lieutenant in Ireland, on the safe custody of that land'.¹⁶ Thus Fitzmaurice's appointment came at a time of heightened royal interest in Ireland and was clearly outside the normal run of county appointments.

The appointment of Robert Bath of Keppok (Cappoge, par. Castleknock), gentleman, as sheriff of Meath in 1507 appears at first sight to be another example of service across county borders, as Bath had served as escheator and clerk of the markets and measures in county Dublin in the months before, but in this case the blame can be laid on a scribal error.¹⁷ Later on in the same roll Gerald Wellesley of Dangan is recorded as sheriff of Meath and Bath is correctly assigned to Dublin.¹⁸ The family of Bath was predominantly based in county Meath and were prominent in the offices of that county, but it is clear that the three men of that surname who served as sheriff of Dublin in the latter half of the fifteenth century represent branches of that family that had established themselves in Dublin. The first, Robert Bath of Laundestown (Lanestown, par. Donabate) was sheriff in 1441, 1446, 1451 and 1462. His son Nicholas, also described as of Lanestown, was sheriff in 1482.¹⁹ Robert Bath of Cappoge took his address from his wife's estate; his connection to the Baths of Lanestown is not certain but that such a connection existed is probable.²⁰ He was definitely not the eldest son, and his elevation

¹⁵ *CPR, 1401-1405*, p. 406.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

¹⁷ *RC 8/43*, pp. 206, 211.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-5.

¹⁹ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Hen. VIII, no. 4.

to the first rank of county office, first as escheator and then as sheriff of Dublin, was almost certainly due to his marriage to Rose Woodlock, heiress to considerable lands of the Owen and Woodlock families in west and southwest Dublin.²¹ Thus the Baths of county Dublin can be clearly identified as Dublin landholders, despite the origins of the family in Meath. They had acquired Lanestown, Ballymadrough (par. Swords) and Newhaggard (par. Lusk) by 1405 at the latest, when William Bath made an enfeoffment of the same to him, his wife Alice, and the heirs of his body, later specified as his son Robert.²² I have been unable to discover their connection to the Baths of Meath.

A final case to consider is that of the Richard Caddell 'of Morton', esquire, who served as sheriff in or before 1485. The family of Caddell are otherwise primarily associated with service in the Meath barony of Duleek.²³ However their landed interests were concentrated on the Dublin-Meath border, and a Robert Caddell had served as sheriff of Dublin in the fourteenth century.²⁴ The John Caddell who served as sheriff of Meath in 1494 is described as John Caddell of Naul and the land surveys of the mid-seventeenth century find the family concentrated in this border area.²⁵ There are two townlands called Mooretown in county Dublin and one Moortown; while east Meath alone can boast no fewer than 6 of the former and one of the latter. However it is tempting to suggest that the 'Morton' in question is in fact none of the above but is instead the modern townland of Mooresides in the barony of Duleek. This townland has for its southern border the river Delvin, which forms the boundary between Dublin and Meath. It is roughly equidistant between Naul and Garristown: in 1466 James Caddell of Garristown, gentleman, was elected escheator and clerk of the markets and measures by the commons of county Dublin.²⁶ Furthermore, the townland of Mooresides was in 1641 the property of John Caddell of Naul, while the nearby townland of Great Hasardstown (Hazardstown, par. Naul) in county Dublin was listed by the surveyors

²¹ RC 8/43, pp. 140, 216, 244; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 37; Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, vi, pp. 38-9.

²² *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 37.

²³ CIRCLE, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 193; Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 49; Robin Frame (ed.) 'Commissions of the Peace', pp. 25-7.

²⁴ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 285

²⁵ RC 8/43, p. 53; *The Civil Survey, A.D. 1654-56*, ed. Robert C. Simington (10 vols., Dublin, 1931-61), v, p. 32; vii, p. 31; *The Down Survey of Ireland*, <http://downsurvey.tcd.ie/>.

²⁶ RC 8/41, p. 34; CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Edw. IV, no. 8.

there as the property of John Caddell.²⁷ Whether or not this was the ‘Morton’ in question, it is clear that the family had lands and interests on both sides of the Dublin-Meath border. With the probable exception then of John Fitzmaurice at the dawn of the fifteenth century then, all the sheriffs of Dublin in this period were men with primary or at least very significant landed interests in the county.

Servants of the lord of Meath

In Meath, the existence of the liberty prevented county families from enjoying a total monopoly on administrative office. Seven known outsiders who held office in the county or liberty of Meath in the fifteenth century were Thomas Pensax, Thomas Talbot, William Welles, Edmund Mulso, Robert Bold, Gilbert Debenham and Henry Grey. All were Englishmen who held the office of seneschal of the liberty, an appointment that was at the discretion of the lord and not limited by legislation or custom to county landholders as was the case for the sheriff of a county. Unsurprisingly, most were personally linked to the lords who appointed them or to other influential figures. Thomas Pensax, seneschal in 1416, appears to have come to Ireland in the company of John Talbot, the king’s lieutenant, with whom he was closely associated.²⁸ He and Robert Pensax, who was presumably a near relation, received rewards for their service, including grants of land to them and their heirs in Meath and Louth, although neither appears to have succeeded in establishing a family in Ireland.²⁹ Pensax was replaced as seneschal by Thomas, John Talbot’s younger brother.³⁰ While Talbot’s appointment was in the name of Edmund Mortimer, it is to be presumed that Mortimer had delegated his authority to or was acting on the advice of John Talbot.³¹

William Welles, esquire, was the longest-serving seneschal of the liberty in the fifteenth century. He was seneschal, with some interruptions, from 1432 to 1451. Although a member of a prominent Lancastrian family in England, he appears to have been a close associate of the Richard, duke of York. He had a grant of York’s lands in

²⁷ *Civil survey*, v, p. 32; viii, p. 31.

²⁸ RC 8/36, pp. 5, 565-6, 615-16; *CPR, 1416-22*, p. 131; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. V, nos. 162, 177. Pensax subsequently reappears as seneschal of the household of John Grey, king’s lieutenant of Ireland, in 1427 – CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. VI, nos. 61-2.

²⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Hen. V, nos. 11-12.

³⁰ RC 8/36, pp. 26, 615; RC 8/37, pp. 157-61; *CPR, 1416-22*, p. 150.

³¹ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 55v.

Tipperary and Kilkenny for his maintenance in Ireland.³² He was removed as seneschal in August 1449 when York was present in Ireland, perhaps due to suspicion of the close ties between his brother Lionel, lord Welles, and the duke of Somerset; but he retained the position of escheator of the liberty, was knighted by York, and after service with the duke in Ulster was reinstated the following year, so such suspicions clearly did not run deep.³³ Edmund Mulso, knight, who was seneschal while York was present in Ireland in 1449-50, was another close associate of the duke. He witnessed York's grant to the Franciscans of Babwell priory near Bury St Edmunds in 1447.³⁴ In February 1448 he was preparing to leave for Ireland in the company of York, then king's lieutenant, alongside William Oldhall, knight, who would serve as seneschal and chamberlain of York's liberty of Ulster.³⁵ Welles acquired significant estates in the county and married Anne Barnewall, widow of John Darcy who had been seneschal in 1433.³⁶ The family established a presence for themselves in county Meath for another generation, though apparently not for much longer than that.³⁷

Although natives of the lordship, Richard Nugent, seneschal in c. 1435 and again in 1452, Edward FitzEustace, seneschal in c. 1436, and Thomas fitz Maurice, the seventh earl of Kildare, seneschal 1454-1460, were all closely associated with Richard of York. All three men served as York's deputies in the office of lieutenant of Ireland, as well as serving as his seneschals.³⁸ Fitz Maurice and his kinsman, the earl of Desmond, were the leading Irish Yorkists of the 1460s.³⁹

³² NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 103; NAI Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 170.

³³ G. E. Cokayne, (ed.) *Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom: extant, extinct or dormant* (London, 1910-59, 2nd edn.; 1st edn. 1887-98), xii, part 2, p. 443; David Beresford, 'Welles, William' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (ed.) James McGuire, James Quinn. (Cambridge, 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8960>]; Gorman, 'York and the development of an Irish faction', p. 172.

³⁴ *CPR, 1446-52*, p. 231.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233; *Reg. Iohannis Mey*, nos. 136, 155.

³⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 408-13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 198-200; ii, pp. 62-7, 260-1, 738-9. Stephenstown (bar. Morgallion), held by William's heirs in 1463 and 1479, was in the hands of a cadet branch of the Flemings by 1508, apparently through marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of William Welles; no families with the surname appear on Cusack's list of the gentry in 1511 - *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 198-200; ii, pp. 738-9; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 213; RC 8/43, pp. 228, 234; TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 170-5.

³⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 110-11, 130-1, 293, 301, 316-17, 342-3, 348-9, 352-3.

³⁹ Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, pp. 56-69.

Robert Bold, seneschal in 1472, and Nicholas Harpsfield, chief remembrancer of the exchequer of the liberty in 1460, were certainly trusted Yorkist retainers. Bold came from a family long associated with royal service in the ports and towns of Chester and north Wales, notably in relation to communications between England and Ireland. Before 1469 Henry Bold, knight, had held the offices of master forester of Snowdonia, constable of Conway castle and captain of the town of Conway.⁴⁰ In 1467 he with others was assigned to take the muster of John, earl of Worcester, deputy lieutenant of Ireland, and 700 archers of his retinue at Beaumaris; the force presumably being bound for Ireland.⁴¹ Similarly in 1475 William Bold of Conway with others was assigned to take ships and mariners in Chester, Conway and Beaumaris for the transport of Thomas Daniel, esquire, and his retinue, ordered to Ireland by the king for the resistance of his enemies.⁴² Robert Bold was among those attainted with Richard, duke of York, at Coventry in 1459.⁴³ In 1460 York granted him the constablership of Denbeigh in north Wales.⁴⁴ Robert Bold was clearly more firmly established in Meath than the most of the other 'foreign' seneschals. He married Ismay, widow of Sir Nicholas Barnewall of Crickstown, and daughter and heiress of John Sargent of Castleknock, county Dublin.⁴⁵ He served as sheriff of the county in c. 1468, the only outsider to hold the office. He was then addressed as Robert Bold of Crickstown, confirming the fact that it was his tenure of lands in the county by virtue of his marriage that qualified him to hold the office.⁴⁶ Bold was granted the king's manor of Ratoath together with the title of Lord of Ratoath in August 1468 for his 'good, acceptable and daily services, as well to... our father... as to us' in England, Ireland and Wales.⁴⁷

Thomas Clerk, appointed seneschal in June 1472, had acted as clerk to Robert Bold when he was seneschal of the county, and was one of those appointed alongside Bold to levy the debts of his former office in January 1471.⁴⁸ He too may have been an

⁴⁰ *CPR, 1467-77*, p. 113.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 524.

⁴³ *CPR 1452-61*, p. 572.

⁴⁴ *CPR 1461-67*, pp. 421-2.

⁴⁵ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 226; Lodge, *Peerage*, v, pp. 30-1; Smith, 'Patricians in medieval Dublin', pp. 226-7.

⁴⁶ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 226; RC 8/41, pp. 215-17.

⁴⁷ *Stat. Roll Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 622-5.

⁴⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 215-17, 343-5.

outsider, but the evidence is inconclusive.⁴⁹ Harpsfield, who held the offices of chancellor of the green wax, chief remembrancer of the exchequer and clerk of the chancery rolls of the liberty in 1460, was one of preparing to leave Ireland in York's company in the summer of 1460, was rewarded in 1479 with the life grant of Ratoath – after Robert Bold's death without issue – 'for good service to the king and to Richard... the king's father in England, Ireland and in Holland and other parts beyond the seas in prosperity and adversity'; a long-delayed reward for sharing the king's exile.⁵⁰

With the liberty in the king's hands, the appointment of proven retainers to liberty offices had the twin advantages of providing a relatively cheap means of rewarding service, as with Bold and Harpsfield, and of assuring control of important positions, thus extending royal influence into the periphery; a consideration doubly important at times of political instability.

William Welles served not only the lord of Meath, but also the royal government in Ireland, as deputy lieutenant of Ireland for his brother in 1439-40 and as escheator of the lordship.⁵¹ This overlap in personnel between the royal and liberty administration could be of advantage to both. The liberty could benefit by the additional powers and increased political clout of the seneschal; likewise the royal government gained a greater degree of control and direction of the liberty's affairs and resources. Such two-fold interests may lie behind the appointment of Gilbert Debenham, chancellor of Ireland, as seneschal in 1474, and Henry lord Grey 1478, deputy lieutenant of Ireland, as seneschal and chancellor of Trim in 1478, at a time of political manoeuvring between the king and the earl of Kildare, and when the central government was in two minds about Meath's liberty status, as we have seen.⁵²

It is clear that the existence of Trim allowed outsiders a greater role in the government of Meath than was the case for the royal county of Dublin, and shifted the power of appointment away from the leading men of the county to the lord of the liberty or (more usually) his representatives in Ireland. Nonetheless it is important not

⁴⁹ Clerk was apparently appointed upon Bold's departure for England - CIRCLE, Pat. Roll 12 E IV, nos. 13, 14; RC 843, pp. 344-5, 360.

⁵⁰ Potterton, *Trim*, p. 372; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 796-7; *CPR 1476-85*, p. 152.

⁵¹ Beresford, 'Welles, William'; Gorman, 'York and the development of an Irish faction', p. 172.

⁵² CIRCLE Pat. Roll 18 E IV; Potterton, *Trim*, p. 372; Quinn 'Aristocratic Autonomy', pp. 603-6.

to attach too great a significance to this distinction. Despite the importance of hand-picked outsiders to fulfil important roles, particularly at times of greater than usual instability, the great majority of the sheriffs, sheriffs of the cross, and seneschals of Meath were inhabitants of the liberty, men whose local wealth, connections and prestige enabled them to carry out self-government at the king's command; and whose own interests lay in the effective defence and government of the county. Even the seneschals, the lords' direct representatives, were more often chosen from the same leading Meath landholders who served as sheriff when the liberty was not in existence. John Darcy, Richard Nugent, Robert Bold, Edward Plunkett, and Oliver Plunkett each served as both sheriff and seneschal; while seneschals like William Welles appointed men from leading gentry families to serve under them as sheriffs of the liberty, as we shall see. These factors served to reduce the impact of the liberty on patterns of service in Meath. Ultimately, both the crown and the lord of Meath tended to rely on men who had the prestige, local connections and resources to effectively carry out the government of a large frontier area.

Social status

The evidence for the social status of the families that held the office of sheriff in Dublin in this period is mixed. Certainly those families that contributed sheriffs – especially those that provided several sheriffs – included the majority of the most prominent families in the county, including the Talbots, St Laurences, Cruises and Holywoods. There is no family that can be clearly identified as standing aloof from the office, as Brendan Smith has observed of the Verdens in county Louth.⁵³ But the enthusiastic participation of the county elite in the office may be more apparent than real. The family of Howth or St Laurence, for example, supplied sheriffs of the county in the fourteenth century, and two members of the family, the head of the family and his eldest son, held the office in 1438 and c. 1456 respectively.⁵⁴ However, there is no record of any member of the family holding that office after 1461, when the family appear to have secured recognition as peers of the Irish parliament as lords Howth.⁵⁵ The reluctance of parliamentary peers to serve as sheriffs has been noted already in

⁵³ Smith, *Crisis and survival*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 279-88; cf. Appendix.

⁵⁵ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 51.

relation to Meath. Similarly it has been observed both of peers and of leading gentry such as the Verdons that, although unwilling to be sheriffs, they featured prominently on commissions of the peace in their counties. Unfortunately the latest commission of the peace that appears to survive for Dublin is that of 1461; but it is surely significant that this commission featured Christopher St Laurence, lord Howth, as well as Robert Howth, his son and successor, our sheriffs of 1438 and c. 1456.⁵⁶ Robert was appointed as a commissioner to hold the election of a sheriff in c. 1465-6 in an apparent acknowledgement of his preeminent place in county society.⁵⁷ The lack of a more complete record of sheriffs of the county, and of any commissions of the peace after 1461, make it difficult to be certain, but this would appear to be a case of a leading family moving up beyond the level at which it was deemed appropriate to serve as sheriff. One more piece of admittedly circumstantial evidence may be worthy of consideration. In 1466 the electors of the former sheriff Robert Bath of Laundestown (elected c. 1462) sought allocation to Robert on the debts of his account of a sum he had been ordered to pay to a clerk of the exchequer in part payment of the latter's wages. One of these electors was Robert Howth, knight, 'lately esquire'; a promotion which may tie in with the family's rise in status.⁵⁸ Other electors came from typical shrieval families, including former sheriff Richard Mareward, Thomas Luttrell, and John Field, suggesting little difference between Robert Howth and his peers; but this election appears to have taken place before the death of Robert's father Christopher and his accession to the title.⁵⁹

The Talbots were another of the most prominent families in county Dublin, although they did not secure recognition of their lordship of Malahide as a parliamentary peerage. At least five men with this surname served as sheriff in the period 1399-1513, continuing an earlier tradition of service.⁶⁰ These men included some of the longest-serving sheriffs of the county, such as John fitz Reginald Talbot, who was sheriff 1416-18, in 1423, 1427 and again in 1430, his namesake and probable grandson

⁵⁶ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 13; Ball, *The Judges in Ireland, 1221-1921* (London, 1926), i, p. 186.

⁵⁷ NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 38.

⁵⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8; Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 52.

⁶⁰ For Talbot sheriffs in the period before 1399, see Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 279-88.

John Talbot of Feltrim, sheriff of the county in 1473, 1479 and 1480, and Robert Talbot, sheriff in 1498, 1504 and 1513. These three men, and the majority of Talbot officers in Dublin during the fifteenth century, came from the cadet branch of the family based at Feltrim (bar. Coolock), also identified by their manor at Belgard (par. Tallaght) at the far southwestern end of the county.⁶¹ The disproportionate service of Talbots from a cadet branch would seem to bear out the impression given by the St Laurences. However the main branch of this family at Malahide also provided at least one and probably two sheriffs of Dublin during the period. Thomas Talbot was apparently sheriff in the 22nd year of the reign of Henry VI (1443-4), although the evidence is not all we might wish it to be.⁶² He is not recorded as sheriff in later years. The Thomas Talbot who was escheator and clerk of the market in Dublin in 1471 was probably his son; he never served as sheriff and appears to have concentrated his efforts on his career in the royal administration.⁶³ It is also possible that, as lord of Malahide, he joined Robert St Laurence (who also pursued a career high in the royal administration) in seeking to avoid the office as below his dignity.⁶⁴ As noted above, Thomas' family did not succeed in securing recognition of their traditional lordship of Malahide as a parliamentary peerage.⁶⁵ His son Peter served as sheriff of Dublin for several consecutive years in the late 1490s. It is possible that the reappearance of the Talbots of Malahide in the office of sheriff was linked to their failure to secure elevation to the peerage.

⁶¹ In 1407 Malahide was in the king's hand during the minority of Christopher Talbot – CIRCLE, Pat. 8 Hen. IV, no. 77. As John fitz Reginald Talbot held county office well into the reign of Henry V, it is clear that he was not of the main line at Malahide. His father Reginald was summoned to the great council of February 1372 alongside Sir Thomas Talbot of Malahide and other prominent Dublin landowners – CIRCLE, Cl. 46 Edw. III, no. 122.

⁶² NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 149. Note of an entry concerning Thomas Talbot, sheriff of Dublin, on the memoranda roll of 22 Hen. VI, without further detail. Robert Burnell was also apparently named as sheriff on the same roll – *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶³ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 183. Ball states that Thomas was a son of Richard Talbot, lord of Malahide, but as Richard was dead by 1400 and Malahide subsequently passed to the descendants of his brother, it would appear that Ball is in error here – NLI MS 761, p. 282. Thomas secured an exemption from service on assizes or as assessor of subsidies, but not apparently from service as sheriff, in 1469 – RC 8/41, pp. 224-5.

⁶⁴ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 186-7; *idem*, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 55; Anthony M. McCormack. 'St Lawrence, Robert, 2nd Baron Howth', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8222>].

⁶⁵ They did, however, secure a hereditary grant of the admiralty of Malahide – NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 272-88.

In Dublin then there is no clear evidence that there were certain families for whom the shrievalty was below their station, although it would seem that the St Laurence family of Howth ceased to serve after they secured their recognition as parliamentary peers. It is clear that most of the leading families – such as the Holywoods of Artane, four generations of whom served as sheriff between 1426 and 1507 – were happy (or at least willing) to take up the office. The sheriffs of Dublin thus included men from families that represented the very highest stratum of landed society in the county. In Meath, once more, the picture is more nuanced.

The magnate families

Meath, uniquely among the four obedient shires, and in strong contrast to Dublin, had a number of resident magnate families. Six – the Nugents of Delvin, the Prestons of Gormanston, the Flemings of Slane, the Barnewalls of Trimlestown, and the two Plunkett peers of Dunsany and Killeen – were created or succeeding in securing recognition as peers of the Irish parliament in the middle years of the fifteenth century. Other families, such as the Hussey barons of Galtrim, the Nangle barons of Navan, and the Butlers of Dunboyne, did not secure recognition as peers but continued to bear the title of baron. In the sixteenth-century Book of Howth this second group were distinguished from the parliamentary barons by the title of baronet.⁶⁶ Their customary titles, later known as feudal baronies, were by the late fifteenth century merely honorific and did not confer a place among the lords of parliament. Where families died out in the male line, these titles were no longer adopted by those who inherited their lands.⁶⁷

The crystallisation of the Irish parliamentary peerage in the middle decades of the fifteenth century, and its elevation above the bearers of purely customary titles and the untitled gentry, can be clearly seen in the records of office-holding in Meath. For the first thirteen years of the century the shrievalty was cycled among four men: John Darcy, William Nugent, baron of Delvin, Matthew Hussey, baron of Galtrim, and Christopher

⁶⁶ *Cal. Carew MSS*, v, pp. 21-23.

⁶⁷ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 91; Nicholls, 'Media taken in by bogus baronies', *History Ireland*, iv, no. 3 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 7-8; Power, *European frontier elite*, pp. 49-51; Lynch, *Legal institutions*, pp. 114-32.

Plunkett, the first Plunkett lord of Killeen.⁶⁸ Delvin and Killeen would by the middle of fifteenth century be recognised as parliamentary peerages; Galtrim was not, and the Darcys of Platin, despite their leading role in the county throughout the fifteenth century and beyond, were never elevated to the peerage. While peers like Richard Nugent, baron of Delvin, served as seneschals of the liberty of Meath into the middle decades of the fifteenth century, only one peer served as sheriff in the second half of the century, and that, as we shall see, was on sufferance. Robert Bold served as sheriff before his elevation to the peerage, but as seneschal thereafter. In contrast, Thomas Nangle, baron of the feudal barony of Navan, served as sheriff on at least one and probably two occasions in the later part of the century, and even held the (slightly) less prestigious office of escheator and clerk of the market.

James Fleming, baron of Slane, was appointed sheriff of Meath in December 1472 upon the dissolution of the liberty as the man ‘most able and sufficient to safeguard the said county of Meath.’ However, the appointment went on to state that ‘the said James is a baron and lord of parliament and of greater honour and reputation than divers other persons who have occupied the said office in the said county’. In keeping with his elevated status, James was granted £20 from the profits of the county ‘in aid and support of his honour and charge’ rather than the now customary £10.⁶⁹ This appointment very clearly marks the gap between the titled families of Meath and their lesser neighbours and relations, and was in keeping with previous acts of parliament such as that of 1449 which decreed that no ‘lords of parliament’ were to be made sheriffs.⁷⁰ Two other peers – John Plunkett of Dunsany (sheriff in 1470) and William Preston (sheriff in 1495) – served as sheriff in the fifteenth century; but in both cases they held the office during their father’s lifetime and thus before their accession to the title.⁷¹

While the peers were by the latter half of the century clearly jealous of their elevated status, there would appear to have been little difference in wealth between the leading gentry families of Meath, such as the Darcy family of Platin, and the

⁶⁸ Lodge, *Peerage*, vi, pp. 166-75.

⁶⁹ *Stat. Roll Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 5-7.

⁷⁰ *Stat. Roll Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 115-17

⁷¹ Lodge, *Peerage*, vi, pp. 199-200; Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, iv, pp. 551-2; vii, pp. 250-1.

magnates.⁷² Gerald Power concludes that the magnate families of the Pale were ‘nobles of the second rank. While their landholdings and peerage titles made them a county elite on paper, they were not capable of intimidating the surrounding gentry or of commanding influential patronage networks’.⁷³ Members of leading gentry families were connected to magnates by marriage. Richard Nugent, baron of Delvin, who had a long career as sheriff and seneschal, was married to a close relative of John Drake, who was sheriff of Meath in 1421.⁷⁴ The commonplace book of Christopher Cusack of Gerrardstown (sheriff in 1510) contains genealogical material on the Plunketts of Killeen and Dunsany (manors inherited by marriage to a Cusack heiress) and records marriages between the Plunketts and the Cusacks well into the fifteenth century.⁷⁵

Cadet branches

The Meath nobility’s unwillingness to serve in the office of sheriff in the latter half of the century did not mean they were willing to relinquish influence over the office entirely. One of the striking features of the shrievalty of Meath between 1460 and 1513 is the predominance of cadet branches of the magnate families, above all the Plunketts, in the office. Although they never entirely displaced other leading gentry families such as the Darcys of Platin or the Wellesleys of Dangan, a majority of those named as sheriff in these years bore the surname of a Meath noble family, whether Plunkett, Fleming, Preston, or Barnewall. At least four separate cadet branches of the Plunketts provided a sheriff of Meath between 1460 and 1513; the Plunketts of Balrath provided no fewer than three. Examples from the other families include two Fleming sheriffs from cadet branches, John Fleming of Derrypatrick in 1491 and George Fleming of Stephenstown in 1508. The connections between the cadet branches and the main line of the family can be difficult to trace; in any case, the families frequently strengthened these bonds by marrying among themselves. The father of Christopher Plunkett of Clone, sheriff in 1501-3, was the second son of Sir John Plunkett, lord Dunsany, who had been sheriff

⁷² Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 90-2; *idem*, ‘Sir William Darcy of Platten’, p. 29; Power, *European frontier elite*, p. 54.

⁷³ Power, *European frontier elite*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Lodge, *Peerage of Ireland*, i, p. 221.

⁷⁵ TCD MS 594, ff. 20v, 34v-35.

(before acceding to the title) in 1470. Christopher's uncle by marriage was Edward Plunkett of Balrath, who dominated the office of sheriff in the 1460s.⁷⁶

These tight bonds did not preclude conflict. In 1478 Oliver Plunkett, who had earlier been sheriff of the county, was appointed deputy to seneschal Henry Grey, the king's deputy lieutenant in Ireland, who was engaged in a showdown with the earl of Kildare for mastery in the lordship.⁷⁷ When the liberty was dissolved, Oliver was replaced by Alexander Plunkett, who was made sheriff of the county. This may simply represent the Plunkett families of Meath playing both sides of the political divide, or the fact that they were a reliable means for the competing factions to project their authority in the county. On the other hand, there is some evidence of violent conflict among the Plunketts at this time. In 1485 the annals of Ulster record the death of Oliver Plunkett, who is probably our deputy seneschal. In the same year 'the son of Oliver Plunket (*Mac Oliuer Pluingced*) was slain by the son of Richard Plunket between the two Nativities (Dec. 25-Jan. 6)'.⁷⁸ It is possible that the violence was linked to a land dispute.⁷⁹ I have been unable to trace precisely which parts of the increasingly numerous Plunkett conglomerate are in question, but the entry serves as a reminder of the limitations of relying on surnames and family connections to indicate shared interests and cooperative action. Similar dissensions between the branches of the family surfaced in the 1530s, when Thomas Cromwell was informed by his correspondent that 'all that cuntrey [apparently referring to the barony of Kells] lakkith a good capitayne; for the Plunkettes that were wont to be a great band, are of noo power, and full of hate

⁷⁶ Lodge, *Peerage*, vi, pp. 200-1. Ellis suggests that Christopher Plunkett of Gibstown (sheriff of Meath 1499-1500) and Christopher Plunkett of Clone (sheriff of Meath 1501-1503) were in fact the same person. However, the two are distinguished consistently in the memoranda rolls of 14 and 15 Hen. VII (1498-1500), when Christopher of Gibstown (bar. Kells) was sheriff and Christopher of Clone was collector of subsidies in the barony of Fore. Gibstown and Clone were certainly in the possession of different branches of the family by 1511, when Oliver Plunkett of Gibstown and Christopher Plunkett of Clone were listed among the gentry of Kells and of Fore respectively. Clone is most likely Clonabreany which in 1641 was in the possession of yet another Christopher Plunkett; Gibstown then being in the possession of Robert Plunkett – RC 8/43, pp. 92, 122, 134, 155, 181, 186; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 264, 295; TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 93, 170-5, 178.

⁷⁷ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 71-2; Quinn, 'Aristocratic autonomy', pp. 604-7.

⁷⁸ *Annals of Ulster*, p. 299.

⁷⁹ TCD MS 594, f. 20v.

between themselves'.⁸⁰ The implication, of course is that in the general run of events the Plunketts could generally be counted upon to act more-or-less as a body.

Sheriffs of the cross and sheriffs of the liberty

No nobleman, whether peer or feudal baron, held the office of sheriff of the cross of Meath in the fifteenth century. Indeed the office was not even strictly the preserve of the gentry. The last known sheriff of the cross, Thomas Walsh, who was appointed sheriff of the cross in December 1472, shortly before the liberty's dissolution, bore the status title of *freholder*, the only officer who is recorded bearing this title in the fifteenth-century lordship. The title is highly ambiguous, being used at various times for men that would otherwise be called gentlemen and those who would be called yeomen.⁸¹ The obvious implication is that Walsh was sufficiently obscure that his status was unclear to the clerk of the exchequer responsible. Walsh bore a surname that was common throughout the lordship of Ireland, but does not appear among the gentry of Meath; it does not feature among the extensive list of Meath gentlemen compiled by Christopher Cusack in c. 1511. It is possible that Thomas may have been a relative of Meiler Walsh, who was undersheriff to Christopher (or perhaps Thomas) Cusack in 1510.⁸² Such an office was by no means indicative of gentry status; indeed the opposite is true.⁸³

John Knight, elected sheriff of the cross in c. 1455, is another obscure individual who held the office. His electors, who were held responsible for his debts, are equally obscure.⁸⁴ And yet other sheriffs of the cross were clearly from gentry families. Richard Lynham, sheriff of the cross in c. 1419, had been keeper of the peace in Moyfenrath in 1405 and was knight of the shire for the cross of Meath in 1421.⁸⁵ Richard Lynham of Adamstown was among the gentry of Moyfenrath in 1511; Clondoogan, in the possession of our sheriff of the cross in 1416, was in the possession of yet another Richard Lynham of Adamstown in 1641.⁸⁶ Richard Tuite of Julianstown, sheriff of the

⁸⁰ *Stat. Papers Hen. VIII*, ii, p. 450; Power, *European frontier elite*, p. 55.

⁸¹ RC 8/41, p. 302.

⁸² TCD MS 594, f. 25v.

⁸³ See above, p. 243.

⁸⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 400-3.

⁸⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 172; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 28.

⁸⁶ TCD MS 594, f. 26; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 171; RC 8/36, pp. 527-9; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 173-5.

cross in c. 1438 and again in 1444, was almost certainly a close relative of Robert Tuite, knight for the cross of Meath in 1420.⁸⁷

John Barnewall of Frenchtown (Frankstown, bar. Ratoath) was by a considerable distance the longest-serving sheriff of the cross. His connection to what was then the main Barnewall family in Meath, the Barnewalls of Crickstown, is unclear. He may have been a younger brother of Christopher Barnewall, knight, head of the family, but this is far from certain.⁸⁸ The two would certainly appear to have been closely associated. In 1424 John was a pledge, alongside Thomas Laundey (presumably a relative of Richard Laundey, sheriff of the cross 1397-8 and collector of a subsidy in Duleek in 1423), for Christopher Barnewall when he had a grant of Bodenhamsweir near Slane.⁸⁹ John had been ordered to pay Christopher 40s from the king's issues of the shrievalty of the cross as a reward for his labours as king's serjeant-at-arms the preceding December.⁹⁰ The sheriff of the cross could be a lucrative office, particularly when the bishopric of Meath was in the king's hand. John Barnewall was the king's 'commissioner' of the episcopal manors of Ardraccon and Ardcah in 1424, when he was given an additional award of 40s of the king's issues from the same.⁹¹ Richard Lynham also appears to have had custody of church lands while sheriff of the cross.⁹² Unsurprisingly, the sheriff of the cross might be closely associated with the religious institutions whose lands made up the county of the cross of Meath. John Barnewall was appointed seneschal and receiver of the archbishop of Armagh's manor of Kilmoon (then bar. Duleek) in 1431 or 1432.⁹³ By 1641 these lands, including the townland of Primatestown, were held to be the

⁸⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 138. By 1511 Julianstown had passed to the Netterville family – TCD MS 594, f. 25v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 170; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁸ Lodge, *Peerage*, v, pp. 30-1; NLI, GO MS 215, p. 59. Lodge's claim is undermined by his subsequent claim that John's son Richard married Elizabeth (or Catherine), daughter and heiress of John Field of Fieldstown (co. Dublin). This seems unlikely given that Catherine, daughter of John Field, and her husband Richard Barnewall were still living in 1516. Frankstown was held in the seventeenth century by the Barnewalls of Kilbrew, who may have been a separate branch of the family as early as the mid-fourteenth century – *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 1; NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), pp. 71-2, 75, 77; CIRCLE, Cl. 33 Edw. III, no. 17; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 93-4.

⁸⁹ RC 8/40, p. 265; NLI MS 761, pp. 260, 272; RC 8/33, p. 175; CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 118.

⁹⁰ RC 8/40, p. 143.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2, 202.

⁹² RC 8/38, pp. 253-7, 8/40, pp. 20-1, 62, 76.

⁹³ *The Register of Milo Sweetman, Archbishop of Armagh 1361-1380*, ed. Brendan Smith (Dublin, 1996), no. 169.

property of the Barnewalls of Kilbrew, heirs of the family of Frenchtown, though the tithes remained in the archbishop's hand.⁹⁴

As a body, the men appointed or elected as sheriffs of the cross compare unfavourably with the sheriffs of the liberty, even though the latter were subordinate officers under the command of the seneschal. Richard Caddell, knight, who was sheriff of the liberty in 1425, and John Delahide of Moynalty, esquire, sheriff in 1447, both came from prominent gentry families that also provided a sheriff of county Meath during the fifteenth century. They are comparable in status to the men who served in the (very similar) office of sheriff of the liberty of Chester across the Irish sea.⁹⁵ Nicholas Ford of Fordstown (bar. Kells), sheriff before Michaelmas 1455, was from a less prominent but undoubtedly gentry family.⁹⁶ Thomas Nangle, baron of Navan, was described as sheriff of county Meath in 1459-60; it is likely that he in fact held the position of sheriff of the liberty, which was then in existence.⁹⁷ In contrast to Caddell and Delahide, the only sheriff of the cross accorded a title was the freeholder Thomas Walsh. The appointment of the sheriff of the liberty presumably lay in the hands of the seneschal, yet these men were exactly the type of 'gentleman amateur' that was elected to the shrievalty when the county was in the king's hand. This suggests a desire on the part of the seneschals – especially perhaps William Welles, the outsider under whom both Delahide and Ford served – to take advantage of the local connections and authority of the gentry of the liberty, just as the crown did in the shires.

Stephen Palmer, sheriff of the liberty in April 1424, may have been an exception. Palmer reappears in 1427 as undersheriff of the county, and appears to have had a long career at the lower levels of county office.⁹⁸ He was an associate of John Brown of Newtown Trim, sheriff of the cross at much the same time that Palmer was sheriff of the liberty; in 1422 the two were receivers of the subsidy granted by the commons of Meath to the earl of Ormond.⁹⁹ Palmer was from Trim, though he may have been from

⁹⁴ *Civil survey*, v, pp. 41-2, 380; *Register of Primate John Swayne*, pp. 48-9.

⁹⁵ Bennett, *Community, class and careerism*, p. 34; Clayton, *Administration of Chester*, pp. 173-77.

⁹⁶ TCD MS 594, f. 27v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 173.

⁹⁷ NAI, Ferguson repertory iii, p. 111.

⁹⁸ CIRCLE, Cl. 5 Hen. VI, no. 67; Connolly (ed.) *Irish exchequer payments*, p. 574; TNA E 101/247/20; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 135.

⁹⁹ RC 8/39, pp. 292, 303.

a cadet line of a minor gentry family. Thomas Palmer of Moyagher (bar. Lune) had been receiver of subsidy in Meath in 1400 and was appointed as a justice to hear an assise of *novel disseisin* between opposing parties each containing a sheriff of Meath (Matthew Hussey and Christopher Plunkett) in 1409.¹⁰⁰ The family reappear towards the end of the century, when Thomas Palmer sought the aid of the Irish parliament in securing his wife's inheritance.¹⁰¹ His wife, Janet Read, was one of the co-heiresses of Robert Read, himself heir to Richard Read, a justice of the king and landholder in both England and Ireland.¹⁰² Janet's sister was married to Roger Rochford, another coming man with Meath connections and a career in the royal administration.¹⁰³ Stephen Palmer was appointed to a commission of the peace in Meath in 1422, a position generally restricted to men who had a prominent place in county society, or administrative or judicial knowhow (or both).¹⁰⁴ Palmer was second engrosser of the exchequer in 1412, and subsequently served as justice of the common pleas; so it likely that he owed his appointment to the latter.¹⁰⁵

New men

Of the 22 families that provided at least one sheriff of Dublin in the period 1399 to 1513, eight (Mareward, Sargent, Fitzmaurice, Bath, Blakeney, Burnell, Duff, Sherlock and White) had never held that office in previous centuries.¹⁰⁶ Fitzmaurice, as we have seen, was an interloper appointed in unusual circumstances, but the remainder were all Dublin landowners. A further four (Holywood, Field, Woodlock and Luttrell) had held the office in the past but not for some considerable period of time; the Luttrells, for example, did not provide a sheriff of the county between 1212 and c. 1484.¹⁰⁷ Two

¹⁰⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 123, 145; Pat. 10 Hen. IV, no. 195.

¹⁰¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 812-13.

¹⁰² Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 171-2. An inquisition *post mortem* concerning the lands of Richard Read *de Hibernia* is preserved in the National Archives at Kew – TNA, C 139/58/23.

¹⁰³ Roger was chief engrosser of the exchequer in 1466. He had a subsidy towards the construction of a castle at Readstown near Moylagh (bar. Fore?) in 1470 – RC 8/41, pp. 7-8, 18; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 700-3.

¹⁰⁴ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. IV, nos. 75, 110; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 574.

¹⁰⁶ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 279-88. Strictly speaking, Thomas Mareward had also served as sheriff in the last decades of the late fourteenth century, but he was the first of his family to do so.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-88; RC 8/33, p. 392.

members of the family served as collectors of the subsidies of 1420, 1421, 1424, and 1435, but otherwise they are not visible in the surviving record of office-holders until the last decades of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth, when two members of the family served as sheriff and another as undersheriff.¹⁰⁸ The continued role of the family in the governance of the county is suggested by the presence of Thomas Luttrell, esquire (possibly the same man who served as sheriff in c. 1485) as one of the electors of Robert Bath of Laundestown as sheriff in c. 1462 and of Peter Travers in 1465.¹⁰⁹ John Woodlock of Blanchardstown, sheriff c. 1475, was the namesake of a sheriff who served in 1302, but apparently none of the family had held the office in the interim period. Nonetheless their continued role in government is attested by the election of yet another John Woodlock as knight of the shire for Dublin at the parliament of October 1421.¹¹⁰ These families thus appear to have been of some influence in the county throughout the century. Their appearance as sheriffs in the reign of Henry VII may thus owe more to the slightly improved record material from this period than any actual change in status; alternatively, the elevation of families such as the St Laurences may have made room for sheriffs from families of slightly lower standing in the county. Yet another explanation is provided by a parliamentary statute of 1476, cancelling all charters of exemption from office, at the request of the commons, who complained that so many gentlemen of the four counties of Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth had purchased such charters that ‘the king can have no sheriff... especially in the county of Dublin’. The statute further ruled that no man of those counties ‘shall be sheriff against his will within three years after he has been sheriff *if there be others sufficient within the said counties*’.¹¹¹ The shortage of men who were willing and able to serve as sheriff may well have allowed – or required – men who might otherwise have escaped service to hold the office.

Unsurprisingly, the appearance, reappearance or disappearance of certain shrieval families can in many cases be directly traced to good or bad fortune in the lottery of marriage and inheritance. John Derpatrick, sheriff in 1403, was the last sheriff

¹⁰⁸ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 142, 159, 180; RC 8/33, p. 392; RC 8/43, pp. 53, 219.

¹⁰⁹ RC 8/41, pp. 7-8, 39-40, 61-5, 70-1.

¹¹⁰ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 179-80.

¹¹¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 256-7.

from a family that had frequently in that office the fourteenth century.¹¹² The reason for the disappearance of the family would seem to lie in the death of John's son Robert Derpatrick in or before 1421, at which point the majority of his lands in Dublin and Meath went to an infant daughter.¹¹³ His lands in south county Dublin, which were held in tail male, were lost to the family on the attainder of his brother Stephen.¹¹⁴ Another example of the impact of changing fortunes on a family's service in office is provided by Peter Travers, sheriff in 1465. An ancestor had been sheriff in c. 1337, while another had been personally summoned to attend the great council of 1374.¹¹⁵ The family subsequently disappear from the record for the first half of the fifteenth century. They next appear rather further down the hierarchy of office. Michael Travers, gentleman, was undersheriff of the county c. 1450.¹¹⁶ Michael would appear to have unusually prominent for an undersheriff. He was appointed to a commission to fortify crossing points on the river Liffey alongside some of the leading men of the county – including Christopher St Laurence, Robert Burnell, John Woodlock, Robert Bath of Lanestown and John Field of Fieldstown – in 1455, although Michael was apparently the least prominent member of the commission.¹¹⁷ The family's decline in prominence can be traced to the death of John Travers without a male heir in the early years of the reign of Henry VI, leading to the loss of their manors of Ward and Baldongan.¹¹⁸ Michael Travers and Peter, who was perhaps his son but was at any rate his heir, were probably descended from David Travers (d. c. 1401), who was a close associate and presumably a near relative of Geoffrey Travers of Ward, and who held land in Hacketstown (par. Lusk).¹¹⁹

The family did not reconcile themselves with the loss of the greater part of their patrimony. Richard Bermingham, who had inherited Baldongan and part of Ward, was one of those attainted for opposing Richard, duke of York, and his son Edward in 1460.¹²⁰

¹¹² Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 279-88.

¹¹³ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. V, no. 14.

¹¹⁴ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, i, p. 115.

¹¹⁵ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 284; Cl. 48 Edw. III, no. 122.

¹¹⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 704-7, 754-7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15. Michael is the last named and is the only one given the addition of gentleman; the others are given the addition of knight or esquire.

¹¹⁸ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, vi, p. 51; RC 8/39, pp. 236-7.

¹¹⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 51 Edw. III, no. 99; Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 169; Pat. 2 Hen. IV, no. 22; NAI, Ferguson coll., ii, f. 137; NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 50; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 90-3.

¹²⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 658-61; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 24-9, 88-93; CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Edw. IV, no. 39; *CPR, 1461-7*, pp. 117, 357.

Peter Travers had chosen the opposite side, and benefited accordingly. He had been one of those preparing to leave Ireland for England in the company of York in July 1460.¹²¹ His sound political judgement saw him restored to the manor of Baldongan.¹²² Peter was also a London-educated lawyer who had served as the king's serjeant-at-law.¹²³ He was elected sheriff of the county in 1465.¹²⁴ In his case, the acquisition of land, administrative experience, and the winds of faction all served to re-establish the family among the county elite. Peter was further helped by advantageous marriage. He married Elizabeth, one of the daughters and coheiresses of Robert Holywood. Through her he was connected to seven sheriffs of Dublin – her father, her uncle Nicholas, her brother-in-law Robert Burnell, and her nephew John Burnell, and the three generations of Holywoods who served as sheriff between 1480 and 1507, as well as Maurice Burghill, sheriff-elect in 1475, who married Elizabeth's sister Margaret after the death of her first husband.¹²⁵

The restoration of the lands at Baldongan, together with the significant lands inherited by Elizabeth Holywood, put the Travers family back among the leading gentry of the county and made Peter a suitable candidate for the shrievalty. Nonetheless Peter was the only member of the family to hold the office. The Bermingham family swiftly returned to favour. Philip Bermingham, who was probably Richard's younger brother, was an accomplished servant of the royal administration, serving as king's serjeant-at-law and later chief justice of the king's bench.¹²⁶ Philip was attainted by the Irish parliament alongside Richard and leading members of the Butler family, the leading Irish Lancastrians, in 1462.¹²⁷ The act had the proviso that Philip and Thomas Cusack, alone of those named, were not to be attainted if they appeared before the king's governor of Ireland at Dublin castle in the quindene of Easter following. A pardon was issued to

¹²¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 792-5.

¹²² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 92-3, 194-7, 562-3.

¹²³ *The records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn: Admissions, A.D. 1420-1893* (2 vols, London, 1896), i, p. 13; Paul Brand 'Irish law students and lawyers in late medieval England' *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxii, no. 126 (Nov., 2000), p. 169; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 792-5.

¹²⁴ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5, 95, 119-22.

¹²⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 88-93, 552-3, 562-3; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 38; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 25.

¹²⁶ RC 8/41, pp. 17, 59-60; CIRCLE, Pat. 14 Edw. IV, nos. 3, 6; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 340-1; Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 184.

¹²⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, p. 24-9.

Philip in December 1462.¹²⁸ In 1463 he secured the repeal of the attainder against the Richard, now deceased, and the restoration of John, Richard's infant son, to his father's lands. The royal administration appears to have enforced a settlement whereby Peter Travers retained Baldongan, while the remainder of the Bermingham estates were returned to the family, to be held in Philip's custody during his nephew's long minority.¹²⁹ Philip used his office as serjeant-at-law to move a suit on the king's behalf against Peter Travers for embezzling county funds while sheriff.¹³⁰ The Berminghams appear to have secured Baldongan only after the death of Peter Travers, in very late 1465 or early 1466, and of his wife Elizabeth, although the Travers family appear to have maintained their claim.¹³¹ Richard Travers of Hacketstown, who had been among Peter's electors in 1465, asserted the family's right to Baldongan by pasturing his animals there, to the displeasure of Philip Bermingham and Walter Cheevers, the king's farmers.¹³² Two rather cryptic entries on the memoranda roll of 9 & 10 Henry VIII (1517-1519) appears to relate to ongoing disputes over the manor decades later. Both were enrolled at the request of Christopher St Laurence, whose wife, Amy Bermingham, was heiress to her family's lands at Baldongan and Ward.¹³³ The first was a list of the obits of Peter Travers, John Bermingham junior of Baldongan (d. 1483) and Nicholas Travers of Courtlough (d. 1486).¹³⁴ The second was the recollections of William Darcy of Platin concerning John Bermingham of Baldongan and Nicholas Travers of Courtlough, as recorded by the king's attorney Thomas Netterville.¹³⁵ Although no specific mention is made of a land dispute – the focus is instead on Nicholas Travers' age – it is clear from the families concerned, and the St Laurence interest, that conflicting claims to the Travers/Bermingham inheritance lie behind these unusual entries on the roll. The Berminghams, and subsequently the St Laurences, were ultimately successful. The Travers family retained lands in the area of Baldongan into the seventeenth century, but do not appear among the leading gentry of the county after Peter's death.

¹²⁸ *CPR, 1461-7*, p. 215.

¹²⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, 88-93; 562-3; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 236.

¹³⁰ RC 8/41, pp. 59-60.

¹³¹ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 236.

¹³² RC 8/41, p. 56.

¹³³ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 60

¹³⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., iv, f. 56.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 57.

Civic elite and county elite in Dublin

More suggestive of genuine social mobility are the sheriffs from the families of Mareward, Burnell, Blakeney and Duff. Áine Foley, in her invaluable list of the sheriffs of Dublin to 1485, notes of Thomas Mareward, sheriff c. 1380 and then again from 1399 to 1402, that 'the Mareward family held the manor of Skreen, Co. Meath, in chief'.¹³⁶ Not only would this put them among the most prominent landed families of the Dublin hinterland, but it would also give Thomas a landed base outside the county of Dublin. However, the impression is misleading. Thomas was in fact the first of his family to bear the title of baron of Skreen; indeed he is the first person with his surname that I have yet been able to identify in Ireland, and would appear to be something of a self-made man.¹³⁷ He acquired the manor and title of Skreen, either by purchase or by marriage (not without some conflict), from the Feypo family, who had themselves received it from Hugh de Lacy in the first flush of the English conquest.¹³⁸ Thomas' first appearances in the record are all in an urban context; he was one of the bailiffs of Dublin in 1384, and was mayor in 1389 and again in 1392.¹³⁹ Thomas' first wife was Cecilia, the widow of Richard Hegreve, himself a citizen and one-time bailiff of the city and a man of illegitimate birth.¹⁴⁰ Thomas was appointed to commissions concerned with the smuggling of wine and the hoarding of grain in involving the city of Dublin, and appears as a witness with other burgesses and civic officials to grants made in the city.¹⁴¹ He

¹³⁶ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 286-7, p. 286 n. 81.

¹³⁷ A cryptic note in Archbishop Alen's register suggests that Thomas' grandfather was the son of Elizabeth, daughter of Elias Ashebourne, chief justice of Ireland c. 1330 and tenant of the archbishops of Dublin. Ashebourne was associated with Ashby Mears in Northamptonshire; it is notable that a Thomas Mareward, kt., appears in connection with Northamptonshire and as sheriff of the neighbouring shires of Warwickshire and Leicestershire at much the same time that our Thomas Mareward was sheriff of Dublin. However the Marewards do not appear as tenants of Elias' lands, while the register entry appears more concerned with land boundaries than the Mareward pedigree. In addition, the Mareward pedigree given here for the late fourteenth century looks suspiciously similar to that of c. 1480 - c. 1520 - *Alen's reg.* pp. 201-2; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 68-9; *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 177; *CPR, 1399-1401*, pp. 212, 325; *List of sheriffs for England and Wales from the earliest times to A. D. 1831, compiled from documents in the Public Record Office* (London, 1898), p. 145; RC 8/33, pp. 398-9; Steven Ellis. 'Darcy, Sir William' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a2405>].

¹³⁸ G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169-1216* (Oxford, 1911) p. 85; *CPR, 1401-5*, p. 509; CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, nos. 13, 132; Pat. 7 Hen. IV, nos. 151-2; RC 8/33 pp. 217, 218. Skreen was not recognised as a parliamentary peerage.

¹³⁹ H. F. Berry (ed.) 'Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs of Dublin City, A.D. 1229 to 1447', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, C, xxviii (1910), pp. 47-61, p. 57.

¹⁴⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 49 Edw. III, no. 113; Berry, 'Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs', p. 56.

¹⁴¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 49 Edw. III, nos. 206, 207, 214; Pat. 10 Ric. II, no. 156.

served on some more martial commissions with men from leading county families, but it is notable that other men with a clearly urban background – such as Geoffrey Gallan, also mayor of Dublin – served on these also; and a payment to Thomas for his service with ‘various defensible men’ in resistance of the Irish enemies in Kildare describes him as Thomas Mareward, citizen of Dublin.¹⁴² The family’s landed base in Dublin was later the manor of Santry, but this too was acquired from the Feypos during Thomas’ lifetime.¹⁴³

Thomas’ grandson Richard Mareward, knight, who served as sheriff of Dublin in 1459, thus came from a family that had significant landed interests in the county; but this cannot be said of Thomas with any certainty. Thomas appears to have acquired his interests in landed society through marriage and/or purchase and through royal service; county service would appear to be a result of this royal service rather than his position in landed society. Thus we may identify in the Marewards the rise of a new, urban family into the ranks of the leading families of Meath and Dublin through royal service and the acquisition of land. The family continued their association with the city of Dublin. Walter Mareward, grandson of Richard, our sheriff, was admitted to the franchise in 1479.¹⁴⁴ Richard, too, was a freeman of the city. The Marewards appear to have used their status as freemen of Dublin to avoid serving as sheriff of the county. Richard, having served as sheriff on several occasions in the 1440s and 1450s, was elected in May 1470 but refused to take up office. When summoned to answer he pleaded that he was a freeman of Dublin and thus exempt from county office. Judgement was in his favour.¹⁴⁵ It is also noteworthy that Walter Mareward did not, apparently, serve as sheriff. Although the gap in our list at this period means that his service as sheriff cannot definitively be ruled out, it is possible that he, like his grandfather, used his status as a freeman to avoid service. Indeed this well may have been his purpose in seeking admission to the franchise.

¹⁴² CIRCLE, Cl. 3 Ric. II, no. 12; Cl. 16 Ric. II, no. 14; Berry, ‘Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs’ p. 57

¹⁴³ Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, p. 85; CIRCLE, Cl. Edw. I, no. 1; Pat. 49 Edw. III, no. 113; Cl. 17 Ric. II, no. 77; Pat. 2 Hen. V, no. 36; RC 8/33, pp. 218, 398-9; RC 8/36, pp. 383-5, 494-7, 654

¹⁴⁴ *Calendar of ancient records of Dublin*, ed. J. T. Gilbert (18 vols., 1889-1922), i, p. 356.

¹⁴⁵ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 255-255v.

At least one other sheriff-elect used his status as a freeman of the city to avoid service. This was Maurice Burghill, knight, elected in 1475.¹⁴⁶ Burghill is an elusive figure whose activities and interests spanned Ireland, England and indeed France. In 1464 he had a grant of the office of the king's foreign exchange at Calais and of the exchange 'within the realm of England towards foreign parts' for ten years, alongside William Hattecliff, the king's secretary.¹⁴⁷ In 1466 he appears as a feoffee to John de Solario 'otherwise Bull' of London, broker, alongside four others, including the earl of Warwick's chaplain and the earl's herald.¹⁴⁸ Given Warwick's long-standing connection to Calais, it is possible that Burghill was associated in some regard with the earl.¹⁴⁹ He was in Ireland before 28 July 1468, when he had permission to be absent from the lordship for the period of eight years, by permission of John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester, deputy lieutenant.¹⁵⁰ He would appear to have been an associate of Robert Bold, who had a similar license of absence given at Drogheda on the same day.¹⁵¹ Bold was a prominent Yorkist, and had been among those attainted by the parliament at Coventry in 1459.¹⁵² In 1460 York granted him the constableness of Denbeigh in north Wales.¹⁵³ Bold was granted the manor of Ratoath together with a peerage only a few weeks after he had this license of absence, in August 1468.¹⁵⁴ Like Bold, Burghill would appear to have been English born. He is the first of his family to appear in the Irish records. Like Bold, he appears to have made Ireland the focus of his attentions. In 1473 he was one of the masters of the mint of Dublin castle.¹⁵⁵ Despite his previous association with the Calais exchange, this position would appear to have been a sinecure – as indeed was probably the case with his Calais office. He does not appear in any other office in the lordship of

¹⁴⁶ Ferguson's notes record him as Maurice Burghill and Robert Burghill alternately; Robert is in error - NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 232, 256, 270.

¹⁴⁷ *CPR, 1461-7*, pp. 323-4; Martin Allen, 'The English crown and coinage, 1399-1485' in Linda Clark (ed.), *Exploring the evidence: commemoration, administration and the economy* (Woodbridge, 2014), 183-200, p. 189.

¹⁴⁸ *CCR, 1461-8*, p. 382.

¹⁴⁹ A. J. Pollard, 'Neville, Richard, sixteenth earl of Warwick and sixth earl of Salisbury [called the Kingmaker] (1428-1471)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19955>]

¹⁵⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 594-7.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 592-5.

¹⁵² *CPR 1452-61*, p. 572

¹⁵³ *CPR 1461-67*, pp. 421-2

¹⁵⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 622-5.

¹⁵⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 128-31.

Ireland but was clearly held to be a man of importance. He was one of the founders of the baker's guild of SS Clement and Anne in Dublin in March 1479, when he is named among the king's council, after Sir Robert Eustace, the treasurer, but before Philip Bermingham and Robert Dowdall, chief justices of the king's and common bench respectively.¹⁵⁶ If Maurice held an office at this time, it is not given. In the same year, he appeared as one of the feoffees of Robert St Laurence and his bride Joan, daughter and coheiress of Edmund, duke of Somerset. His fellow feoffees on this occasion included many of the leading churchmen, nobility, and gentry of England, including the duke of Buckingham, the earl of Essex, and the king's brother-in-law, Anthony Woodville, 2nd earl Rivers, as well as the archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁵⁷ Irish nobles present included the earl of Ormond and James Fleming, baron of Slane.

Burghill thus appears to have been a close associate of the most important men in the lordship of Ireland, without himself holding an important office. He does not appear to have held any significant lands in his own right; but he did secure considerable estates through his marriage to Margaret Holywood, coheiress to the Holywood lands in Dublin and Meath, and widow of Sir Robert Burnell.¹⁵⁸ In acquiring large portions of the estates of the former sheriffs Robert Holywood and Robert Burnell, Burghill clearly made himself eligible, in the eyes of the electors of county Dublin, to serve as sheriff in the county. But he sought to avoid the office, as he apparently sought to avoid office in general, and his new wife gave him a way out. In September 1468 Maurice 'Burwyll' had been admitted to the franchise of the city of Dublin as husband of Margaret Holywood.¹⁵⁹ Like Richard Mareward, Maurice successfully appealed to his status as freeman of the city to escape service as sheriff of Dublin.¹⁶⁰ In 1470 and 1476, shortly before and shortly after Maurice's election, the commons of the Irish parliament had complained about the shortage of men eligible for election as sheriff, a problem particularly acute in county Dublin, because of the widespread sale of charters of

¹⁵⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 19 Edw. IV, no. 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Cl. 19 Edw. IV, no. 5; Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 54.

¹⁵⁸ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 226, 228; Ferguson repertory, iv, pp. 7, 25; RC 8/41, pp.35-7; *Stat. Roll Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 178-81; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 38.

¹⁵⁹ *CARD*, i, p. 332.

¹⁶⁰ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 232, 256, 270.

exemption from service.¹⁶¹ In 1470 the sale of such charters was prohibited, and it was ordered that the sheriff should have £10 of the county's issues towards his costs. In 1476 all existing charters were annulled, but it was ordained that no one 'shall be sheriff against his will within 3 years after he has been sheriff, if there be others sufficient'. The act appears to have taken effect. Robert Holywood had a charter of exemption from serving as sheriff in 1474-6, but appears in that office in 1480.¹⁶² These acts, together with Mareward and Burghill's use of their civic rights to escape service, all within the years 1470-1476, suggest something of a crisis in the office. And yet John Burnell, who was admitted to the franchise of the city as son of Sir Robert Burnell in Michaelmas 1468 (he is in fact listed immediately before Burghill) served as sheriff at least twice in the same seven-year period.¹⁶³

The Burnell family provide a striking example of social mobility in late medieval Ireland. The earliest surviving reference to the family in the Irish chancery material is a grant of 1284 by Edward I of three and a half carucates of land in 'Glincopy' and 'Glaslawer' to William Burnell.¹⁶⁴ Glincopy is almost certainly Glencap near Kilmacanoge in modern county Wicklow, part of the royal lands of Othee. The grant was dated at Caernarfon, making it highly probable that William was a close relation of Robert Burnell, bishop of Bath and Wells, Edward I's chancellor, who was in north Wales at precisely that time as part of the 'pacification' of the country following the rebellion of Llwelyn ap Gruffudd. William was possibly a nephew of the bishop, or indeed one of the bishop's illegitimate children, of which he was reputed to have several.¹⁶⁵ It will be seen that Robert was a popular name in the family. It would thus seem that the Burnells had some landed presence in the Dublin region in the late thirteenth century, but whether they retained continuous possession of that land in the face of the Gaelic Irish resurgence seems unlikely. Certainly there is no evidence of the family holding land in this area in later periods. No member of the family served as sheriff of the county before

¹⁶¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 674-7; ii, pp. 256-7.

¹⁶² NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, pp. 25-6.

¹⁶³ *CARD*, i, p. 332.

¹⁶⁴ *CIRCLE*, Antiquissime Roll, no. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Alan Harding, 'Burnell, Robert (d. 1292)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., 2007) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4055>]

the 1450s.¹⁶⁶ Yet after 1450 three members of the family (very probably three generations of the main line) served between in the office before the close of the century. As with Thomas Mareward, the source of the family's rise to prominence would appear to lie in the city of Dublin. The first Robert Burnell who features in the records of the Irish chancery was a citizen of Dublin, who was bailiff of the city in 1317 and 1318; his son Robert II also served as a bailiff (in 1350) and then as mayor of the city (in 1356).¹⁶⁷

Like Thomas Mareward, Robert Burnell II actively acquired land in the Dublin hinterland in the latter half of the fourteenth century. At his death he held half the manor of Balrothery as well as part of the manor of Ballyfermot in Dublin, apparently acquired through marriage to a Clahull coheirress, and the manor of Tullaghmedan in county Meath.¹⁶⁸ An inquisition of 1416 found that the farmers of the Meath manor were Thomas Plunkett and Patrick Burnell.¹⁶⁹ As Patrick was not Robert's principal heir, it is possible that he deliberately acquired this manor to provide for a younger son. How he acquired these lands is not clear, but elsewhere he used both purchase and marriage to good effect. It is notable that at around that same time that Mareward was securing for himself the Feypo manors of Skreen and Santry, Robert acquired nine marks of annual rent from the Feypo lands in Ballymun and Silloge in county Dublin 'for a certain sum of money paid to [Francis Feypo, knight] by hands'.¹⁷⁰ The biggest coup secured by the family was the marriage of his son, also called Robert, to the junior of the two co-heiresses of the Tyrell lordship of Castleknock.¹⁷¹ The elder sister married John Sargent, another urban figure, whose family henceforth bore the title of lords of Castleknock; his son Thomas served as sheriff of Dublin in c. 1401.¹⁷² It is clear that in the late fourteenth century the urban elite of Dublin were busily acquiring estates in the city's hinterland.

¹⁶⁶ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 279-88.

¹⁶⁷ Eoin C. Bairéad, 'The bailiffs, provosts and sheriffs of the city of Dublin' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin XIV* (Dublin, 2014), 210-309, pp. 284, 286.

¹⁶⁸ CIRCLE, Cl. 18 Ric. II, no. 6; Ball, *History of County Dublin*, iv, pp. 101-2, 127.

¹⁶⁹ RC 8/36, pp. 105-13.

¹⁷⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. VI, no. 62

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Cl. 4 Ric. II, no. 32; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, p. 167

¹⁷² Smith, 'Patricians in medieval Dublin', pp. 225-6; *8th report of the Record Commiss.*, supplement 7, p. 530.

Robert Burnell III also served as bailiff and mayor of Dublin (in 1382 and 1383 respectively).¹⁷³ With Mareward he was one of the citizens of Dublin charged with using the money raised by the grant of the King's ferry-toll of Dublin to repair the great bridge of the city in 1386.¹⁷⁴ He was described as 'of Castleknock' in the English letters patent appointing him second baron of the Irish exchequer (for the second time) in 1393.¹⁷⁵ It is possible that this Robert had some legal training. He frequently served as attorney in Ireland for Irish landowners and clerics staying in England and English landowners with interests in Ireland.¹⁷⁶ His travel to England in 1388, when he appointed attorneys to represent his interests in Ireland, may have related to legal studies.¹⁷⁷ What is certain is that his knowledge, connections and travel across the Irish Sea made him a valuable agent in Ireland not only for Englishmen with interests in the lordship but also for the king, as in 1396 he was charged, with the sheriff of Dublin and the king's serjeant-at-laws, with bringing a recalcitrant cleric from Dublin before the king's chancery in England.¹⁷⁸ Robert's son John also served as an attorney in Ireland for English landowners, including the prior of Little Malvern, and it is possible that he too may have had legal training; at the very least he maintained his father's cross-sea connections.¹⁷⁹ John appears to have acquired the manor of Balgriffin, by which the family was usually identified later in the century, from the Comyn family (who last provided a sheriff of Dublin in 1398) by way of a long and vindictive legal dispute with his fellow citizen John Little, husband of Eleanor Comyn, whom he accused of being an Irishman named John Maguire.¹⁸⁰

The Burnells, then, appear to have joined the ranks of Dublin county society through a textbook combination of land purchase, astute marriage, legal practice and royal service. Just as Smith wrote of their contemporaries (and in-laws) the Sargents, the family had fulfilled the dreams of the urban patriciate by carving out a place for

¹⁷³ Berry, 'Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs', p. 56

¹⁷⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 29 Edw. III, no. 19; Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 93.

¹⁷⁵ CPR, 1391-6, p. 262.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 604, 708; CPR, 1396-9, p.462; CPR, 1399-1401, p. 99.

¹⁷⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 15.

¹⁷⁸ CPR, 1396-9, p. 53.

¹⁷⁹ CPR, 1416-22, p. 177.

¹⁸⁰ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 50-2; Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 121; NLI MS 761, p. 287; *8th report of the Record Commiss.*, supplement 7, p. 530.

themselves in landed society.¹⁸¹ But this interpretation – of evolution from urban to county elite – risks being too narrow. In 1988 Rosemary Horrox made the case for the existence of an urban gentry in later medieval England and argued that, far from seeking to escape the towns for the countryside, the urban patricians were as inherently ‘gentle’ as the county elite. Both successful merchants who acquired land and families of purely rural gentry origin maintained or sought to create a presence in London and the provincial towns. The elite of town and country were far from seeing the urban and rural worlds as two mutually exclusive spheres.¹⁸² The Burnells of the county and city of Dublin are a clear example of the same phenomenon in Ireland in the later Middle Ages. Robert Burnell IV, the son of John Burnell, continued the family tradition of royal service, as for instance in 1462 when he with others was charged to take the muster of Roland FitzEustace, lord Portlester, and 300 archers upon their arrival in Ireland.¹⁸³ He was knighted, and served as sheriff on at least seven occasions between 1444 and 1466 as well as serving as justice of the peace in 1461. Together with his extensive lands in the north, west and south of the county, Robert appears the very model of the late fifteenth-century county gentleman. But he also, like John and Roberts II & III, served as mayor of the city Dublin (in 1449, 1450, 1454, 1458 and 1461-2 – overlapping with his time as sheriff).¹⁸⁴ This level of overlap in the offices of town and county would in fact appear to exceed that which Horrox found in England, where urban gentry could be found acting as ‘commissioners, escheators and under-sheriffs’ on a county level.¹⁸⁵ Horrox cites one man from an urban gentry background who acted as sheriff of Northumberland in 1457 but adds that he was ‘by this date... barely an urban figure’; a statement that can hardly be said to hold true of a perennial mayor.¹⁸⁶ It contrasts too with Saul’s verdict that the English gentry ‘were visitors to, rather than residents in, the towns’.¹⁸⁷ Nor was Robert’s joint county and city service unique in late medieval Dublin. Both Thomas Mareward and Walter Tyrell, who each served several years as sheriff in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, served as mayor of the city; while John

¹⁸¹ Smith, ‘Patricians in medieval Dublin’, p. 228.

¹⁸² Horrox, ‘Urban gentry’, pp. 26-27, 33-36.

¹⁸³ *CPR, 1461-7*, p. 201.

¹⁸⁴ Berry, ‘Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs’, p. 56; *CARD*, i, pp. 273, 282, 299, 310.

¹⁸⁵ Horrox, ‘Urban gentry’, p. 34.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43 n. 74.

¹⁸⁷ Saul, *Scenes from provincial life*, pp. 186-7.

Barrett who served as Walter's undersheriff was a bailiff of the city during Walter's time as mayor.¹⁸⁸ The continued association of the Burnell family with the civic life of Dublin is given further testament by their association with the religious guild of St. Anne in St. Audoen's parish, and the existence in the city of Burnell's Inns, one of several residential complexes associated with prominent civic families.¹⁸⁹ The Burnells then are surely proof that in Dublin at least there was no impenetrable barrier between county gentry and civic elite.

Robert Burnell IV added to his family's possessions by his marriage to Margaret, coheiress to the lands of Robert Holywood, kt., who had been sheriff in 1426. His wife's uncle was Nicholas Holywood, last sheriff in 1447, while her sister Elizabeth was married to Peter Travers, who was sheriff immediately before Burnell in 1465-6.¹⁹⁰ These connections make clear the close bonds between the families that provided sheriffs of Dublin in the fifteenth century. Such marital alliances, which can only rarely be glimpsed, stretched (unsurprisingly) across county borders. We have already noted that Robert Bath of Cappoge drew his name from an estate he held in right of his wife, Rose Woodlock. Rose's mother, Catherine, was coheiress to the lands of the Owen family, who had provided a sheriff of Dublin in the fourteenth century and a justice of the peace in 1396 and 1402.¹⁹¹ Catherine was related by marriage to John Woodlock, sheriff of Dublin in c. 1475.¹⁹² Her sister and coheiress, Joan, was married to Nicholas Cusack of Gerrardstown (bar. Skreen, co. Meath). Their son Christopher was sheriff of Meath in 1511; Joan's obit is recorded in the family's commonplace book.¹⁹³

Robert Burnell's family continued to serve in county office after Robert's death, while sheriff, in late summer 1466.¹⁹⁴ His son John was sheriff on several occasions

¹⁸⁸ Berry, 'Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs', pp. 56-7; RC 8/36, p. 613.

¹⁸⁹ H. F. Berry, 'History of the religious gild of S Anne, in S Audoen's church, Dublin, 1437-1740', *PRIA*, 25C3 (1904), pp. 21-106, pp. 23, 27.

¹⁹⁰ *Stat. Roll Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 88-93, 552-3, 562-3; ii, pp. 150-3, 178-81; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 38; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 25.

¹⁹¹ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 4; Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 282; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 12.

¹⁹² John Woodlock 'of Blanchardstown' was sheriff c. 1475; both Cappoge and Blanchardstown later appear among the lands inherited by Rose Woodlock from her mother Catherine Owen – *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 4. The relationship is not clear. Catherine appears to have been married to Thomas Woodlock – RC 8/43, pp. 100, 216.

¹⁹³ TCD MS 594, ff.34v-35

¹⁹⁴ RC 8/41, pp. 35-7, 78-81.

1468-1472, and apparently again at some point in the period 1486-93. His son Robert was sheriff in 1499. Their connection to the civic life of Dublin appears to have declined, although John was admitted to the franchise as son of Sir Robert in 1468.¹⁹⁵ John Burnell, recorder of the city in 1459 and bailiff in 1467, and his son Patrick, apparently represent a cadet branch of the family.¹⁹⁶ This John may have been a younger brother of Sir Robert, or perhaps a descendant of the Patrick Burnell who had been in possession of Tullaghmedan in 1416.¹⁹⁷ It is notable that John Burnell, son of Sir Robert, did not take advantage of his rights as a freeman of Dublin to avoid service as sheriff of Dublin, in the manner of Richard Mareward or Maurice Burghill.

A family that bears comparison with the Burnells is the family of Blakeney or Blackney. Indeed the two families were closely associated, not least in their shared patronage of the guild of St. Anne.¹⁹⁸ The family does not appear in county office until 1466. John Blakeney 'of Dublin' in 1405 served as one of the attorneys in Ireland of the prior of Little Malvern with John Burnell in 1420, and he undoubtedly had legal training.¹⁹⁹ He was in the royal service in this capacity, being retained by the king for an annual fee of 100s for his counsel to the lieutenant in 1407-8, and eventually rising to be chief justice of the common bench, while his son James was chancellor of the Irish exchequer and clerk of common pleas of the same.²⁰⁰ The James Blakeney of Harristown, esquire, who served as sheriff in 1466 was presumably the same man. The family was closely associated with the Burnells. In 1450 and 1453 John Blakeney and John Burnell, gentleman, were pledges for John Rodwell, keeper of the crane house of Dublin.²⁰¹ James Blakeney was bailiff in 1454, when Robert Burnell was mayor of the city.²⁰² A continued association with the Burnells is suggested by the fact that James seems to have served as sheriff following the death in office of Sir Robert Burnell.²⁰³ James was among the electors of Robert's two predecessors and it is likely he had been

¹⁹⁵ *CARD*, i, p. 332.

¹⁹⁶ *CARD*, i, pp. 302, 326, 340.

¹⁹⁷ *NAI*, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 20.

¹⁹⁸ Berry, 'Religious gild of St. Anne', pp. 22-3, 27.

¹⁹⁹ *CIRCLE*, Pat. 7 Hen. IV, no. 38; CPR 1416-22, p. 177.

²⁰⁰ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 174; *CIRCLE*, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 11; Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 19; *NAI*, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 12.

²⁰¹ *CARD*, i, p. 274.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 280-1.

²⁰³ RC 8/41, pp. 24, 30, 35-7.

among Robert's electors also.²⁰⁴ He was one of those appointed to a commission to summon all the gentry (*toutz lez Gentils*) of Dublin for the purpose of raising and paying for soldiers in 1465, alongside Robert St Laurence, Robert Burnell, Peter Travers, John Barnewall, John Field and John Woodlock, all of whom, with the exception of John Field, had served as sheriff or would serve as sheriff in subsequent years.²⁰⁵ Blakeney also served on other commissions concerned with the defence of the county.²⁰⁶ It is notable that the only other member of the family to serve in county office in Dublin in the period of study was James Blakeney of Balcony, gentleman, who was escheator and clerk of the markets and measures in 1509.²⁰⁷ The 'Balcony' in question is almost certainly the modern townland of Balcunna. A Thomas Burnell, clerk, served as James' attorney in a legal dispute with Thomas Fitzlyons, merchant of Dublin, and was apparently related to him by marriage.²⁰⁸ Like the Burnells, the Blakeney family possessed a prominent city residence, Blakeney's Inns, which in 1534 were granted by James Blakeney of 'Rykynhore' (Cremona, par. Swords; called Reckenhore in the Down Survey, when it was still in the family's possession) to the fraternity of St. Anne's.²⁰⁹ Once more, the importance of royal service as a means of acquiring the money and favour that enabled the acquisition of land – and thus status – is emphasised.

Civic elite and county elite in Meath

We have seen that in Dublin there was a close link between the civic elite and the leading county office-holding families. Robert Sherlock, esquire, of Athboy, elected sheriff of the county in 1485, appears to be a rare example of a similar role being played in Meath by a prominent urban figure. Sherlock had been provost of the town of Athboy, and had served as a baron of the exchequer of the liberty of Meath when it was restored in 1478-9.²¹⁰ Other members of the Sherlock family served in the less prominent offices of Meath. John Sherlock was coroner of Meath in 1421, while Walter Sherlock was sheriff of the cross in c. 1436. The coronership was largely the preserve of the middling

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40, 61-5.

²⁰⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 344-7. John Field was the son of Thomas, last sheriff in 1449 – NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 68.

²⁰⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 262-5.

²⁰⁷ RC 8/43, p. 287.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ Berry, 'Religious gild of St. Anne', p. 27; *Civil survey*, vii, p. 101; NAI, Ferguson coll., iv, ff. 11-11v.

²¹⁰ *Christ church deeds*, nos. 1014, 1021.

gentry in the fifteenth century, while the sheriffs of the cross were on the whole less prominent than sheriffs of the county. In 1641 Edward Sherlock of Fraine (par. Athboy) appears as a significant landholder in the area around the town of Athboy. He was also the proprietor of a castle and six tenements in the town itself.²¹¹ Despite these landholdings and service as sheriff, the family do not appear among the gentry of Meath in Christopher Cusack's commonplace book. It is possible that in 1511 the family had yet to acquire their estates outside the walls of Athboy; however, this seems unlikely given the roughly generational appearance of the family in county office and the election of one of their number as sheriff of the county in 1485.²¹² Another possibility is that Cusack did not consider them to be members of the county gentry despite their acquisition of landed estates. If so, this is a rare Irish example of a burgess family struggling to assert themselves as members of the gentry despite the acquisition of land, a trope that was common in early modern England.²¹³ As we shall see, other officers of the Meath, including a sheriff of the cross and a coroner of the county, were associated with Trim or Newtown Trim; while Nicholas Brown of Kilpatrick, sheriff of the cross in 1457, came from a family with strong links to Athboy.²¹⁴ The town of Drogheda, though outside the county, played a key role in the economic life of Meath. While no men strongly associated with the urban elite of Drogheda appear to have served as sheriff of Meath, Thomas Kent of Drogheda, gentleman, served in the lesser but still significant office of escheator and clerk of the markets and measures of Meath in 1495. As we shall see, Thomas' family held lands in the county, at Danestown in the barony of Skreen, and they were closely connected to such leading gentry families as the Darcys of Platin.²¹⁵ Despite these connections, as with the Sherlock family of Athboy, the Kents of Danestown/Drogheda are notable by their absence from Christopher Cusack's list of the Meath gentry. It may be the case that the presence of families with urban interests in the lists of county officers makes the dividing line between patrician and county gentleman seem less significant than it was to contemporaries.

²¹¹ *Civil survey*, v, pp. 204-6, 209-10, 212.

²¹² RC 8/33, p. 397.

²¹³ Wright, *Derbyshire gentry*, p. 1.

²¹⁴ William Brown of Kilpatrick held a castle and six tenements in Athboy in 1641 - *Civil survey*, v, p. 210.

²¹⁵ See below, pp. 184-5.

The examples of Robert Sherlock and Thomas Kent show that overlap between the urban elite and the elite of the county was not restricted to Dublin. Nonetheless this overlap was much less pronounced in Meath than in Dublin, and it appears to have been restricted to a few of the humbler sheriffs and the lesser county officers. There is no Meath equivalent of the long cross-jurisdictional careers of Walter Tyrell and Robert Burnell. The reason for this discrepancy is the unique position of the city of Dublin, which for its size and especially its geographical position had no equivalent in Meath. Drogheda, which was not much inferior to Dublin in its economic clout, lay on the periphery of Meath, a much larger county than Dublin. Furthermore, the location of the liberty administration at Trim, together with Drogheda's own county status militated against Drogheda playing a key role in the political life of the county. Trim supplied many officers of the liberty and also of the county, but these men tended to serve in the less prominent administrative offices, and had little claim to membership of the county gentry, as we shall see.²¹⁶

Office and social mobility: Roger Duff of Kilcoskan

In Dublin urban families like the Burnells and Blakeney's rose to prominence through the classic gentry mechanisms of wealth, royal service and legal expertise. The rise of one of our last sheriffs is much more obscure. Roger Duff of Kilcoskan (par. Killisallaghan), was sheriff of Dublin in 1505-1506.²¹⁷ Roger had earlier been collector of subsidies in the barony of Castleknock.²¹⁸ The surname appears rarely in the Irish chancery records, although a Ralph Duff was a prominent burgess of Drogheda in the early fifteenth century, serving on occasion as one of the sheriffs of the town, while John Duff of Drogheda was impromptu gaoler of John Barnewall for nine weeks in 1455.²¹⁹ As John Duff, late of Drogheda, merchant, he appears as one of the debtors of Thomas Cusack in 1460.²²⁰ In both cases John appears in connection with leading members of the royal administration, although I have not found evidence that he himself held office.

²¹⁶ See below, pp. 276-7.

²¹⁷ NLI MS 761, p. 339; RC 8/43, p. 273.

²¹⁸ RC 8/43, pp. 106-11.

²¹⁹ RC 8/36, p. 4; CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. V, no. 12; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 326-9.

²²⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 712-15; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 242-5.

Henry Duff, also of Drogheda, was king's serjeant-at-law and subsequently second justice of the common bench during the reign of Edward IV.²²¹ It is tempting to identify the surname as the Gaelic word *dubh* (black), as has MacLysaght.²²² Irishmen with this surname can be found living in fifteenth-century county Dublin.²²³ If this is the case, Roger's position as sheriff and gentleman of county Dublin would be an unprecedented example of a Gaelic presence in the at least middling ranks of landed society in the immediate Dublin hinterland in the early Tudor period. What is more, the same memoranda rolls record the fine of 40d paid by Roger for his homage as tenant of Kilcoskan.²²⁴ He was thus holding his land in chief of the king by military service. It should be noted that others paying the same fine for their homage in or around this time included prominent individuals such as James Cruise of Naul, Peter Talbot of Malahide and James Butler of Dunboyne.²²⁵ It seems probable, however, that Duff was not – or rather not always – a name of Gaelic origin. A Walter Duff was listed as one of the principal sub-tenants of the Feypo manor of Skreen as early as the 1180s; Otway-Ruthven adds that he was lord of Dowdstown, which took its name from him; so some men with this surname were clearly 'functionally English' from the earliest days of the colony.²²⁶

What relationship the fine for homage bore to the extent of a tenant's landholdings is not clear. In 1641 Kilcoskan, described as half a ploughland, was held by Laurence Bealing of Bealingstown.²²⁷ Edward Dowd of Porterstown held 78 plantation acres in Stradbally as well as half a ploughland in Porterstown (par. Castleknock).²²⁸ It would appear that Kilcoskan was in the possession of the Kent family in the early fourteenth century.²²⁹ How or when the Duffs came to acquire Kilcoskan I have been

²²¹ RC 8/41, pp. 407, 412-13 *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 790-3; ii, pp. 506-11, 794-7; *Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, p. 19; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 185.

²²² Edward MacLysaght, *Irish families* (Dublin, 4th edn., 1985; 1st edn. 1957), pp. 18-19

²²³ Henry F. Berry (ed.) *Register of wills and inventories of the diocese of Dublin, in the time of Archbishops Tregury and Walton, 1457-1483* (Dublin, 1898), p. 31.

²²⁴ RC 8/43, p. 282.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-9.

²²⁶ *Chart. St. Mary's*, i, pp. 157-8; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Parochial Development in the Rural Deanery of Skreen', *Jn RSAI*, xciv, No. 2 (1964), pp.111-122, pp. 117, 119. Nicholas Duff appears as a juror in 1247 alongside men from Meath families such as Feypo and Delamare – *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 5.

²²⁷ *Civil survey*, vii, p. 238.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 244.

²²⁹ *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 177; CIRCLE, Pat. 19 Edw. II, no. 3.

unable to discover, but John Duff, Roger's father, paid a fine for homage for the same in 1484 and again in 1493.²³⁰ Roger is recorded as the 'son and heir of John Duff of Stradbally and son and heir of Johanna Vier [sic] widow of the said John' recorded on the memoranda roll of 12 Henry VII (1496-7).²³¹ The inclusion of Roger's mother implies that at least some of his lands came through her; but unfortunately the name Vier is apparently unique and is probably corrupt.

It is likely that the Duff family had been established in this part of county Dublin for some time, as a number of men with the surname being to appear in connection with the parish of Killsallaghan from the 1470s (if not earlier). John Duff of Stradbally 'junior' (Roger's father?) was involved in a dispute with his neighbour Thomas Falyagh (an unmistakably Irish surname) of Stradbally in 1479, when he sought security against violence on Thomas' part.²³² John appears among the debtors of Hugh Galyane, citizen of Dublin, in his will of September 1474.²³³ John owed Galyane 20s, considerably more than David Wogan of Naas, gentleman, owed, but considerably less than that owed by John Woodlock of Cappoge, who is probably our sheriff of c. 1475.²³⁴ The inventory of the goods of John Palmer, whose will was proved in April 1476, lists Nicholas Duff among his creditors.²³⁵ John sought burial in the parish church of Killsallaghan, and was thus a neighbour of the Duffs of Stradbally. This Nicholas was presumably Nicholas Duff of Rowlestown (now par. Killossery, less than 3km from Killsallaghan), husband of Joan Dansay, whose will was proved in December 1476.²³⁶ The goods of Joan and Nicholas were valued at £22 17s, before debts. Inventories of gentry possessions are few and far between for fifteenth century Ireland, so it is not possible to make any definitive pronouncement on the couple's social status from this inventory. However in contrast Henry Dowdall, gentleman, could claim, presumably without inviting too much ridicule, to have had 300 marks worth of livestock, clothing, and household stuff stolen

²³⁰ RC 8/33, p. 535; RC 8/43, p. 54.

²³¹ NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 60.

²³² Steven Ellis (ed.), 'The common bench plea roll of 19 Edward IV (1479-80)', ed. Steven Ellis, *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 31 (1984), pp. 19, 21-60', p. 55.

²³³ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 85-9.

²³⁴ Both Cappoge and Blanchardstown later appear among the lands inherited by Rose Woodlock from her mother Catherine Owen – *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 4.

²³⁵ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 35-6.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-4. In the fifteenth century Rowlestown was part of the parish of Clonmethan in the crosslands of the county, and a possession of the archbishop - *Civil survey*, vii, p. 158.

(alongside his wife and daughter) from his tower house at Castlelumny, county Louth, in 1467.²³⁷ Nicholas and Joan appear to have been prosperous farmers, but whether they can be considered members of the local gentry is questionable. Dansay is not a name that appears among the gentry of Dublin in the fifteenth century, although it does appear among the elite of the city of Dublin.²³⁸ It is notable that among the couple's debts was 10s owed to John 'Dawe' of Stradbally. This is almost certainly John Duff.²³⁹

It seems probable that the Duff family had previous experience of county office, albeit at a lower level. Thomas Duff, clerk, was one of those appointed to levy the debts of office of former sheriff Thomas Field of Fieldstown, esq., in 1444, alongside Field himself, the subserjeants of Balrothery and Castleknock and a number of men described either as yeomen or clerks.²⁴⁰ It is probable that at least some of these men, including Duff, were members of Field's staff. In 1436 Thomas Duff had acted as attorney for Nicholas Holywood, sheriff of Dublin, and Alexander Ever, seneschal of St Sepulchre's, to make their account in 1436, and he acted in the same capacity for sheriff Robert Bath in c. 1448.²⁴¹ In 1452-3 he was described as late undersheriff of Dublin.²⁴² Four years later he was appointed by the coroners of Kildare as their attorney to make return of writs.²⁴³ Thomas thus appears to have had a long career in local office in county Dublin, albeit at the rarely-glimpsed level of the sheriff's staff. His origins are not clear. He may have been connected to the Duff family of Drogheda. He acted as attorney for the vicar of Mullary and the vicar of Termonfeckin, both in the deanery of Drogheda, in 1456-7.²⁴⁴ His association with Thomas Field, however, puts him squarely in the part of county Dublin in which the Duff family later appear as landowners. Fieldstown is only 5km from Kilcoskan and less from Stradbally and Rowlestown. It is possible that Thomas was the

²³⁷ *Stat. Rolls. Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 496-503.

²³⁸ John Dansey was one of those elected as a *jure* of the city in 1474 – *CARD*, i, pp. 349-50.

²³⁹ The surname appears in various forms, some less 'Irish-looking' than others – RC 8/33, p. 535 (John 'Debe' of Kilcostan, 1484), RC 8/43, p. 54 (John Dove of Kylcostan, 1493), RC 8/43, p. 106 (Roger Duff, 1498), NLI MS 761, p. 339 (Roger Dowe, 1505). Men with the surname Daw or Dawe appear as landowners in south Dublin in the fourteenth century, while Nicholas Dawe of Naas was king's serjeant-at-arms in Ireland, 1461 – *CIRCLE*, Antiquissime roll, no.59; Cl. 5 Edw. III no. 13; Pat. 1 Edw. IV, nos. 25-6; *Inquisitions and extents*, nos. 92, 98.

²⁴⁰ NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 58; *CIRCLE*, Pat. 22 Hen. VI, no. 3; See below, pp. 228-30.

²⁴¹ NLI MS 761, pp. 301-4; *Dowdall deeds*, no. 448.

²⁴² NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 54;

²⁴³ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 206.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 205v.

father or grandfather of John Duff of Kilcoskan. A man named John 'Dave' was attorney for Robert Bath and Robert Burnell, former sheriffs, in c. 1463.²⁴⁵ Given the malleability of the surname Duff, it seems reasonable to conclude that this John was continuing a family tradition of service in local office begun by Thomas Duff.

As former sheriff Roger had a commission to levy his debts of former office in 1508. The commission was directed to Roger Duff of Kilcoskan, gentleman, James Duff, yeoman, John Rice of Chapelmidway, yeoman, Peter Smith and John Spark of Stradbally.²⁴⁶ Rice, Smith and Spark are surnames of apparently English origin. It is likely that these men were Roger's near neighbours and possibly his tenants.²⁴⁷ James' precise relationship with Roger is not specified, it but seems certain that despite the difference in status titles accorded to them they were closely associated. It would seem that the Duff family was on the margins of gentility, such that Roger, as the head of the main line of the family, qualified as a gentleman, while others even of his immediate family did not. A useful contrast might be drawn with a similar commission issued to the widow and sons of Robert Burnell III upon his death in 1465-6. In this commission John and Edward Burnell were both given the title of esquire, but the other men named in the commission were Nicholas Walsh, yeoman, Nicholas Kendyrton, Walter Walsh yeoman, James Gilbert yeoman, William Dalton yeoman and Patrick Penkeston yeoman.²⁴⁸ The Burnells were thus associated with wealthier members of the peasantry in the same manner as Roger Duff, but the additions used make a clear distinction between the Burnell members of the commission and the rest. It is probable that the yeoman members of the commission were closely associated with Robert Burnell, as tenants or even as his 'staff'. This tentative conclusion is given some support by the fact in the Burnell commission above it is noted that Nicholas Walsh yeoman 'mainprised to account to us for Robert's debts and accounts'. Some association with Robert in the execution of his office seems likely in Nicholas' case at least.

²⁴⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 7-8.

²⁴⁶ RC 8/43, p. 273.

²⁴⁷ D'Alton, *History of the county of Dublin*, pp. 390-2. Roger Duff paid a fine for his homage for Stradbally, apparently in place of Kilcoskan, in 1496 - BL Royal MS 18 C xiv, f. 35.

²⁴⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 35-7.

Conclusion

Despite the difficulties of the source material, it has been possible to reconstruct a list of the chief officers of Dublin and Meath that covers the fifteenth century with some degree of consistency. While any findings drawn from such incomplete material must be tentative, the evidence of the records of the office does lend itself strongly to a series of conclusions. The first is that the shrievalty of Dublin in the fifteenth century was dominated by a small group of prominent landed families. These families overwhelmingly had their main landholdings in the county, even if several of them also owned land in neighbouring counties. In Meath, the existence of the liberty prevented the local landed elite from exercising a comparable monopoly of office in the first half of the century. Nonetheless, with the exception of William Welles, few of these outsiders served for long, and in at least two cases – Welles himself and Robert Bold – they chose to establish themselves permanently in the county. The majority of the seneschals of the liberty in the fifteenth century were from the local landed elite, while many of those who were not chose to act through local representatives – notably Henry Grey, seneschal in 1478, who appointed Oliver Plunkett, former sheriff of the county, as his deputy, but also William Welles, who appointed men from leading Meath gentry families to serve under him as sheriff of the liberty. A series of minorities in the early part of the century and the liberty's demise in the latter part of the century further served to ensure the leading role of the local nobility and gentry in the government of the county.

In both Dublin and Meath, the group of families that provided sheriffs was quite stable. Families such as the Cruises of Naul, who had provided sheriffs of the county in the fourteenth and even in some cases in the thirteenth centuries continued to hold office up to the end of the Middle Ages. But nor was this group impervious to change. Many families that had previously been prominent in county office ceased to serve. Others, like the Derpatrick and Owen families may have died out in the male line. In Dublin and Meath, those leading county families that secured their recognition as peers increasingly withdrew from office in the second half of the fifteenth century. As a result, the families that held the office came increasingly to be those of the next rank; those who were prominent, but not dominant, in the county. In Meath, this came increasingly

to mean the numerous cadet branches of the peerage families, especially the Plunketts, though the office certainly remained open to other leading gentry families such as the Darcys of Platin, the Bellews of Bellewstown, and the Wellesleys of Dangan. At the lower end of the social scale, this group of families was open to new blood, some of whom, such as Roger Duff, seem to have had only a tenuous grasp on gentility; but others, such as the Burnells, had successfully carved out a place for themselves among the leading gentry of the county. In Meath the pressure appears to have been in the other direction. No sheriff elected in the period 1463-1513 appears to have come from a 'new' family. Here the simple size of the county gentry meant that the pressures of the office could be widely shared while retaining the office among the leading gentry of the county, while the pressures on landholding caused by the multiplication and ramification of the leading families left little room for incomers. The fourth and perhaps most striking feature of the list of shrieval families in fifteenth-century Dublin is the connection between the county elite and that of the city of Dublin. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century several of the leading families of the city became important landholders in the Dublin hinterland, through a combination of land purchase and astute marriages; but they retained their urban links and often their civic role. In Meath too the men of the towns had an important role to play in the administration of the liberty and county, but they tended to appear in office at the lower, more professional end as clerks of the seneschal or undersheriffs. Robert Sherlock, sheriff of Meath and provost of Athboy, provides a rare but still striking example of a phenomenon that was much more pronounced in Dublin. Finally, the role of royal service to upwardly-mobile families in later medieval Ireland would be hard to exaggerate. In this as in so much else, the gentry of later medieval county Dublin mirrored the behaviour of their contemporaries across the Irish Sea.

Chapter two: Commissions of the peace

Powers and duties of the commissioners of the peace

In England the commission of the peace was the means by which the normal exercise of justice in the English counties was increasingly delegated to a group of 'amateur landlord-magistrates'.¹ Bertha Putnam traced the evolution of the office from the original military functions of the thirteenth century keepers of the peace to the entirely judicial role of the justices of the peace by the late fourteenth century.² On its introduction at the end of the thirteenth century, the Irish commission of the peace exactly mirrored the English archetype. As in England, the *custodes pacis* were originally leading members of local communities enlisted to repress crime and ensure that the inhabitants of their jurisdiction were armed in accordance with their station. In contrast to the increasingly judicial role of the English justices of the peace, however, the role of the Irish keeper of the peace remained predominantly a military one, with commissions stressing their task of assessing arms, holding musters and conducting parleys with hostile groups, providing the central government with a flexible means for directing and legitimising local conflict.³ Any judicial powers held by those receiving commissions were directly linked to these duties – for example, the imposition of fines for those failing to fulfil their military duties or those insufficiently equipped for their station in society. As Robin Frame demonstrated in 1967, the Irish commissioners very much remained keepers, rather than justices, of the peace. For the remainder of the middle ages, the pre-eminent role of the commissioners remained that of directing the military forces of the county in border warfare. They remained commissioners of array a century after their English equivalents had lost this role. The term 'justices of the peace' does appear in the early fifteenth century, but Frame argued that this did not reflect a change in the keeper's role or an extension of their judicial powers. It appears instead simply to have designated those – more prominent individuals – who were given a commission

¹ Coss, *Origins of the English gentry*, p. 168.

² Putnam, 'Transformation of the Keepers of the Peace', pp. 19-48.

³ Frame, 'Judicial powers of the medieval Irish keepers of the peace', pp. 301-303; idem, *English Lordship in Ireland*, p. 39

for an entire county or multiple counties, while those who were appointed as their subordinates on a barony level continued to be called keepers of the peace.⁴

The surviving commissions of the peace for Dublin appear to bear out Frame's point very strongly. The most complete commission is that for 1403 appointing Thomas Cruise, Christopher Holywood, Thomas Sargent and Walter Tyrell as keepers and supervisors of the peace. Their duties were as follows. Firstly, they were to 'assess and cause to be arrayed all men and ecclesiastics having temporalities within that county to horses and arms, hobelars, archers and foot according to the quantity of their lands'. Secondly, having conducted this array, they were to 'place them in twenties, hundreds and thousands, and lead them to marcher areas where hostile invasion by Irishmen or Englishmen... may occur; and, with God leading, to fight and repulse them'. Thirdly, they were to enforce the policing measures contained in the Statute of Winchester. Furthermore, they were to inquire, by oath of prudent and law-worthy men of that county concerning all 'trespasses, seditions, felonies, ambidextries, champerties, extortions, contempts, falsities, false allegiances, conspiracies, confederacies, maintenances, receipts of felons, and all excesses whatever,' to arrest all those indicted for the same, and to commit them to gaol to await trial.⁵ Their power to carry out punishments themselves were limited to amercing those who were remiss in their military or policing duties – for example, those who failed to raise the hue and cry. This is the commission of the peace as it might have appeared in England a century earlier. The keepers have no judicial role beyond that necessary for the execution of their military and policing role. It is worth pointing out that we only have this level of detail because of the commission's survival in a manuscript of the eighteenth-century antiquarian Walter Harris.⁶ It contrasts starkly with the record of the same commission preserved in the nineteenth-century calendar of the Irish chancery letters, which is as follows: 'The king appoints Thomas son of Simon Cruise, Christopher Holywood, Thomas Sargent and Walter Tyrell keepers and supervisors of the keepers of the peace in county Dublin. Dublin, 1 November'.⁷ It is difficult to know to what extent the powers of the

⁴ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 3-5; Idem, 'The Judicial Powers of the Medieval Irish Keepers of the Peace', *Irish Jurist*, new ser., x (1960)

⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 82

⁶ *Ibid.*; Frame, 'Commissions', p. 12

⁷ *RCH*, p. 178 no. 77(a)

1403 commission were typical. Unfortunately we are reliant on the nineteenth-century calendar for the great majority of the remaining commissions, none of which are described as having anything more specific than ‘various powers’ or ‘commission of array, and other powers’.⁸ However, the importance of the military powers of the commission is emphasised by the overlap between its personnel and those of other, more specific commissions concerned with the county’s defence, as in 1402 when Thomas Mareward served on two successive commissions of the peace, a commission to levy ‘the money called smokesilver’ (on which he was joined by Robert Tyrell, his fellow commissioner of the peace), and a commission to levy a subsidy granted by the commons of Dublin ‘to be spent in the marches of the said county, for the salvation of the said marches’ (on which he was joined by Christopher Holywood and John Owen, also keepers of the peace in that year).⁹ Later parliamentary legislation refers to the quarterly sessions of the justices of the peace; although the only competence of the sessions mentioned is that of amercing those guilty of breaking the defensive dyke at Saggart, which is at least obliquely military in nature.¹⁰ Such legislation is significant, apart from anything else, because it shows that the commissions of the peace continued to be a normal part of county government long after our records for the commissioners cease.

Apart from the powers granted in the commissions, which have in many cases been obscured by the record commissioners, evidence for the duties of the commissioners of the peace is rare in later medieval Dublin. A sole example of the commissioners in action is provided by two orders of 18 March 1423 to Richard Aylmer of Lyons, one of keepers of the peace in county Dublin, to release (firstly) Henry Carrick and (secondly) John Frende, chaplain, and Peter Godfrey of Newcastle Lyons from prison.¹¹ Where or why these men were imprisoned is not made clear, but a connection to the vicinity of Newcastle Lyons is likely in both cases. Henry Carrick had been indicted for unspecified felonies almost a decade earlier; his crimes in this instance do not appear to have concerned the security of the county.¹² Among those who secured Henry’s

⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 2 Hen. VI, no. 35; Pat. 3 Hen. VI, nos. 123, 128; *RCH*, p. 232 no. 31b, p. 239 no. 117

⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 2 Hen. VI, nos. 227, 235, 246, 249

¹⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 442-5.

¹¹ CIRCLE, Cl. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 36, 37

¹² RC 8/34, pp. 215-17.

release on the promise of producing him to answer the accusations against him was a Richard Smith of Newcastle, while another was Richard son of Roger Dodde. Richard Dodde also mainprized, with John Godfrey, for John Frende and Peter Godfrey of Newcastle, to whom John was presumably related in some degree.¹³ This unique snapshot of the keeper of the peace in the execution of his duties is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it is an example of service across county borders, as Aylmer also served on commissions of the peace in county Kildare; as did John Sargent, who was justice of the peace in Kildare in 1409 and in Dublin in 1415.¹⁴ In contrast, there are almost no surviving examples of an individual serving as a sheriff of more than one county in the fifteenth century. This highlights perhaps the relative flexibility of appointments to the commission of the peace, which continued to rely on pragmatic considerations of ability to exercise power in an area, rather than the increasing restriction of the shrievalty to those who main landed base lay in the county they were to administer. Secondly, this instance bears out Robin Frame's assertion that Irish keepers of the peace retained a predominantly military and policing role long after the point at which English justices of the peace had assumed a judicial role. Aylmer's duty here is limited to keeping these men in custody until they can be brought to trial, not to try or punish them himself. However, it may be significant in this regard that Aylmer is entitled a keeper and not a justice of the peace, as we shall see. Thirdly, it would appear that Aylmer's role is strictly a local one. As we have seen, both cases appear to concern inhabitants of his family's landed base of Newcastle Lyons or its immediate vicinity. This suggests that in appointing Aylmer as a keeper of the peace the royal government recognised his dominance in the locality and sought to co-opt this dominance for its judicial and policing needs. In return, Aylmer and those like him had their local power enhanced by the stamp of royal authority. In this case the commission of the peace is not so much a county office as a means of co-opting the local power of the gentry for the needs of royal government. Once more, the fact that Aylmer is not part of any of the surviving commissions raises questions about how common or significant this example might be. Were other gentry families exercising these powers over the inhabitants of their localities, perhaps as subordinates of the more prestigious men named as justices or

¹³ RC 8/34, p. 215-17.

¹⁴ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 12, 13, 16.

keepers of the peace in the surviving commissions? If we return to the detailed commission of 1403, we see that the commissioners, as 'keepers and supervisors of keepers of the peace', were granted 'full power to deputize, place and appoint other sufficient and suitable persons, for whom they are willing to answer, in any baronies or districts in that county whatsoever, to do and execute all and singular of the premises for the benefit of the king's peace'.¹⁵ It is tempting to suggest that Aylmer held his position as a local deputy appointed in precisely this manner; but in the absence of further evidence this must remain in the realm of speculation.

Despite the clear importance of the military and policing role of the commissioners of the peace, there is reason to believe that the commissions as preserved in the nineteenth-century calendar hide a more complicated reality. A significant proportion of those appointed to commissions of the peace in Dublin were prominent judicial figures, as we shall see. The commission of 1401 and all the commissions for county Dublin from 1415 onward featured at least one person of known legal, judicial or exchequer experience, and often more than one, as in 1425 when James Cornwalsh (chief baron of the exchequer in 1420-1423 and again from 1426) and Reginald Snitterby (second baron of the exchequer from 1424) served on the commission.¹⁶ The presence of such men has important implications for the judicial powers of the commission of the peace, as does the nomenclature associated with them. As noted above, Frame concluded that the distinction between justices of the peace and keepers of the peace in Ireland, if it had any significance at all, was merely honorific. Justices of the peace tended to be more prominent figures, and always had charge of an entire county or multiple counties, while keepers of the peace could on occasion be restricted to a single barony. Although the surviving commissions of the peace for fifteenth-century Dublin are too few to allow definitive conclusions with regard to patterns of nomenclature, there is a very striking correspondence between those commissions which appointed justices of the peace and those which featured men with judicial or exchequer experience. With the exception of the commission of 1461 (which is taken from notes of the eighteenth-century genealogist John Lodge and has no corresponding entry in the calendar of Irish chancery material by which it can be

¹⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 82.

¹⁶ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 174-5.

compared with earlier commissions) all the commissions of the peace which featured such men were appointments as justices, or justices and keepers, of the peace, while those that did not feature such men were appointments to be keepers of the peace.¹⁷

The commission of the peace of 1401 is particularly suggestive. Christopher Holywood, William Tynbegh, Thomas Sargent and Robert White were appointed as justices and supervisors of the peace, to assemble ‘the prelates, magnates, peers and commons of the said county and crosslands at certain times and places within the said county for the safety and defence of same, whenever seems expedient to them; to assess the subsidies granted by them; and to appoint collectors for those subsidies.’ The commission states that these duties can be carried out by any two of the four men appointed, but specifies that of those two, one must be William Tynbegh. Tynbegh was a career administrator, who served variously as chief justice of the king’s bench, chief justice of the common bench, and chief baron of the exchequer over the period 1396-1424. The emphasis placed on his position on the commission of the peace suggests that his legal experience and knowledge were necessary for the execution of its duties. The implication of this is that the duties of the justices, if not of the keepers of the peace, required a greater degree of legal competence than has hitherto been recognised. Nonetheless, in the absence of further evidence, we must conclude that the military and policing duties of the commissioners remained paramount. The gentry of county Dublin did not come to dominate the commissions of the peace in that county to the same extent that they did the other offices of royal government. Nevertheless the commissions of the peace provided them with a powerful instrument for exercising collective control over the defence and government of their county.

Commissions of the peace in Dublin

The records of the commission of the peace are unfortunately rather sparse, even by the standards of fifteenth-century Ireland. As they were outside the machinery of royal income processed by the exchequer, the commissioners feature only rarely in the exchequer records; there is nothing comparable to the proffers which provide a great

¹⁷ Frame, ‘Commissions of the peace’, pp. 6, 12-13; Thomas Walleys, who was appointed as the sole keeper of the peace in Dublin in 1406, is a possible exception, as he had served in central government as usher and marshal of the exchequer, but there is nothing to suggest he had legal training or judicial experience. Neither were required for his office. RC8/34, p. 267; RC8/36 pp. 336-7.

number of the names of sheriffs of the county. Eleven commissions of the peace survive for the county in the fifteenth century, but they are unevenly distributed.¹⁸ Some are separated by months, most by several years, while only one of the eleven dates from after 1427 (the exception being a commission for 1461).¹⁹ That Richard Aylmer, the keeper of the peace ordered to release certain prisoners in 1423, is not among those named in these eleven commissions suggests that they represent only part of the total.²⁰ A discussion of the justices of the peace in Dublin is thus heavily skewed towards the period 1400-1430.

One aspect of the commissions that is immediately apparent is the prominent role of ecclesiastical figures on the commissions of the reign of Henry VI, a development which apparently preceded the appearance of ecclesiastics as justices of the peace in England.²¹ All the Dublin commissions from 1422 on include at least one and more frequently two or three of the archbishop of Dublin, the prior of Holy Trinity, and the abbot of St. Mary's. The 1461 commission also featured the prior of Kilmainham. The reasons for their presence include the addition of ecclesiastical power to the military, policing and peace-making role of the commissions, the fact that such men as Archbishop Richard Talbot, who served on commissions in 1422, 1423, 1425 and 1427 were royal servants of proven reliability, and of course the fact that the church was a major landholder in the county, making their inclusion important for the raising of subsidies.

The mainstays of the commission were the same leading county families that provided the sheriffs of Dublin, as we shall see. But there was another group who played an important role on the commissions. Of the twenty-eight men (excluding churchmen) who served as justices of the peace of Dublin in this period, at least seven (William Tynbegh, Thomas Walleys, Richard Bermingham, Reginald Snitterby, James Cornwallsh, Thomas Snitterby and Sir Robert Dowdall) were men who owed their place on the

¹⁸ Unless otherwise stated, all references to the men who served as justice of the peace are taken from Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 12-13; 27-9.

¹⁹ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 12-13; CIRCLE, Pat. 2 Hen. IV, no. 19; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 227, 246; Pat 5 Hen. IV, no. 82; Pat. 7 Hen. IV, no. 145; Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 132; Pat. 2 Hen. VI, no. 35; Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 128; Pat. 5 Hen. VI, no. 33.

²⁰ CIRCLE, Cl. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 36, 37.

²¹ Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 130.

commission to careers in the royal courts or exchequer.²² These men were of course proven royal servants and some certainly held, or were granted, land in the county, but the extent of legal expertise present has important implications for the powers and role of the commissions, as we have seen.

Nonetheless despite the undoubted importance of churchmen and bureaucrats, the greater part of the named justices of the peace, twenty-one of thirty-two, were men whose main qualification came from their position as county landholders. These twenty-one men, from fifteen families, amassed a total of thirty-three commissions between them. The reappearance of several members of the same family is less pronounced than among the sheriffs of the county. No doubt this is due in part to the concentration of the surviving commissions of the peace within one thirty-year period; but it is notable that none of the gentry families represented on the 1461 commission provided justices of the peace in the period 1400 to 1430.

The justices of the peace in Dublin in this period can thus be broken up into three groups: churchmen, exchequer or judicial figures, and leading county gentry. There was naturally some overlap between these groups. Lawyers in the royal service, such as Richard Bermingham, married into the county's landholding elite or received grants of land in Dublin, while members of leading county families served on occasion in high position in the royal government.²³ Robert Howth, or St Laurence, who served as sheriff of Dublin and as a commissioner of the peace, served later in life as chancellor of the Irish exchequer.²⁴

Of the twenty-one men who might be classed as gentry commissioners – that is, those whose place on the commission did not stem from an ecclesiastical or judicial position – eleven were men who also served as sheriff of Dublin. Of the ten who did not, Christopher Holywood (who served on the commissions of 1401, 1402, 1403 and 1415) was a father and grandfather of sheriffs, while John Field (justice of the peace in 1461) was the son of a sheriff and had himself served as escheator and clerk of markets and

²² Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 170, 174-5, 177; CIRCLE, Pat. 25 Hen. VI, no. 11; RC 8/34, p. 267; RC 8/36 pp. 336-7.

²³ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 140; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 3.

²⁴ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 187-8.

measures for the county.²⁵ Henry Fitzwilliam, who served in 1402, was probably a relative of the William Fitzwilliam who was sheriff of the county for several years during the period 1373-1397, and his namesake who was sheriff in 1420 and c. 1438.²⁶ Richard Tyrell who joined the veteran sheriff Walter Tyrell as one of the justices of the peace in 1415 may have been a close relative; as might Robert Tyrell who featured on one of the two commissions issued in 1402. Richard Tyrell was knight of the shire for Dublin in 1420, so was clearly a man of some consequence in his own right.²⁷

John Talbot of 'Warde' who served on the commission of the peace in 1415 was almost certainly John fitz Reginald Talbot, sheriff of Dublin in 1416, 1417, 1418 and again in 1423. Warde here denotes not Ward in the barony of Castleknock but Belgard (bar. Uppercross). The Talbots of Belgard supplied several sheriffs and other officers of county Dublin in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, while there is nothing to connect the family with Ward in Castleknock.²⁸

John Sherlock, one of the justices and keepers of the peace in Dublin in 1427, came from a family that do not make many appearances in the fifteenth-century record but were clearly of some prominence. The family's lands were concentrated on both sides of the Dublin-Kildare border and they are more prominent as office-holders in the latter county. Walter Sherlock, who was chief serjeant of Kildare in the 1420s and 1430s, may have been a close relative.²⁹ In Dublin Thomas Sherlock of Rathcreedan (bar. Newcastle) was one of those appointed to collect 'smokesilver' (a levy toward the maintenance of watchmen on the border with the Irish, and thus a matter of direct interest for landowners in the southern baronies) in 1461.³⁰ Thomas served as sheriff of the county in 1470-1472.³¹ Edward Sherlock, sheriff of Dublin in 1503, was presumably a near relation.³² John appears to have been at odds with Walter Tyrell and a several

²⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 37 Hen. VI, no. 1.

²⁶ Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', p. 286; RC 8/39, p. 30; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 36-9.

²⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 141-2.

²⁸ See above, pp. 56-7, and below, pp. 162-4.

²⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 8 Hen. V, no. 27; Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 129; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 79; Pat. 24 Hen. VII, no. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Edw. IV, no. 75.

³¹ RC 8/41, pp. 213, 414; *8th report of the Record Commiss.*, supplement 7, p. 536.

³² NLI MS 761, p. 336.

other officers of the county over his lands in Rathcreedan, Athgoe (bar. Newcastle) and Sallins (bar. Naas, co. Kildare).³³

John Owen, keeper of the peace in 1402, came from a family that had provided several sheriffs of the county up to the middle of the fourteenth century, but thenceforth lapsed somewhat into obscurity.³⁴ John himself appeared on several commissions concerned with levying subsidies or otherwise ordaining for the defence of the county up into the 1420s.³⁵ It is notable that he frequently appeared alongside Thomas or John Sargent, of whom he held significant lands in Blanchardstown and Diswellstown (par. Castleknock).³⁶ It is tempting to suggest that John served on these commissions as a prominent associate of the Sargents, but as neither Sargent joined him on the commissions of the peace of April and June 1402 he was clearly a trusted agent of royal government in his own right. The family disappear from the record of Dublin officeholders after John's last appointment as a collector of subsidies in 1421, but did not apparently become extinct.³⁷ In 1508 Katherine and Joanna Owen paid a fine of twenty pence for homage for the two halves of Blundelstown (par. Clondalkin), which had been part of John's landed possessions.³⁸

Maurice Walsh, who served on the commission of the peace in 1425, was the head of the most prominent of the families of the south Dublin marches.³⁹ The absence of the family from other offices in the county probably stems from their position in the march and their role as a bulwark against the hostile Irish of the Wicklow mountains. This may have made it difficult for them to fulfil the duties of a sheriff elsewhere in the county. It was also the reason for their inclusion in this commission of the peace and in other commissions concerned with the defence of south Dublin, as in 1476 when Maurice Walsh of Kilgobbin, gentleman, was granted a subsidy of 4s4d of every

³³ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 132. 'Rathardeans' here is in error for Rathcreedan. The nature of the suit and the makeup of the contending parties is not clear from the ambiguous wording of this commission. That it was Sherlock versus Tyrell et al. is suggested by a commission to the same justices, on the same day, to hear an assize of novel disseisin between Thomas Sherlock and his wife and many of the same officers concerning lands in Dunlavin (now Co. Wicklow) – CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 133.

³⁴ Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', pp. 282-85.

³⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 249; Pat. 10 Hen. IV, no. 181.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 37.

³⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 180.

³⁸ RC8/43, pp. 244-5; CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 304.

³⁹ Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', pp. 127-8.

ploughland in Rathdown for the rebuilding of Jamestown castle.⁴⁰ The military, policing, and subsidy-raising powers of the commission of the peace would have been an effective means of bolstering Maurice's position vis-à-vis the Irish of Wicklow and the other English families of the marches.

Of those who served both as sheriff and justice or keeper of the peace, most seem to have served on commissions either after or during their first recorded term as sheriff. Thomas Mareward was specifically appointed to the commissions of 1402 in his capacity as sheriff of the county.⁴¹ Former sheriffs were men of proven military and administrative experience, while the presence of a serving sheriff married the powers of the commission with the administrative machinery of the shrievalty to their mutual benefit. Ultimately both offices required men with much the same qualifications: men whose private resources and status in their county made it possible for them to carry out 'self-government at the king's command'.

Commissions of the peace in Meath

Seven full commissions of the peace survive for the county of Meath in the fifteenth-century, with the last in 1431. A further commission of February 1425 has been preserved in part. The commissions ranged in size from the four-man commissions of February and November 1403 up to the ten-man commission of 1427. As in Dublin and elsewhere in the lordship, the church was well represented on the commissions. The commissions of November 1403, 1407, 1427, and 1431 all included the bishop of Meath (who was of course one of the leading landholders of the county), while the latter two also included the archdeacon of Meath. The 1422 commission included Br William White, who was also presumably an ecclesiastic, although it is not clear to which order or foundation he belonged. In total, 30 individuals from 27 families served on these commissions; if we discount the churchmen who served as commissioners we reduce this figure to 22 county families that served on commissions of the peace.⁴² Although

⁴⁰ *Stat. Ire. Edw IV*, ii, pp. 517-19.

⁴¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 227, 246.

⁴² Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 27-9; NLI MS 761, p. 264; RC 8/33, p. 313; CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Hen. IV, no. 69; Pat. 11 Hen. VII, no. 28; Pat. 14 Hen. VII, no. 14.

the commissions are not directly comparable, this is a similar number of individuals and families to those that served as justices of the peace in Leicestershire in roughly the same period.⁴³

The commissions of the peace for Meath were dominated by men from the families that would later in the century form the peerage of the county. Each of the future peerage families – Preston, Plunkett, Nugent, Fleming, and Barnewall – featured on the commissions of the peace for the period 1400-1431. There is no surviving commission for the period that does not include at least one leading member of one of these families. Usually they contain more; that of 1400 includes the barons of Slane and Delvin as well as Christopher Preston and Christopher Plunkett. The other Meath landholders who joined them on this commission included Walter Delahide, knight (sheriff in 1422), and John Darcy, who with Nugent and Plunkett dominated the office of sheriff throughout the reign of Henry IV. Christopher Preston, head of the family later ennobled as viscounts Gormanston, served on no fewer than six of the known commissions of the peace in the county between 1400-1431, and is probably the Preston named to the poorly-preserved commission of 1425.⁴⁴ The magnates of Meath thus played a leading role on the commissions of the peace. There is little reason to believe that these appointments were purely nominal and intended simply to add political weight to the commissions, as was the case for the majority of nobles appointed as justices of the peace in fifteenth-century England.⁴⁵ The directly martial role of the Irish commission of the peace as directors of the military organisation of their counties made magnate service both necessary and socially acceptable. The lack of any surviving commissions for the second half of the century means that we cannot trace a decline in magnate service in this office as we can with the shrievalty. However, comparison with the surviving Dublin commission of 1461 suggests that in all likelihood the commissions of the peace continued to be dominated by the magnates and the leading gentry.

As in Dublin, there was an extremely pronounced overlap between the men who served as sheriffs (and in this case seneschals and sheriffs of the cross) and those who

⁴³ Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 131.

⁴⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 110; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 28.

⁴⁵ Carpenter and Mattéoni, 'Offices and officers', p. 84.

staffed the commission of the peace. Of the eight men who served as sheriff of county Meath between 1400 and the date of the last surviving commission in 1431, five served on commissions of the peace. Christopher Plunkett, sheriff in 1409 and again in c. 1412, served on five commissions of the peace. Furthermore, there was a high degree of overlap between liberty office and commissions of the peace. John Darcy served as seneschal of the liberty, sheriff of the county and keeper of the peace for several years over the first two decades of the century. Thomas Bacon, justice of the peace in 1407, did not apparently serve as sheriff or seneschal; but he was hereditary chief serjeant of Meath, and served as escheator of the liberty.⁴⁶ This overlap is unsurprising given that only a limited group of families had the prestige and influence among the local community that was a necessary qualification for both. In addition, it made sense to use the prestige and power of the seneschal or sheriff to bolster the strength of the commission of the peace.

Others appointed to the Meath commissions were figures with careers in the royal administration. Roger Hakenshawe, who was appointed to the 1431 commission was the son of a former escheator of Ireland, apparently the first of his family in Ireland.⁴⁷ His father may have acquired some land in the lordship, but if so it was of such limited extent that his widow petitioned the king for aid because she could not support her son, a minor.⁴⁸ As an adult Roger appears to have supported himself through practice of the law and service of the crown. He was appointed second justice of the king's bench in 1416, having earlier served as a justice of oyer and terminer in the four shires of the Dublin hinterland.⁴⁹

This pattern – magnates, leading gentry, prelates and finally administrative/judicial figures (often with a personal link to the county in question) is consistent throughout the four shires of the Dublin hinterland in the fifteenth century.⁵⁰ We can conclude that any individual named to a commission of the peace for the county

⁴⁶ RC 8/33, p. 360; NLI MS 761, p. 272; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 416-17; NAI, Ferguson coll. 3, f. 102.; Potterton, *Trim*, p. 374.

⁴⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *The administration of Ireland 1172-1377* (Dublin, 1963), p. 129; CIRCLE, Cl. 49 Edw. III, no. 2.

⁴⁸ CIRCLE, Cl. 49 Edw. III, no. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 140; Pat. 5 Hen. V, no. 41; *Dowdall deeds*, no. 400.

⁵⁰ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 10-29.

of Meath who was not a noble and was not otherwise recorded as a professional administrator can be identified as a member of the gentry, and a prominent one at that. Again, the importance of the leading families of Meath was anterior to and separate from their possession of county office. They were commissioners of the peace because they were the leading men of the county, not the other way round. Peter Coss has stressed the importance of the English commissions of the peace in enabling the gentry to exercise collective control over their tenantry.⁵¹ The more martial role of the Irish commissions of the peace is unlikely to have made them less sought after in the troubled conditions of the fifteenth century.

Keepers of the peace in the baronies

At the county level, therefore, the staffing of the commission of the peace was more or less identical in Dublin and Meath, the Meath commission featuring more magnates simply because there were more magnates available. However, the sheer size of Meath meant that, unlike in Dublin, commissioners of the peace – often described as keepers, rather than justices of the peace – were appointed for individual baronies. Eleven such appointments are known from the fifteenth century, ranging from the fairly thorough appointment of keepers in twelve of the baronies of the county in 1403 to commissions for single baronies in 1408 and 1410.⁵² The 1403 commission is the most complete of the fifteenth-century barony commissions, containing appointments to each of the baronies of modern county Meath as well as Fore, Mullingar and Delvin in modern Westmeath. In some cases, such as the commission for Duleek and Slane in 1432, there is no particular reason to believe that other baronies had commissions at the same time.⁵³ In others, such as in 1425, it is certain that commissions were appointed for other baronies but the names of the keepers have not survived.⁵⁴ In addition, while no commission of the peace for the county has survived for the fifteenth

⁵¹ Coss, 'Formation of the English Gentry', pp. 57-8, 60

⁵² CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, nos. 279-80; Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 31; Pat. 11 Hen. IV, no. 87.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 134.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 111.

century after 1431, two barony commissions from the last decade of the fifteenth century have been preserved.

The commission of 1499 would appear to have had similar powers to the earlier commissions of the peace. They were to array the men of the barony, provide arms and horses, hobelars and footmen, and to lead them against the enemy, and to enforce 'the statutes of Winchester, Northampton, Westminster, Kilkenny, Dublin and Drogheda.'⁵⁵ The inclusion of a prominent churchman – the archdeacon of Meath – while in line with earlier commissions of the peace for the county, was not a feature of the other barony commissions of the fifteenth century. The commission was also more numerous (five commissioners) than the earlier barony commissions, which generally had two (occasionally three) keepers for each barony. The 1499 commissioners were also charged with enforcing 'all the articles and proclamations lately made at Dublin and Drogheda by Gerald, earl of Kildare, deputy of the king'. It is possible that the articles in question were acts concerning the use of English-style weaponry and harness passed by a parliament before Kildare at Castledermot and Dublin (but not at Drogheda), 1498-99.⁵⁶ Such legislation was by no means new, but it may perhaps have been of particular concern to the gentry of Meath at the turn of the sixteenth century. In 1509 Edmund Golding of Piercetown Laundry wrote to the earl of Ormond seeking a lease of the mill of Blackcastle (bar. Navan). To strengthen his case he implicitly contrasted himself with the degenerating gentry of Meath: '(there are none in) the shere that y dwell in that rydithe in a sadill dayly butt the B(aron of ... and there are few) more that werithe gowne and dublet in the shere of Mithe but my l(ord of ... and Sir William) darce off platen.'⁵⁷

Alternatively, the commission may be linked to the turbulent politics of the 1490s. In 1496 Thomas Garth had been appointed 'chief captain of the army of Ireland and also guardian or keeper of the peace of the barony of Skreen, co. Meath, [and] justice in the said barony', the only other appointment of a keeper or justice of the peace to survive from Meath after 1432.⁵⁸ The appointment, with its eccentric

⁵⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 14 Hen. VII, no. 14.

⁵⁶ Quinn, (ed.) 'Bills and statutes of the Irish parliament, Hen. VII & Hen. VIII', pp. 96-103; Steven Ellis (ed.), 'Parliaments and Great Councils, 1483-99: addenda et corrigenda', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 29 (1980), pp. 96, 98-111, pp. 110-11.

⁵⁷ *Ormond deeds*, iv, appendix 1, no. 746, pp. 356-8.

⁵⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Hen. VII, no. 28.

combination of offices, was clearly quite exceptional; why Skreen should have been singled out, in particular, does not appear. Garth was an English soldier who had been one of the leaders of a force sent to Ireland in the wake of the appearance of the pretender Perkin Warbeck in Cork in 1492. He had been engaged in direct conflict with the earl of Kildare, who captured Garth and hanged his son, although they were sufficiently reconciled by September 1493 to attend a great council together.⁵⁹ Here the purpose of the commission clearly cannot be separated from the tense political atmosphere of the period.

There was a high degree of overlap between the men who staffed the county commissions and those who were appointed to the barony commissions. Of the nine leading county landholders appointed justices and supervisors of the peace in Meath in 1400, five, including the baron of Delvin, were appointed keepers of the peace in various baronies in 1403. Christopher Fleming, son of a sixth, was keeper in Slane in 1403; he would himself serve on county commissions in 1420 and 1427.⁶⁰ Other men who were appointed keepers of the peace of a barony in 1403 included John Drake, who would serve as sheriff and as a justice of the peace of the county two decades later.⁶¹ The barony commissions – with the exception of the very late example from Skreen in 1499 – do not feature the ecclesiastical or judicial figures that were appointed to most of the county commissions. They are consistently staffed by the magnates and gentry of the baronies in question. While they undoubtedly included many men from less prominent families than those which supplied justices of the peace of the county, the appointment of men such as William Nugent, baron of Delvin, and John Nangle, baron of Navan, to commissions in their baronies is testament to the fact that the position was one suited to the most prominent landholders of the shire. The barony keepers undoubtedly represent the leading gentry and magnates of those baronies; the presence of a broader spectrum of Meath landed society is a result of the simple fact that a larger number of commissioners were needed to staff the barony than than the county commissions. The

⁵⁹ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 331-2; *Annals of Ulster*, p. 367; S. J. Connolly, *Contested island: Ireland 1460-1630* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 64-5.

⁶⁰ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 27-8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. V, no. 71; RC 8/39, p. 254; NAI Ferguson Coll. 3, f. 55v.

keepers of the peace directed the defence of their baronies and were the leaders of its military forces, a task the leading gentry and magnates were unwilling to cede.

Chapter three: The coroners

Duties of the coroners

Second to the sheriff in the official machinery of county government were the coroners. Like the sheriff they were elected in the county court by the commons of the county.⁶² The coroners functioned in part as auxiliary sheriffs. If a sheriff was implicated in a legal case, the normal sheriff's duties of serving writs and ensuring the attendance of those involved fell to the coroners.⁶³ The coroners might also be charged with holding the election of a new sheriff.⁶⁴ They kept the records of the county court, which they held alongside the sheriff.⁶⁵ In the normal course of affairs the coroners had much less general power and general responsibility than the sheriffs, and were reliant on the sheriff, his staff, and the serjeants to execute their business.⁶⁶ This business was primarily that with which the office is still associated: the inspection of the remains of those killed by mischance, violence or in suspicious circumstances, and the determination of responsibility for their death.⁶⁷ Having done so the coroner might assess the value and dispose of deodands and well as goods and lands of felons.⁶⁸ The other duties of the coroner were closely related, such as that of taking the oath of felons who, having taken sanctuary in a church, agreed to abjure the realm.⁶⁹ The other crown pleas, such as treasure trove, also fell under their purview.⁷⁰ Furthermore the coroners might on occasion be included in other aspects of local government. A statute of 1460 concerned with fixing the value of coins circulating in the lordship gave power to enforce the statute value of coins to a wide body of officials that included sheriffs, seneschals of

⁶² Helen Cam, 'Shire officials: Coroners, constables and bailiffs' in James F. Willard, William A. Morris, and William H. Dunham Jr., *The English government at work, 1327-1336* iii: *Local administration and justice* (Cambridge, MA, 1950), 143-83, p. 143; R. F. Hunnisett, *The medieval coroner* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 150-5; *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1295-1303*, p. 60.

⁶³ *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1295-1303*, pp. 120-1; NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 73; Clayton, *Administration of Chester*, p. 190.

⁶⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., ii, f. 155v; iii, f. 267.

⁶⁵ BL Add. Ch. 33600, mem. 8v; *Ormond deeds*, iii, nos. 44, 102, 135; Acheson, *A gentry community*, pp. 108-9.

⁶⁶ Cam, 'Shire officials', pp. 156-7; Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', pp. 26-7.

⁶⁷ *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1308-1314*, pp. 277, 296.

⁶⁸ CIRCLE, Cl. 4 Edw. II, no. 4; *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1308-1314*, pp. 8-9; 124-5, 144, 147-8, 156

⁶⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Ric. II, no. 87, *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1308-1314*, pp. 232, 243; 'Anglo-Irish shire government', pp. 26-7.

⁷⁰ Connolly, *Local record sources*, p. 30.

liberties, justices of the peace, and coroners to determine the quality of coins and imprison those refusing to accept coins following the determination of their value.⁷¹ The legislation clearly required a large, widespread body of potential enforcers to be effective. E. R. Stevenson, discussing the escheator, observed that the division of labour among the king's officials was not complete, with the individual escheator 'liable to be called upon to perform any task for which their superiors, the exchequer, the council, or the king deemed them the suitable agents.'⁷² Undoubtedly the same can be said for the coroners.

A statute of the Irish parliament of 1453 sheds some light on the day-to-day duties of the coroners and the science of crime scene investigation in fifteenth-century Ireland. It also illustrates the more-or-less tolerated extortion that formed an important part of the remuneration for service in office in the period. The practice decried by the statute was as follows. Upon the discovery of the body of an individual 'feloniously killed during the night' (or otherwise covertly murdered) the coroners would summon a jury of locals (presumably empanelled by the subserjeant of the barony) to discover the identity of the culprit. If the jurors returned on oath that they did not know the felon, the coroners refused to accept the verdict but instead 'do vex [the jurors] from day to other, and from place to place, many times a whole quarter of a year, to the intent to charge the people with the escapes, and so compel them to say a false verdict, to the great hurt of the people so sworn.' The coroners were henceforth to give the jurors 'another reasonable day' to answer, and if on that occasion they once more returned that they were ignorant of the culprit's identity, they were to be discharged. If the coroners refused to discharge the jurors, the jurors were to be free to return home without being impeached or otherwise harassed by county or judicial officers – a ruling that would appear to support Otway-Ruthven's contention that the coroner was reliant on the sheriff and his subordinates for the execution of his office.⁷³

⁷¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire., Hen VI*, pp. 750-3

⁷² E. R. Stevenson, 'The escheator' in William A. Morris and Joseph R. Strayer (eds.) *The English government at work, 1327-1336 ii: Fiscal administration* (Cambridge, MA, 1947), 109-67, p. 121

⁷³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 294-5; Vesey (ed.), *The statutes at large*, p. 16; Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 27. In 1416 it was recorded that four villis in County Meath owed £10 between them for the escape of John Nettervill and John Walsh, who had feloniously slain John Herbert. No mention of the coroner is made on this occasion – RC 8/36, pp. 673-4, 676.

Unlike the sheriff, the coroner rarely had an entire county in his solitary care. In England the number of coroners varied from county to county, though most had either two or four.⁷⁴ In Ireland, too, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw some local variation. In Kildare before 1297 the chief serjeants of the baronies were also coroners in their bailiwicks. When the liberty was taken into the king's hand, separate coroners were appointed, but these continued to be appointed to the individual baronies at least in the immediate aftermath.⁷⁵ It would appear that by the fifteenth century the normal practice in Ireland was to have two coroners in a county. It is difficult to be absolutely certain of this, however, because the survival of records has been particularly cruel to the coroners. The fiscal responsibilities of the coroners were few, and they did not make proffers, so they are only rarely mentioned in the memoranda rolls of the exchequer. The elections of coroners in Louth, Meath and Dublin in 1485 survive among the manuscript calendars of the memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer compiled by the nineteenth-century record commissioners; but they come in fact from a rare surviving plea roll.⁷⁶ The judicial records, in which the coroners might be expected to feature more prominently, are almost entirely absent for the fifteenth century.⁷⁷ Three of the seven names of coroners of Dublin in the period 1390-1513 come from the nineteenth-century calendar of Irish chancery material; both concern assizes of *novel disseisin* in which a coroner or coroners of Dublin were implicated.⁷⁸ Two of the coroners so named appear again in a fragment of a plea roll for county Dublin now in the British Library.⁷⁹ Two coroners were named for 1456 and another for 1475 on the memoranda roll of the exchequer.⁸⁰ One of these reappears in 1485 alongside a new colleague on the plea roll mentioned above.⁸¹ The appearance of the coroners in pairs in 1402, 1407, 1456, and the election of two coroners in 1485 suggest that this was the normal arrangement in Dublin; nowhere is there evidence to suggest that there were more than two coroners at any one time.

⁷⁴ Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, pp. 134-5; Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 108.

⁷⁵ *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1295-1303*, pp. 167-91; Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 23

⁷⁶ RC 8/43, pp. 7-12.

⁷⁷ Ellis, 'Plea roll 19 Edw. IV', pp. 21-9.

⁷⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 160; Pat. 3 Hen. VI, nos. 132, 133.

⁷⁹ BL Add. Ch. 33600, mem. 3-11.

⁸⁰ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 206, 267.

⁸¹ RC 8/43, p. 9.

How did the two coroners divide the duties of their office? The intuitive answer would be to divide their office geographically, saving the coroner and those who had need to call on him confusion, time and unnecessarily long journeying. There is abundant evidence of customary coroners' jurisdictions in certain English counties.⁸² None of our fifteenth-century coroners are described as coroners of a particular district. The comparatively detailed record of the election of Peter Fitzrery of Tyrellstown and Henry Golding of Tobersool as coroners in 1485 gives no indication that either was intended to serve in a particular district. The locations of Tyrellstown (in west County Dublin) and Tobersool (in the north of the county) arguably lend themselves to a division of the county, given that the unsettled conditions and extensive crosslands south of the Liffey reduced the extent of the coroner's responsibilities there. The same cannot be said of Drimnagh and Belgard, the landed base respectively of Robert Barnewall and John Talbot, coroners in 1402 and 1407. However John Talbot, described elsewhere as John Talbot of Feltrim, also had a landed base across the Liffey in the barony of Coolock, so the possibility that the two took charge of separate parts of the county remains.

Any such division of labour would have been on an unofficial basis, presumably understood by the two coroners, those who might have need to call on them, and perhaps the sheriff, but apparently not important enough to note in the roll recording their election. Presumably the royal government simply expected those in need to call on the coroner who was most convenient. That both coroners officially were held to share responsibility for the entire county is perhaps suggested by the arraignment of an assize of *novel disseisin* against the two coroners in 1402 (although this invites a contrast with the similar case in 1422 involving a single coroner). In the early fourteenth century William Field was elected as 'coroner in the parts of Finglas'.⁸³ Similarly in 1327 a jurisdictional dispute arose between the bailiffs of the city of Dublin, who served as coroners in the city, and Thomas Kent, 'the king's coroner of Fingal'; the city officials were sufficiently exercised by this infringement on their liberties to have the favourable judgment entered into the patent roll fifty years later.⁸⁴ It may well be that Field's election as coroner of Finglas is in error for Fingal, and that a division of the county into

⁸² Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, pp. 135-7; Cam, 'Shire officials', pp. 158-9.

⁸³ *Cal. Just. Rolls Ireland, 1295-1303*, p. 411.

⁸⁴ *Chart. St. Mary's*, i, pp. 6-10; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Ric. II, no. 2.

territories north and south of the Liffey (reflecting the modern division of local government in the county) was standard practice in the early fourteenth century. The fact that both Tobersool and Tyrellstown are in Fingal suggests that such a schema, if it ever existed, was no longer in place in the late fifteenth century.

Another aspect of the office that requires scrutiny is the length of service. The elections of coroners of 1485 do not mention a term limit; but neither do the similarly-worded elections of sheriffs and escheators in the contemporary memoranda rolls of the exchequer; both of which offices were held for the length of a year.⁸⁵ In England the office was an appointment for life, or at least until its occupant was deemed unfit to continue service.⁸⁶ Examples of coroners serving over long periods of time are not lacking, and elections of coroners took place on the death or disqualification of serving coroners, as they arose.⁸⁷

In Ireland as usual it is much more difficult to reach a conclusive answer to this problem, but it is likely that here, too, coroners served for long periods of time if not for life. Despite the paucity of reference to the coroner in the records, three of our seven coroners appear more than once in that office. The team of John Talbot and Reginald Barnewall appear together as coroners in 1402 and again in 1407; while Peter Fitzrery was coroner in 1456, alongside James Caddell, and in 1485 alongside Henry Golding. At least one coroner, John Talbot, later served as sheriff; as the coroners were responsible for enforcing the law on unruly sheriffs, it was presumably not possible to hold both offices concurrently. Similarly, it is unlikely that James Caddell was coroner in 1466 when he served as escheator of the county.⁸⁸

The election of two coroners of the county in November 1485 would appear to suggest that the office was not simply filled as vacancies arose. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that the plea roll for 1485 records the election of teams of two coroners in three of the four obedient shires. It is tempting to conclude from this that teams of coroners were elected in these counties each year as standard practice.

⁸⁵ RC 8/43, pp. 7-12, 53-4.

⁸⁶ Cam, 'Shire officials', pp. 149-51; Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, p. 167; Saul, *Knights and esquires*, pp. 141-2.

⁸⁷ Cam, 'Shire officials', pp. 150-1; Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, pp. 154-5.

⁸⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Edw. IV, no. 8.

However, there is reason to believe that the 1485 elections represent the exception rather than the rule. It was standard practice in England for writs of *de coronatore eligendo* to be issued at the beginning of a new reign.⁸⁹ Such writs were certainly issued to the sheriffs of each English county in November 1485 upon the accession of Henry VII.⁹⁰ The timing of the Dublin, Meath and Louth elections accords so neatly with those in England that a connection to the new reign must be at least considered. The fact that one of the coroners elected in Dublin – Peter Fitzrery – had been coroner almost thirty years earlier, in 1456, would seem to support this theory. The solitary election of William Field as coroner ‘in the parts of Finglas’ (perhaps in error for Fingal) in 1302 is suggestive of an office being filled as vacancies arose. However, the election appears to have been made upon the disqualification of an earlier coroner-elect because of his youth and inexperience.⁹¹ The absence of judicial records makes the question difficult to answer. Calendared justiciary rolls only survive for the period 1295 to 1314; a coroner could hold office for much of that period and still not exceed the tenure of certain sheriffs, despite the fact that the latter office was usually held for the term of a year. The appearance of Peter Fitzrery in the office on two occasions separated by thirty years, and of two members of the Barnewall family in the office across a twenty-year period, may suggest a degree of specialisation among certain individuals and families compatible with long service. By its nature, the office of coroner required a degree of specialist knowledge which would reward longer service.

The extent of the coroners’ bailiwick was severely reduced by the existence within the county of the ecclesiastical liberties and the franchises of the city of Dublin. A series of inquisitions into the secular jurisdiction of the archbishops of Dublin held in the middle years of the thirteenth century provide the earliest evidence for the operation of the coroner’s office in the lordship of Ireland; providing, albeit in negative, a clear depiction of the primary role of these officers.⁹² The jurors at these inquisitions unambiguously rejected the right of the king’s coroners to view bodies or take the oaths of felons abjuring the realm within the archbishop’s liberties, these tasks falling instead

⁸⁹ Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, pp. 164-6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁹¹ *Cal. Just. Rolls, 1295-1303*, p. 411.

⁹² Charles McNeill, 'The secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops of Dublin' *JRSAI, Sixth Series*, v, No. 2 (Jun. 30, 1915), pp. 81-108; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 101-14.

to the serjeant or bailiff of the archiepiscopal manor in question.⁹³ The king's coroners were equally excluded from carrying out these tasks within the franchises of Dublin city. The civic authorities' jealous defence of their rights against the coroners of the county has already been noted. Within the city limits, the bailiffs held the office of coroner. This is made quite clear by the laws and customs of the city and emphasised by comparison with the very similar laws and customs of Waterford, which differ in having coroners in addition to bailiffs.⁹⁴ For this reason the appointment in 1422 of Patrick Ferris as 'one of the coroners' of the city of Dublin by election of the commons of the city is extremely curious and as far as I can discover it is entirely unique.⁹⁵ It may be that Dublin here is in error for Cork, where a Patrick Ferris was certainly active some years later.⁹⁶

From the little evidence that survives, it would appear that the election of coroners from among their number had by the later decades of the fifteenth century become the ordinary (and perhaps annual) duty of the commons of the four obedient shires, as was the case for the sheriff and the escheator. This perhaps was a means of sharing the burden of office. In 1463 the electors of Robert Bath, former sheriff of Dublin, intervened on his behalf to seek a reduction in his debts of office.⁹⁷ The fiscal liability of electors for the wrongdoings of coroners was an established principle, and it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that this communal responsibility could have been positive as well as a negative.⁹⁸ The office of coroner was one that men often attempted to escape by bribery; such bribes were no doubt a welcome source of income to the sheriff, although they could expose him to danger.⁹⁹ On the other hand, there are no surviving instances of a dearth of coroners requiring statutory remedy, as with the repeal of charters of exemption from service as sheriff in 1476, and men might on occasion bribe their way into office instead of out.¹⁰⁰ No doubt as with the shrievalty the majority considered the office an unwelcome burden, but the reappearance of certain individuals and families in the office over long periods of time suggests that for

⁹³ McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', pp. 91 and *passim*; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 101-14.

⁹⁴ Mac Niocaill, *Na Buirgéisí: XII-XV Aois* (Dublin, 1964), i, pp. 18-22, 32-3; ii, pp. 342-4.

⁹⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. V, no. 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pat 10 Hen. VI, no. 116.

⁹⁷ RC 8/41, pp.7-8.

⁹⁸ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 27; Cam, 'Shire officials', p. 152.

⁹⁹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 12; *Cal. Just. Rolls Ire., 1305-1307*, pp. 174-5.

¹⁰⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, p. 257; Cam, 'Shire officials', p. 152.

some service as coroner could be a source of influence, prestige and income.¹⁰¹ This of course begs the question of the rewards for service as coroner, involving as it did inconvenient journeys to view often severely mangled corpses. Doubtless access to the goods and lands of felons was a welcome source of income.¹⁰² Customary, if not strictly legal, perquisites included payments demanded before taking view of a body, or items of clothing from the deceased.¹⁰³ Meyler Medok, chief serjeant of the barony of Laois in 1297, took two shillings each time he viewed a corpse in his office of coroner in the barony, while his sub-serjeant took the outer garment of the deceased, as it was 'accustomed out of mind'.¹⁰⁴

Coroners of Dublin

John Talbot was one of the two coroners of the county implicated in a case of *novel disseisin* in 1402, and appears again holding the county court alongside his colleague Robert Barnewall and sheriff Walter Tyrell in 1407.¹⁰⁵ John fitz Reginald Talbot was sheriff of Dublin for several years during the reign of Henry V and the first decade of the reign of Henry VI. In 1415 he was one of the justices and keepers of the peace in Dublin.¹⁰⁶ He is the only one of our fifteenth-century coroners to have held the office of sheriff or that of keeper of the peace. Indeed among the named coroners of Dublin only John Talbot and James Caddell (who was escheator and clerk of the market of the county) are recorded holding any other county office. John Talbot and his family (the Talbots of Belgard or Feltrim) were exceptionally prominent in county office in Dublin and are discussed in detail elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ John fitz Reginald Talbot was certainly the most prominent of the men who served as coroner of county Dublin in the fifteenth century. In his case the coronership would appear to have served as an introduction to office for the scion of a family with a long pedigree as sheriffs of the county. Talbot would go on to serve as sheriff for at least six years in the quarter of a century after his service as

¹⁰¹ Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, p. 188-9.

¹⁰² NAI, Ferguson coll., ii, f. 156v.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 120; Cam, 'Shire officials', p. 159.

¹⁰⁴ *Cal. Just. Rolls Ire., 1295-1303*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 160; BL Add. Ch. 33600, mem. 8v.

¹⁰⁶ RC 8/36, pp. 28-9; RC 8/37, pp. 5, 16; RC 8/40, p.258; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 132; Pat. 6 Hen. V, no. 14; Pat. 2 Hen. VI, no. 49 .

¹⁰⁷ See above, pp. 56-7, and below, pp. 162-4.

coroner, often alternating service as sheriff with Walter Tyrell, with whom he had held the county court in 1407.

It is striking that of seven men whose tenure of the office of coroner has survived for fifteenth-century Dublin, two are from the same family. The fact that these two men, Robert Barnewall in 1402 and 1407 and Henry Barnewall in 1422, served roughly a generation apart, is suggestive of a long-standing family connection to the office. The arrival of the Barnewall family in Ireland was remembered in later legend with a great deal of colourful embellishment, including the escape of a pregnant widow from a massacre that came close to extinguishing the family, with the family's fortunes subsequently revived by the posthumous son, a London-educated lawyer.¹⁰⁸ The reality was of course more prosaic. Hugh Barnevalle was a servant of King John who features regularly in the king's dealings with Ireland in the later years of his reign, serving as a messenger and providing counsel on the distribution of land.¹⁰⁹ He benefited accordingly, receiving wardships, custody of lands, and a lease of lands in Drimnagh and Terenure.¹¹⁰ Hugh died childless. His brother Reginald secured possession of his brother's newly-acquired lands in Ireland by continuing his brother's service to the crown there.¹¹¹ He was granted a lease of the lands in Drimnagh and Terenure and secured a permanent grant of the same, holding by military service; the family was established there throughout the Middle Ages.¹¹² The family also acquired lands further to the south, near Powerscourt, but these were too exposed to exploit effectively in later centuries.¹¹³ Wolfram, the son (or possibly grandson) of this Reginald, was a patron of the Hospital of St. John outside Dublin, and was a witness to several grants to this foundation, as was his son Reginald.¹¹⁴ Wolfram's local importance is testified by his frequent presence on juries concerned with landholding in south County Dublin, while his inclusion alongside some of the leading knights of the lordship on an inquisition of 1292 concerned with the king's interest in the trade of the city of Waterford is

¹⁰⁸ M. O'Reilly, 'The Barnewalls', *Ríocht na Míde*, i, no. 3 (1957), pp. 64-8.

¹⁰⁹ *Cal. Docs. Ireland, 1171-1251*, nos. 394, 438, 538.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, nos. 581, 594, 667, 668, 680, 822, 824, 998.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 1080, 1159, 2311.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, nos. 1668, 2416.

¹¹³ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 194-6.

¹¹⁴ *Register of the hospital of S John the Baptist without the New Gate, Dublin*, ed. Eric St. John Brooks (Dublin, 1936), nos. 190, 263, 266, 340-1, 344 and *passim*.

testament to his political importance on a grander stage.¹¹⁵ Much like the Fitzrerys, the Barnewalls of Drimnagh were prominent in county office in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Two (or perhaps three) generations of the family sharing the distinctive name Wolfram served as sheriff of Dublin between 1280 and 1344.¹¹⁶ The family next held the office in 1468.¹¹⁷ Unlike the Fitzrerys, the family's less prominent role in county office cannot be assigned to extinction in the main line.¹¹⁸ On the contrary, the Barnewalls were flourishing, and beginning the process of ramification that would see no fewer than nine branches of the family established in County Meath alone by 1511.¹¹⁹ Early in the fourteenth century the family had added significantly to its Dublin possessions by marriage with one of the heiresses of the Clahull family, who brought lands in Ballyfermot together with a portion of the lordship of Balrothery in the north of the county.¹²⁰ By the middle of the fourteenth century a family of Barnewalls became established at Kilbrew and Crickstown, in the barony of Ratoath, County Meath.¹²¹ The means is obscure, but their fondness for the name Wolfram shows a close connection to family of Drimnagh.¹²²

It was the Meath branch of the family that would reach the highest levels of Anglo-Irish society in the fifteenth century with their elevation to the peerage as Lords Trimleston. This elevation owed much to astute marriage. The marriage of Sir Robert Barnewall to the daughter and heiress of Christopher Brown brought the family significant lands in Meath which the Browns had themselves acquired by marriage to an heiress of the London family, lords of Athboy.¹²³ These lands included Trimleston (now Tremblestown) in the barony of Navan, from which they took their name. The other London co-heiress had married Sir Christopher Preston; it is interesting to note that the manor from which the Preston peers took their title, Gormanston, was similarly among

¹¹⁵ *Inquisitions and extents.*, nos. 77, 88, 93.

¹¹⁶ Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', pp. 280-4.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 288; RC 8/41, pp. 213-14.

¹¹⁸ See below, pp. 119-22.

¹¹⁹ TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v.

¹²⁰ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, iv, pp. 101-2, 127.

¹²¹ RC 8/34, pp. 104-7; Kennedy Abraham, 'Upward Mobility in Later Medieval Meath', *History Ireland*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter, 1997), pp. 15-20, p. 17.

¹²² RC 8/34, pp. 104-7.

¹²³ *Calendar of the Gormanston register, from the original in the possession of the Right Honourable the Viscount of Gormanston*, ed. J. Mills and M. J. McEnery (Dublin, 1916), p. 16.

their share of the London estates.¹²⁴ The legal education and judicial careers of successive members of the Tremblestown family, and their prominent role in the politics of the lordship, combined with their new landed wealth to ensure their elevation to the peerage.¹²⁵ Christopher Barnewall's son Robert's espousal of the Yorkist cause was undoubtedly an immediate factor in his elevation to the peerage, which took place in 1461.¹²⁶ In Meath the family appeared in county office, but many of these officers seem to have come from a junior branch of the family. The John Barnewall who served as sheriff of the cross of Meath for several years in the first decades of the fifteenth century was described as being of Frenchtown, not of Trembleston or Kilbrew.¹²⁷ The Drimnagh Barnewalls remained important landholders, acquiring territory outside County Dublin; but they were henceforward rather overshadowed by younger branches of the family who embraced legal careers and royal service, such as the Patrick Barnewall, one of the Barnewalls of Stackallen, who through his legal career, royal service and acquisition of land of dissolved religious foundations set his descendants on the path to their peerage as Viscounts Kingsland.¹²⁸

It would appear that both of our Barnewall coroners were members of the immediate family of Drimnagh, but that neither was the head of the family. An entail of the family's lands carried out by another Wolfram Barnewall in 1437 has a reversion, after that to Wolfram's sons, to Henry and Robert Barnewall, who would thus appear to be his brothers or close male cousins.¹²⁹ Wolfram's son John was sheriff of the county in the 1460s and appears to have died in or around the turn of the sixteenth century.¹³⁰ The chronology strongly suggests that the Henry of the entail is very possibly the coroner of the county in 1422. While the case is much less certain for the identification of Robert with the coroner of 1402 and 1407, the use of these names for the family's younger sons is suggestive of a close connection. There is little else that can be said for certain about the two Barnewall coroners. Robert appears nowhere else in the surviving

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 141.

¹²⁵ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 176, 180-1, 193.

¹²⁶ Abraham, 'Upward mobility', p. 17.

¹²⁷ RC 8/34, p. 3; RC 8/36, pp. 27, 33; RC 8/37, pp. 7, 18; CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. V, no. 22.

¹²⁸ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 204-5.

¹²⁹ *Cal. Inq. Dub.*, Jas. I, no. 44; CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. VI, no. 40

¹³⁰ This is suggested by account in *Cal. Inq. Dub.*, Jas. I, no. 44; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 23; RC 8/41, pp. 95-6, 243.

records. Henry appears in 1435 as the husband of Edmunda, widow of Thomas Cruise of Naul, a former chief serjeant of the county.¹³¹ All that can be stated with a degree of certainty is that two generations of Barnewalls, apparently closely connected to the leading Dublin branch at Drimnagh, but certainly not the heads of that family, held the office of coroner of Dublin in the early fifteenth century. The evidence for the office of coroner is so scanty that we risk reading more into this fact than is truly warranted. Nevertheless this appears to be evidence of a degree of specialisation on the family's part, and a particular affinity for the office of coroner. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that a Reginald Barnewall – bearing a name very popular with the family, that of Wolfram's second son – was among the electors of Golding and Fitzrery as coroners of the county in 1485.¹³² It is surely significant that of the six years for which one or more coroners is named, three saw members of the Barnewall family in office and on a fourth occasion a Barnewall was among the electors. If, as would appear to be the case, coroners in Ireland as in England served for long periods (theoretically for life) the service of two generations of the Barnewall family is even more striking. It may be further suggested that this affinity for the office of coroner goes some way towards explaining the family's disappearance from the office of sheriff in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, despite their continued landed presence in the county. Part of the coroner's duties were to act as a check on the sheriff and thus a close relationship between sheriff and coroner would presumably not have been encouraged. However, John Talbot's tenure of both offices means this can only be a tentative suggestion.

The Caddells had been established in Naul (par. Clonalvy, bar. Duleek) by the mid-fourteenth century at the latest.¹³³ They appear as officers of the county and liberty of Meath, especially in the barony of Duleek, in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, while Robert Caddell had served as sheriff of county Dublin on more than one occasion in the mid-fourteenth century.¹³⁴ Richard Caddell, knight, would appear to

¹³¹ CIRCLE, Cl. 14 Hen. VI, nos. 44, 46.

¹³² RC 8/43, p. 9; *Cal. Inquis. Dub.*, Jas. I, no. 44

¹³³ *Gormanston register*, pp. 46-9.

¹³⁴ CIRCLE, Cl. 4 Edw. II, no. 4; Pat. 29 Edw. III, nos. 29, 132-3; Pat. 12 Ric. II, nos. 193-4; Pat. 2 Hen. IV, no. 17; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 252; Pat. 4 Hen. IV, nos. 280, 296, 359; Cl. 9 Hen. V, nos. 49, 53; Pat. 13 Hen. IV, no. 136; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 29; Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 285.

have been an associate of Richard Talbot, archbishop of Dublin; he was one of those summoned to court alongside the archbishop in July 1429.¹³⁵ It may be significant that one of those summoned was John Blakeney, whose son James was sheriff of Dublin at precisely the same time that James Caddell was elected escheator, in 1466.¹³⁶ James Caddell was closely connected with Sir Richard, but was not apparently his heir.¹³⁷ He appears as plaintiff alongside Sir Richard in a suit disputing ownership of Beshellstown (par. Clonalvy, bar. Duleek) with Richard Beshell in 1453-4.¹³⁸ The land was apparently claimed in James' name; the Irish parliament ordered restitution of Beshellstown to him, rather than to Sir Richard, that same year.¹³⁹ It is also striking that in the two citations of this suit James is alternatively addressed as James Caddell 'yeoman' and James Caddell 'gentleman'.¹⁴⁰ If this is not a simple error, the implication is that James was of lower status than Sir Richard Caddell, either as a younger son or as a member of a cadet branch of the family. It may be that Beshellstown was secured to provide land for a cadet branch of the family. It is notable that James is not addressed as being of Naul, the family's main seat, in any surviving record, instead being addressed as James Caddell of Garristown.¹⁴¹ Beshellstown lies right on the border of counties Dublin and Meath, less than five kilometres from Garristown. In the mid-seventeenth century Beshellstown, described as a mere sixth of a ploughland, did not belong to the Caddell family, even though they held lands directly abutting.¹⁴² The family do not appear as landowner in the parish of Garristown in 1641, but Margaret Bath, owner of Beshellstown and other lands in Clonalvy, also appears as the tenant of sixty (plantation) acres in Garristown.¹⁴³ The lands of the widow Margaret Bath thus likely represent at least a portion of the estates of a cadet branch of the Caddell family descended from James. It would appear that Richard Caddell 'of Moreton', who was sheriff of Dublin c.

¹³⁵ CIRCLE, Cl. 7 Hen. VI, nos. 27-30; M. C. Griffith, 'The Talbot-Ormond struggle for control of the Anglo-Irish government, 1414-47' in *IHS*, ii, no. 8 (Sep., 1941), 376-397, pp. 383-4.

¹³⁶ See below, pp. 164-5.

¹³⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 80-5.

¹³⁸ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 201v, 202v.

¹³⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 298.

¹⁴⁰ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 201v, 202v.

¹⁴¹ RC 8/41, pp. 34, 222-3.

¹⁴² *Civil survey*, v, pp. 31-4. The division of the lands in the parish into sixths and twelfths of a ploughland strongly suggest that they had at one time constituted a single manor.

¹⁴³ *Civil survey*, vii, pp. 17-18. James Bath of Athcarne, who appears as the posthumous tenant of a further twenty acres in Garristown, may well have been Margaret's husband.

1484, was from the main line of the family.¹⁴⁴ James seems to have added to his estates through royal service. He was farmer of a messuage and five acres in Garristown in September 1470, when he was ordered to pay James Caddell of Garristown (i.e., himself) two marks of the king's issues of that farm for his service in the wars of Ireland.¹⁴⁵ Although he came from a family that was prominent in north Dublin and east Meath, the evidence suggests that James was from a younger branch of the family for whom royal service was a means of establishing their position. The office of coroner is unlikely to have secured this aim, although it did mark James as an active member of the county gentry. It is also possible that his election as escheator – an office that certainly could help to secure the family's landed position – was a reward for his service, as coroner or otherwise.¹⁴⁶

Peter Fitzrery, coroner in 1456 and 1485, came from a family that was unique among the gentry of County Dublin in that they had been established in the county before the English conquest. Their eponymous ancestor Rhirid ab Owain, owner of a large estate in Cloghran, near Swords, was a grandson of Gruffydd ap Cynan, prince of Gwynedd, and the family's presence was a legacy of Gruffydd's time in Dublin in the late eleventh century.¹⁴⁷ Rhirid's son Cynwrig had no less a personage than his cousin Llewellyn the Great exert influence to ensure his smooth accession to his father's lands.¹⁴⁸ The family also held or acquired lands in the south of the county, around Threecastles, as tenants of the Archbishop of Dublin.¹⁴⁹ In the early thirteenth century records the family are generally accorded the surname MacKanan (occasionally and more properly Map Kanan) but the family's fondness for the name Rhirid (usually rendered Ryrith in the Irish material) ensure that this replaced Mac Kevan, first as

¹⁴⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 80-5; RC 8/33, pp. 397, 401, 409, 544-5; See above, pp. 50-1.

¹⁴⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 222-3.

¹⁴⁶ See below, pp. 160-1.

¹⁴⁷ Edmund Curtis, 'The Fitz Rerys, Welsh Lords of Cloghran, Co. Dublin', *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Dec., 1921), pp. 13-17; Seán Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish Sea region, 1014-1318* (Thesis, TCD, 1993), Appendix 1: 'Irish material in the *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*', pp. 228-38; *idem.*, 'The Welsh conquest of Ireland' in Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan and John Sheehan (eds.), *Clerics, kings, and Vikings: essays on medieval Ireland in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), 103-14, pp. 104-5.

¹⁴⁸ Curtis, 'Fitz Rerys', p. 15; Duffy, *Ireland and the Irish Sea region*, p. 230; *idem.*, 'Welsh conquest', p. 105; *Cal. Docs. Ireland, 1171-1251*, no. 830.

¹⁴⁹ It is possible that these lands were only temporarily in the family's hands and in fact represent Rhirid's wife's dower. *Alen's reg.*, p. 121.

patronymic and later as a fixed surname.¹⁵⁰ Three generations of the family were prominent in county and royal government in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Rhirid MacKanan was a baron of the exchequer.¹⁵¹ His son John fitz Rhirid was a justice of assizes.¹⁵² John's son Rhirid served as sheriff of Dublin several times in the first two decades of the following century and later served as a justice of the common bench.¹⁵³ Rhirid's son, Rhirid fitz Rhirid, was one of those summoned in 1335 to serve the king in Scotland.¹⁵⁴ Both he and Nicholas fitz Rhirid, who was probably his younger brother, served the crown against enemies closer to home, such as the O'Byrnes.¹⁵⁵ Rhirid's son Thomas did not apparently hold office; but he may have died quite young. He left a single daughter as his heir.¹⁵⁶ However John Fitzrery, who appears to have been a son of Nicholas, took up the baton of family service to the royal administration.¹⁵⁷ Over the course of his career he served as a justice of oyer and terminer, as escheator and as deputy escheator, as a clerk of wages to forces serving against the king's Irish enemies, and as chancellor and treasurer of the liberty of Ulster.¹⁵⁸ He too took part in military campaigns against the Irish and was personally summoned to the great council of February 1372.¹⁵⁹ In Dublin he served as a keeper of the peace and a collector of a subsidy, and served with Thomas Mareward as a justice of labourers.¹⁶⁰ During the disputed elections of 1375, Fitzrery and Mareward formed, apparently by themselves alone, a third group of electors, choosing the Windsor adherent William Fitzwilliam and Windsor's opponent Richard White, perhaps as a compromise.¹⁶¹ John's position as

¹⁵⁰ For example, *Cal. Docs. Ireland, 1171-1251*, no. 1059; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, 20, 22, 38-9, 69; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 158, provides a fascinating but perhaps slightly garbled picture of the evolution of the surname.

¹⁵¹ *Ir. Exch. Payments*, 20, 22, 25, 31, 38-9, 47, 61, 63, 69. Ball states that Rhirid 'appears as an Irishman who had come to the peace 1272' – *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 54. I have been unable to discover the source for this claim, but it seems rather unlikely.

¹⁵² CIRCLE, Cl. 27 Edw. I, no. 22; Cl. 3 Edw. II, no. 268

¹⁵³ Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', pp. 281-3; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p.65; CIRCLE, Cl. 13 Edw. II, no. 1

¹⁵⁴ Curtis, 'Fitz Rerys', p. 16. Curtis conflates Rhirid fitz John and Rhirid fitz Rhirid (his son), but it is clear that two generations are in question – CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 158.

¹⁵⁵ CIRCLE, Cl. 30 Edw. III, no. 4; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 406.

¹⁵⁶ CIRCLE, Cl. 6 Ric. II, no. 15; Pat. 9 Ric. II, no.158

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Pat. 13 Ric. II, no. 46

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Cl. 49 Edw. III, no. 24; Cl. 4 Ric. II, no. 50; Pat. 5 Ric. II, no. 51; Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 134; Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 23; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 530

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 535; CIRCLE, Cl. 46 Edw. III, no. 122

¹⁶⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 49 Edw. III, no. 285; Pat. 2 Ric. II, no. 3; Cl. 3 Ric. II, no 33; Pat. 10 Ric II., no. 222

¹⁶¹ M. V. Clarke, 'William of Windsor in Ireland, 1369-76' in L. S. Sutherland and May McKisack (eds.), *Fourteenth century studies by M. V. Clarke* (Oxford, 1937), 146-241, pp. 238-40.

escheator doubtless provided him with opportunities to acquire land, and he appears to have taken them. In 1389 he appears in possession of Diswellstown (par. Castleknock) and 'Collardesrath'.¹⁶² Collardesrath is probably Coolatrath, which was in the family's possession in the early sixteenth century; if so John was certainly the progenitor of what was thenceforward the main line of the family.¹⁶³

In a trajectory that was in stark contrast with that of the Goldings, the Fitzrery family was very prominent in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries but declined greatly in importance thereafter. John's importance as an officer was due to his career's worth of experience, rather than his preeminent position as a county landholder. There is no record of a member of the family holding office in Dublin between John's appointment as a collector of a subsidy in Fingal in 1386 and Peter's appearance as coroner in 1456.¹⁶⁴ The reason for the family's descent into relative obscurity is no doubt a direct result of the failure of the main line based at Cloghran. The interests of Thomas Staunton, who married Joan, heiress of Cloghran, appear to have been focused on County Kildare, where he was a keeper of the peace in 1404.¹⁶⁵ He swiftly leased out his newly-acquired lands.¹⁶⁶ The Stauntons did not take the Fitzrery's place in Dublin county office.

Peter Fitzrery, described as 'of Tyrellstown' upon his election as coroner of 1485, appears to have been strongly associated with western county Dublin. He was a warden of the fraternity of St. Mary in the parish church of Mulhuddart; his daughter requested burial in the grounds of the same church in her will, dated November 1475.¹⁶⁷ He makes no other appearance in the record. It is possible that he was connected to two more prominent men of the same surname. Simon Fitzrery was one of the leading citizens of Dublin, serving in many civic offices, including several stints as mayor.¹⁶⁸ His connection with Peter is not certain but he was apparently had interests in the same part of county Dublin. In 1484 he had the custody of twenty acres of land in Renvillestown, in the

¹⁶² CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Ric. II, no. 46.

¹⁶³ Curtis, 'Fitz Rerys', pp. 16-17; *Cal. Inq. Dub.*, Hen. VIII, nos. 1, 111; *ibid.*, Appendix, no. 44.

¹⁶⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Ric. II, no. 222; RC 8/43, p. 9.

¹⁶⁵ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 16; CIRCLE, Cl. 18 Ric. II, no. 23; Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 92.

¹⁶⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 57.

¹⁶⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp.676-9; *Wills and inventories*, pp. 155-6.

¹⁶⁸ *CARD*, i, pp. 292-364.

vicinity of Clonsilla.¹⁶⁹ Robert Fitzrery was appointed king's attorney in October 1450 and was still in that office in 1468.¹⁷⁰ He was appointed to the common bench in 1471.¹⁷¹ He appears as chief justice of the common bench at a meeting of the Irish council in 1472, at which Simon Fitzrery, as mayor of Dublin, was also present.¹⁷² Simon Fitzrery, merchant, and Robert Fitzrery, pleader, had a lease of the profits of the prebend of Lusk in February 1472.¹⁷³ Unfortunately I have been unable to find any more concrete evidence linking them to Peter Fitzrery. The family is associated almost exclusively with west County Dublin thereafter, whether as jurors or feoffees, and they appear to have been quite parochial in their activities.¹⁷⁴ Peter Fitzrery was thus a member of a family that was certainly part of the gentry of county Dublin, but had long ceased to be among the most prominent county families. If we may assume that Peter remained in office between 1456 and his (re-)election in 1485 – and the evidence for the English coroners suggests that we may – he served as coroner for the majority of his adult life, serving alongside at least three different colleagues. Peter Fitzrery's career is clear evidence of a level of specialisation which separates the coroners from the other officers of county government. The association of at least two generations of the Barnewall family provides further support for this conclusion.

Patrick Hackett, coroner in c. 1475, makes two appearances in the surviving record. In 1466 Patrick Hackett, gentleman, was among the electors of the county held responsible for the debts of Peter Travers, late sheriff.¹⁷⁵ He appears again roughly a decade later when he was ordered, as coroner, to summon the electors of county Dublin to elect a sheriff.¹⁷⁶ The Hackett family had been prominent landowners in the south Dublin marches in the fourteenth century before largely fading from view for much of the fifteenth century. By the end of the century a branch of the family had established itself at Sutton on the Howth peninsula.¹⁷⁷ Patrick's connection to the Hackett families

¹⁶⁹ RC 8/33, p.523; For Renvilleestown, see *Cal. Inquis. Dub.*, Eliz., no. 33, and *ibid.*, Index, p. 715.

¹⁷⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 29 Hen. VI, no. 47; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 554-5.

¹⁷¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 732-5.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 8-13.

¹⁷³ *Christ church deeds*, no. 302.

¹⁷⁴ *Cal. Inq. Dub.*, Hen. VIII no. 111; Jas. I, no. 67; Appendix, no. 44.

¹⁷⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5, 121.

¹⁷⁶ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 267.

¹⁷⁷ See below, pp. 171-80.

of Rathdown and Sutton is impossible to determine. It is clear, however, that he is another coroner from a family that was clearly among the gentry of the county but below the rank of those which supplied the sheriffs of the county.

Henry Golding of Tobersool was elected coroner alongside the veteran Peter Fitzrery in 1485. He seems to have come from a newly established family. The Golding family do not appear as landowners in Dublin before the second half of the fifteenth century. Indeed I have been unable to discover any record of the family in Ireland before the early fourteenth century. In 1314 Nicholas Golding appears as purveyor in Dublin of grain, wine and salt for the royal armies in Scotland.¹⁷⁸ Upon Edward Bruce's invasion of Ulster he was ordered to divert these supplies to the crown's forces in Ireland.¹⁷⁹ Nicholas had earlier been bailiff of Dublin; his son John was a prominent Dublin burgess in the following decades of the fourteenth century.¹⁸⁰ Thereafter the name ceases to feature among the higher stratum of Dublin citizens for over two centuries. The Goldings who rise to a degree of prominence in the later fifteenth century were instead descended from the branch of the family that established itself in Meath in the early fourteenth century.

In 1317, around the time that Nicholas Golding was redirecting his supplies to the royal armies opposing Edward Bruce, a jury of some of the most prominent men of Meath (including Simon de Geneville, John fitz William Butler, and Hugh Hussey) sitting at Dublin acquitted Hugh and Walter de Lacy of being in league with the invader.¹⁸¹ Allowed to enter the king's peace for a payment of £200 with Hugh and Walter were nine other men from the de Lacy family alongside more than forty others including some, such as Ad Omelaghlin and Miler Okelly, who were clearly Gaelic Irish.¹⁸² Among these men were Nicholas son of Richard Golding, Hugh Golding, and another Golding whose first name has not been preserved. Walter, Hugh, Robert and Aymer de Lacy would be outlawed for fighting on Bruce's side at Faughart soon after, as would Walter Blount, named among those admitted to the king's peace in 1317, and John Kermerdin,

¹⁷⁸ *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 225.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 244; CIRCLE, Cl. 13 Edw. II, nos. 5-7; Margaret Murphy and Michael Potterton, *The Dublin region in the middle ages: Settlement, land-use and economy* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 476-7.

¹⁸⁰ Berry, 'Catalogue of the mayors, provosts and bailiffs', p. 54.

¹⁸¹ *Chart. St Mary's*, ii, pp. 407-9.

¹⁸² *Chart. St Mary's*, ii, pp. 407-9.

the son of the Adam who appears here.¹⁸³ Other men here admitted to the peace also appear to have forfeited their lands in the following years. Walter Gybbenach (Gibbons) was among those holding land by knight service from Trim in the last decade of the thirteenth century, and was admitted to the peace in 1317, but in 1358 Gybynagheston (Gibbonstown, bar. Fore) was among the lands in the lordship of Trim in the king's hand by the forfeiture of Walter, Hugh and Aymer de Lacy and others adhering to them.¹⁸⁴ However not all of the men permitted to enter the king's peace with the de Lacys in 1317 seem to have been de Lacy partisans. One of the men named, John Ledwich, was killed alongside members of his family fighting with Thomas Butler against Mageoghan and *les Lacies* on the borders of Meath in the aftermath of the family's outlawry, as were members of the Tyrell family.¹⁸⁵

The fate of the Goldings is difficult to determine. By the end of the fourteenth century the family were established at Churchtown in the barony of Navan and at Leckno or Piercetown Laundry in the barony of Duleek. Neither Churchtown nor Piercetown appear among the lands of the de Lacys or other outlaws regranted by the crown over the following thirty years. Churchtown was later held in chief of Trim by knight service, but does not appear by that name among the list of services owed to Trim preserved by the Gormanston register nor among the payments rendered for the lordship in 1334.¹⁸⁶ Churchtown was a parish in the deanery of Trim, but is not named among the parishes of Trim in the ecclesiastical taxation of the early fourteenth century.¹⁸⁷ Comparison of the deaneries of Trim named here and those from later episcopal visitations suggest that Churchtown earlier went by the name of 'Athleton'; but the only occurrence of this name I have discovered is that in the ecclesiastical taxation and it does not feature among the knight's fees of Trim any more than Churchtown does.¹⁸⁸ Piercetown Laundry, under its earlier name of Leckno, was in the

¹⁸³ Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, ii, p. 190 n. 2; *Chart. St Mary's*, ii, p. 411; CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Edw. II, no. 120; for the relationship between John and Adam Kermerdin, see *Gormanston register*, p. 134 and CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Edw. II, no. 34

¹⁸⁴ *Gormanston Register*, p. 11; *Chart. St Mary's*, ii, pp. 407-9; *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1358-1361*, pp. 85-6

¹⁸⁵ *Chart. St Mary's*, ii, pp. 370-1; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 334; Frame, *English lordship in Ireland*, p. 193

¹⁸⁶ *Gormanston Register*, pp. 10-13; *RDKPRI*, 44, pp. 22-3

¹⁸⁷ *Cal. Docs. Ireland, 1302-1307*, no. 713, pp. 256-7; no. 714, pp. 264-5

¹⁸⁸ C. R. Elrington (ed.), *The whole works of the most Rev. James Ussher* (Dublin, 1847), i, Appendix V, pp. lxxx-lxxxvj; The 'Villa Arundel' of the fourteenth-century ecclesiastical taxation of Trim is also not

hands of the Laundry family as late as 1306; it was in the Verdon purparty of Meath, but no mention of it is made under either name in the partition of the Verdon lands carried out in 1332.¹⁸⁹ I can find no reference to it again until appointment of Hugh Golding of Leckno as sheriff of Meath in 1347.¹⁹⁰

In 1424 the family were involved in litigation, apparently unsuccessfully, concerned with lands in the parish of Kilskeer in the barony of Kells, right on the border of the O'Reilly lordship.¹⁹¹ Possibly it was residence here or defence of these lands that led to Hugh Golding being captured with his relatives and household by 'O'Reilly and other Irish rebels' in 1346.¹⁹² The Laundry family held land in this parish in the early fourteenth century; among Walter de Lacy's possessions granted to John and Laurence Fitzsimon in 1318 was a four mark rent from the lands of John Laundry in Crossakiel.¹⁹³ The evidence that the Golding family held or at least claimed land in the area suggests that their acquisition of former Laundry lands in the barony of Duleek came through marriage and not a grant or purchase of forfeited estates.

The only evidence of the Golding family holding land in Meath before the Bruce invasion is a grant of 1306 by Nicholas Dillon to William de London, lord of Athboy, preserved among the Gormanston register, of land in Donaghtain [?] which included thirty-six shillings of rent 'to be received from the free tenants of the said town, viz.: of sixteen acres which Richard Goldyng held, sixteen shillings a year; of twenty acres which Alexander Goldyng held, twenty shillings a year.'¹⁹⁴ In 1326, during Roger Mortimer's imprisonment, Richard Golding was appointed as one of the king's receivers in Trim.¹⁹⁵ The context suggests he was likely not a Mortimer partisan. Around this period Richard begins to appear on Meath juries (the first of his surname to do so), such as those of

present in the seventeenth-century visitation, but is most likely the later parish of Tullaghanoge. See CIRCLE, Cl. 32 Edw. I, no. 14.

¹⁸⁹ *Cal. Just. Rolls, Ireland, 1305-1307*, pp. 313-14; *Gormanston Register*, p. 61; Otway-Ruthven, 'The partition of the de Verdon lands in Ireland in 1332', *PRIA*, lxvi (1967/1968), pp. 401-445, 447-455. It is possible that Piercetown formed part of the dower of Elizabeth Burgh, not included in the partition – *ibid.*, p. 401.

¹⁹⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 21 Edw. III, no. 19.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 8.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, Pat. 20 Edw. III, no. 84.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 11 Edw. II, no. 194.

¹⁹⁴ *Gormanston Register*, pp. 168-9.

¹⁹⁵ Potterton, *Trim*, pp. 94, 96.

1323 concerned with the lands confiscated from Mortimer and his adherent Hugh Turpletoun.¹⁹⁶ In 1322 he was a pledge for Basilia, widow of John Tuite, alongside some of the leading knights of Meath, at least one of whom, Walter Cusack, had been on the jury that acquitted the de Lacys in 1317.¹⁹⁷ Richard's background is not revealed. His fellow receiver in 1326 was John Fraunceys of Drogheda.¹⁹⁸ He may or may not have shared John's burgess background. A Richard Golding was among twelve prominent citizens of Dublin tasked with determining the extent of a tenement called 'Fish house' within the city walls in 1317; his associates in this task included Hugh of Castleknock, who was victualler in Dublin of the royal armies alongside Nicholas Golding.¹⁹⁹ Richard may or may not be identical with the Richard holding sixteen acres in Donaghtain in 1306, or with the Richard whose son Nicholas was admitted to the king's peace in 1317. One possibility is that the family combined perhaps quite petty landed interests in Meath with urban interests, whether in Dublin or one of the smaller towns. Alternatively they may have been from a purely burgess background and in the business of acquiring land at the turn of the fourteenth century. If either is true, a connection between Richard and Nicholas Golding of Meath and Richard and Nicholas Golding of Dublin city is a possibility, but this must remain entirely in the realm of conjecture. There is no evidence of a continuing connection between the Goldings of Meath and the city of Dublin.

What is not in question is that the rather sudden appearance of the family among the gentry families of Meath dates to the period following the defeat of Edward Bruce. By 1347 Hugh, son of Richard Golding, was serving as sheriff of the county.²⁰⁰ Hugh was in possession of Churchtown on his death in 1362; he was subsequently accused of engineering a death-bed entail to prevent the crown having the wardship of his heir, Trim being then in the king's hand.²⁰¹ The family thereafter kept a low profile

¹⁹⁶ *Inquisitions and extents*, nos. 220, 224; Frame, *English lordship in Ireland*, p. 183.

¹⁹⁷ *RDKPRI*, 42, pp. 36-7.

¹⁹⁸ Potterton, *Trim*, p. 96.

¹⁹⁹ *CARD*, i, p. 112; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, pp. 225, 237, 244; CIRCLE, Cl. 13 Edw. II, nos. 5-7; Murphy and Potterton, *Dublin region*, pp. 476-7.

²⁰⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 21 Edw. III, no. 84.

²⁰¹ RC 8/33, pp. 10-13.

for the first half of the fifteenth century, producing no more sheriffs of Meath.²⁰² At this time the family only appear as collectors of subsidies and as local keepers of the peace.²⁰³ By the time they resurface in the second half of the century, they have definitively split into two main lines at Piercetown and Churchtown, with another branch of the family at Ardbracken, not far from Churchtown in the barony of Navan.²⁰⁴

A reference in Archbishop Alen's register, purportedly taken from the private muniments of the Bealing family, records the quitclaim of Bartholomew Golding of Arthurstown to two hundred acres of land Ballough, near Swords in favour of Thomas son of Luke Bealing, dated 1357.²⁰⁵ This is Bartholomew's only appearance in the record, and his connection to the main line of the family is impossible to determine. Arthurstown may perhaps be Archerstown, in the parish of Castledelvin in modern Westmeath, where a branch of the Golding family was established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but I have otherwise found no evidence of such early possession or how they acquired it.²⁰⁶ It was presumably not before 1323, when Archerstown was in the held by Roger Wise and Roger fitz Reiner.²⁰⁷ Members of the family do appear as collectors of subsidies and as keepers of the peace in the barony of Delvin early in the following century, while Thomas Golding was a keeper of the peace in the baronies of Mullingar, Moyesshil and Farbill in 1398 alongside the baron of Delvin; no commissioners were apparently appointed for Delvin itself.²⁰⁸ If Bartholomew was closely related to the Goldings then establishing themselves at Piercetown, and if he was indeed the progenitor of the Archerstown Goldings of later centuries, the quitclaim provides further evidence of the family's growing presence in Meath at this time.

At some point before 1467 a branch of the family established itself in County Dublin at Tobersool (par. Balscadden). The Goldings of Tobersool were apparently closely connected to those of Piercetown; they shared the Piercetown branch's ties to

²⁰² Potterton lists Richard Golding as subsheriff of Meath, 1424, but this is in error. Potterton, *Trim*, p. 373; cf. CIRCLE, Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 8; *RCH*, p. 233.

²⁰³ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 25-7; CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 122; Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 53.

²⁰⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 35 Hen. VI, nos. 2, 16; RC 8/43, p. 8.

²⁰⁵ *Alen's reg.*, p. 284.

²⁰⁶ NLI, GO MS 217, p. 26.

²⁰⁷ *RDKPRI*, 44, p. 23; *Gormanston register*, p. 12.

²⁰⁸ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 26-7; CIRCLE, Pat. 22 Ric. II, no. 4; Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 122; Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 53.

the Finglas family, to whom Tobersool would pass by marriage in the early sixteenth century.²⁰⁹ Richard Golding of Tobersool is the first of his family to appear as a landowner in Dublin and the family's appearances in office prior to 1485 are limited to Meath. The appearance of the family in Dublin is presumably linked to the rise to prominence of the Meath branches, specifically that of Piercetown Laundry just across the county border. In 1456 Patrick Golding of Ardbracken and Walter Golding of Churchtown were elected as escheators and clerks of the market in the county of the cross of Meath and the lordship of Trim respectively by the commons thereof.²¹⁰ The association of the family with the second rank of county office is strengthened by the parallel elections of Henry of Tobersool and Edmund of Piercetown as coroners of Dublin and Meath respectively in 1485; Edmund would later serve as escheator and clerk of the market of Meath and as knight of the shire.²¹¹ The parallel elections of 1456 and 1485 are a striking and highly unusual example of continuing, cooperative links between the branches of an extended family.

Richard appears to have acquired Tobersool through his marriage – or perhaps his father's marriage – to Elizabeth Paslowe, heiress of John Paslowe (Paisley) whose family had held land in northern County Dublin since the early days of the conquest.²¹² In 1251 Henry III granted their services to the prior and canons of Holy Trinity.²¹³ Richard acquired further lands in the area by lease from the Ormond manor of Balscadden; and others by marriage to Janet Howth, who brought lands in Hoathstown in the vicinity of Ardee in County Louth, although these lands were of meagre extent and apparently were not exploited by him due to their position in the land of war.²¹⁴ A continued family connection with the area is suggested by the presence of Master Michael Golding, rector of Dromin at a hearing in Drogheda in 1497; Dromin is less than five kilometres from Hoathstown, and Sir (*Dominus*, denoting in this instance a priest) Michael was named

²⁰⁹ *Christ church deeds*, nos. 1235, 1253; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Eliz., no. 55; *ibid.*, Wm. & Mary, no. 3; *Ormond deeds*, iv, p. 357; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 193-4.

²¹⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 35 Hen. VI, nos. 2, 16.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, Pat. 35 Hen. VI, nos. 2, 16; Pat. 14 Hen. VII, no. 10; Cl. 15 Hen. VII, no. 2; RC 8/43, pp. 8-9 .

²¹² *Stat. Rolls Ireland*, Edw. IV, i, pp. 570-1; *Christ church deeds*, nos. 379, 943; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 14-15.

²¹³ *Alen's reg.*, p. 74; D'Alton, *History of the county Dublin*, p. 482; William Monck Mason, *History and antiquities of the collegiate and cathedral church of St Patrick near Dublin from its foundation in 1190 to the year 1819* (Dublin, 1820), pp. 109-10.

²¹⁴ *Ormond deeds*, iii, no. 245, p. 223; *Stat. Rolls Ireland*, Edw. IV, ii, pp. 146-9.

by Richard as one of his sons and executors in 1476.²¹⁵ Henry Golding, our coroner of 1485, is not named in the will. It is possible that he was a grandson, rather than a son. Alternatively he may have been a younger son or nephew. As we have seen, there is good cause to believe that the members of the Barnewall family who served as coroners of the county were younger sons or otherwise junior members of the family.

Coroners of Meath

Ten individuals are named as coroners of Meath for the period 1399 to 1513: four teams of two coroners of the county, one team of two coroners of the liberty of Meath, and a solitary coroner of the crosslands of Meath.²¹⁶ In contrast to the shrievalty and the commissions of the peace, no magnates served as coroner in the fifteenth century, with the possible exception of Thomas Fleming, coroner in 1421. Thomas Fleming, knight, baron of Slane, had been seneschal of the liberty and commissioner of the peace in Meath over the course of a long career.²¹⁷ He was certainly still alive in 1421.²¹⁸ He was however around sixty years old in 1421, and had last been in office fourteen years previously.²¹⁹ Thomas Fleming, our coroner, is not accorded any status title; his colleague in office, John Sherlock, was from a middling gentry family. It seems highly unlikely that this coroner was a sixty year old magnate. It is possible that Thomas was a younger son of the baron of Slane, or he may instead have been from a cadet branch of the family. The Flemings established far fewer cadet branches in the county than other noble families, especially the Plunketts. Nonetheless four Flemings are listed among the gentry of Meath in Christopher Cusack's commonplace book, not including the lord of Slane.²²⁰ At least two of these cadet branches – the Flemings of Grange or Derrypatrick (bar. Deece) and the Flemings of Stephenstown (bar. Morgallion) – provided sheriffs of the county in the later part of our period.²²¹ Thomas' connection to any of these branches is now impossible to prove. But Flemings that were not leading members of

²¹⁵ *Christ church deeds*, no. 368; *Wills and inventories*, pp. 120-2.

²¹⁶ John Loughlin of Newtown Trim was coroner alongside John Barnewall of Kilbrew in 1465-66 and alongside John Durham of Durhamstown later in 1466.

²¹⁷ CIRCLE, Cl. 18 Ric. II, no. 76; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 25-8.

²¹⁸ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 28; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 90.

²¹⁹ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 28. Thomas had livery of his father's estate in Duleek in October 1380 – CIRCLE, Cl. 4 Ric. II, no. 4.

²²⁰ TCD MS 594, ff. 26v-27; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 171-2.

²²¹ RC 8/43, p. 228; CIRCLE, Pat. 23 Hen. VII, no. 11; NAI, M.2675 (Delafield MS), p. 74.

the main line certainly held office in the baronies of Duleek and Dunboyne in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century.²²²

Matthew Bath of Rathfeigh, elected coroner in 1485, was from a leading gentry family, although he did not apparently serve as sheriff himself.²²³ Walter Cusack, John Durham, and Edmund Golding, coroners in 1450, 1466 and 1485 respectively, all later served as escheator and clerk of the market in Meath.²²⁴ We have seen a similar progression with James Caddell of Garristown, coroner and later escheator in Dublin. The escheatorship was a desirable office, so much so that an ordinance was passed by the Irish parliament to stop sheriffs rigging elections to it in their favour.²²⁵ It may perhaps be the case that these coroners – especially Durham, who first served as escheator no more than three years after serving as coroner – had to a certain extent earned their election to the office by service in the comparatively thankless office of coroner.²²⁶ The escheatorship was largely dominated by the same county gentry families that provided sheriffs, both in Meath and Dublin. Walter Cusack did not himself serve as sheriff, but his grandson Christopher did.²²⁷ The Cusacks of Gerrardstown were one of the leading gentry families of the county. They were the heirs of that portion of the estates of Luke Cusack, knight, that had been held in tail male: the majority of the estate, notably the manors of Dunsany and Killeen passed to the Plunketts through marriage and subsequently formed the landed base of not one but two Meath magnate families.²²⁸ The Cusacks were keenly aware of their connection to the noble families of Killeen and Dunsany. The commonplace book of Christopher Cusack, compiled in or

²²² Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 26-7; RC 8/36 615; CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 145. It is possible that John Fleming, collector of subsidy in Duleek in 1400, John Fleming of Fennor (par. Ardcath), who was tenant of a weir at Fennor in 1416, John Fleming of Moretoun (Mooretown, par. Ardcath?) who was appointed to a judicial commission in 1415, and John son of James 'Fyllyng' of 'Felynestoun' (Flemingtown, par. Clonalvy?) are the same individual – RC 8/36, p. 592; CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 92; Pat. 2 Hen. V, no. 206.

²²³ Matthew Bath, consistently described as Balgeeth in RC 8/33, was sheriff in 1484. None of the three townlands of that name were in the possession of the Bath family in 1641, nor does any Bath of Balgeeth feature among the gentry of Meath in Cusack's commonplace book. However, there is no known example of a former sheriff serving as coroner in the fifteenth century – RC 8/33, pp. 393, 404, 407, 416, 514-15; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 27, 135, 286; TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 170-5.

²²⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll. 3, ff. 226v, 228. RC 8/43, p. 182.

²²⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 356-7.

²²⁶ NAI, Ferguson coll. 3, f. 226v.

²²⁷ TCD MS 594, ff. 9-9v, 35-35v.

²²⁸ TCD MS 594, ff. 9-9v, 35-35v; Lodge, *Peerage*, vi, pp. 171-4.

before 1511, includes obits of the Plunkett family (and other gentry families that were connected to the Cusacks by marriage, such as Exeter of Carrick and Owen of Diswellstown in co. Dublin), together with pedigrees showing the connection between both families.²²⁹ Walter himself was married to Elizabeth, daughter of John Plunkett, the second Plunkett lord of Killeen.²³⁰

John Durham is the first of his family to appear in office in the county. While no member of the Durham family served as sheriff, two generations held the office of escheator in the later fifteenth century, so they were certainly among the county gentry.²³¹ The family give their name to Durhamstown (bar. Navan), which they may have held as tenants of St Mary's Abbey, Navan.²³² They served as collectors of subsidy in Navan and were numbered among the gentry of the barony in 1511.²³³

John Herdman, one of the coroners of the liberty in 1424, is probably the John Herdman of Herdmanstown (Harmanstown, bar. Slane) who was appointed to a commission of the peace in Duleek and Slane in 1432 alongside leading men of those baronies such as Christopher Preston, knight, and John Netterville of Ballygarth, esquire.²³⁴ The family are named among the gentry of Slane in Christopher Cusack's commonplace book.²³⁵ Thus he too was from a solidly gentry family. His colleague, John Wilde, would appear to have been further down the social scale. Walter Wilde, servant of Nicholas Abbot, a merchant of Drogheda, died in Iceland on an ill-fated trading expedition in 1457.²³⁶ The only other appearance of the family in office in Meath was in 1401, when William Wilde was one of those appointed to levy grain for the support of

²²⁹ TCD MS 594, ff. 3v-5, 22, 35.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 35.

²³¹ John Durham, escheator in c. 1468, was dead by 1483. Thomas Durham was summoned in Trinity term 14 Hen. VII (1499) to render account for his late father's time as escheator of the county. The thirty-year gap suggests (but does not demand) that a second John Durham of Durhamstown was escheator at some more recent date – NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 242; RC 8/43, p. 150; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 181.

²³² The rectory of Durhamstown was impropriated to the abbey and the abbey held at least a small portion of land there in the sixteenth century – Newport B. White (ed.), *Extents of Irish monastic possessions, 1540-1541* (Dublin, 1943), pp. 252-3. Durhamstown, along with lands known to have been in the possession of the abbey, were in the hands of Roger Jones, viscount Ranelagh, in 1641 – *Civil survey*, i, pp. 232-3.

²³³ TCD MS 594, f. 26v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 172.

²³⁴ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 29.

²³⁵ TCD MS 594, f. 27; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 172.

²³⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 696-9.

the king's lieutenant.²³⁷ Wilde was collector in the barony of Skreen. Few of the men appointed alongside Wilde were men of prominence on the county level. A handful, such as Philip Somer or Sower, came from families that might expect to serve as collectors of subsidies and occasionally as a keeper of the peace in their barony.²³⁸ The majority, however, do not appear again in office in the fifteenth century. The family would appear to have been among the prosperous yeomanry or very minor gentry of the barony of Skreen. A jury of such men (one of whom, Thomas Brennan, had a Gaelic surname) was accused of maliciously returning a false verdict in an inquisition concerning the English status of John Ardagh, official of the diocese of Meath, in 1459.²³⁹ Two of the jurors were Geoffrey Wilde and Laurence Wilde of Oberstown (par. Skreen). No member of the Wilde family appears among gentry of Meath in the Cusack commonplace book. It is possible that John Wilde is the John Wilde of county Meath, clerk, who was mainpernor to John White, clerk, when he had a grant of custody of land in 1434.²⁴⁰ John White was the king's attorney, while Wilde's fellow mainpernor on this occasion was William Stakeboll, who had been as assessor of subsidy for Meath in 1421 and had served as John Darcy's clerk when he was seneschal of Meath.²⁴¹ Stakeboll was also attorney for Thomas Pensax, Thomas Talbot, and Thomas Cusack, who succeeded John Darcy in that office.²⁴² John Wilde was thus an associate of men with long careers in the service of the royal administration and of the seneschals of Trim. It seems likely that his connections, and the administrative skills that they imply, made up for his comparatively humble origins.

John Sherlock, coroner in 1421, may well have been the Sherlock who was attorney for the prior of St Peter's near Trim in October 1411. The prior's other attorney was John Brown of Newtown Trim, who, as we have seen, was sheriff of the cross of Meath; further proof of the role played by a relatively small number of men with connections and administrative ability that was out of proportion with their place in

²³⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 61-2.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 221; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 28; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 138.

²³⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 618-23.

²⁴⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. VI, no. 43.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Cl. 2 Hen. V, no. 11; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 50-2; RC 8/34, pp. 171-2; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 172.

²⁴² RC 8/36, pp. 615-18, 641-2; RC 8/37, p. 18; RC 8/39, p. 91.

county landed society.²⁴³ The prior may have been a relative. Brother Thomas Sherlock was prior in 1423.²⁴⁴ An earlier John Sherlock, a cleric, had been feoffee to Richard Lynham, another sheriff of the cross of Meath, while an Adam Sherlock had been one of the attorneys for Thomas Fleming, baron of Slane, in 1402.²⁴⁵ Walter Sherlock, who was presumably a relative of John, was sheriff of the cross in c. 1437.²⁴⁶ We have seen that the family were strongly associated with the town of Athboy, with Robert Sherlock serving as provost there as well as serving as sheriff of county Meath later in the century. It seems likely that John Sherlock had a connection to Athboy, Trim or both; providing further evidence for the role of men from the county towns in office in Meath.

John Barnewall of Kilbrew, coroner in 1466, was probably from the same branch of the family as John Barnewall of Frankstown, who had been sheriff of the cross of Meath on several occasions in the early fifteenth century.²⁴⁷ He was certainly from a solidly gentry family. We have seen that the Barnewall family of Drimnagh – or rather, the younger sons of that family – were strongly associated with the office of coroner in Dublin in the fifteenth century. To suggest that the Barnewall family tradition of service in this office was shared by the Meath branches of the family, on the basis of a single known coroner, is to venture dangerously far into the realm of conjecture. Yet it is striking that of seven known coroners of Dublin and ten for the county, cross and liberty of Meath, three shared the Barnewall surname. The case of the Golding family is equally suggestive. Edmund Golding of Piercetown Laundey was elected coroner of county Meath in 1485. At precisely the same time, Henry Golding of Tobersool was elected coroner of county Dublin.²⁴⁸ The Goldings of Tobersool were closely connected to those of Piercetown Laundey. If the election of members of both families in Dublin and Meath at the same time was a coincidence, it is a striking one. It seems more reasonable to conclude that the office of coroner favoured individuals with a degree of administrative and legal knowledge more often found in certain families.

²⁴³ CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. IV, no. 12.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 120.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, nos. 4, 182.

²⁴⁶ NLI MS 761, p. 312.

²⁴⁷ Frankstown is in the parish of Kilbrew; it was held by the Barnewall family of Kilbrew in 1641 – *Civil survey*, v, p. 93-5.

²⁴⁸ RC 8/43, pp. 8-9; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 312v.

John Loghlan, coroner in 1466, is the most obscure figure to serve as coroner. He is described as being from Newtown of Trim, so was likely from a burgess background, in contrast to the remainder of our coroners who would all appear to have been middling gentry. Figures from an urban background played a reasonably prominent role in the lower levels of county office, notably Stephen Palmer of Trim, who had been undersheriff of the county, sheriff of the liberty, justice of the peace, and receiver of subsidies in the county.²⁴⁹ John Brown of Newtown Trim, who was a close associate of Palmer, had been sheriff of the cross 1420, and was receiver of subsidies alongside Palmer in 1422. He had also acted as deputy in county Meath for John Fountains, escheator in Ireland.²⁵⁰ The offices held by these men were suited to men with clerical and administrative skills that were perhaps more easily found among the burgesses than the minor gentry.

The coroners of Meath, then, included a mixture of men from solidly gentry families, such as Edmund Golding, knight of the shire for Meath in 1499, and John Barnewall of Kilbrew, and men from further down the social scale, who were more likely of burgess origin, such as Loghlan and Sherlock, or of yeoman or very petty gentry stock, like John Wilde.²⁵¹

Conclusion

It will be seen that a discussion of the office of coroner in fifteenth-century Dublin and Meath is heavily reliant on very few and rather meagre pieces of direct evidence, together with a great deal more evidence garnered from earlier centuries and indeed from another country. As such few definite conclusions may be drawn from this evidence. It is presumed, for example, that the duties of these coroners were the same of those of their late-thirteenth and early fourteenth-century predecessors, simply because there is little evidence to the contrary; on the other hand, few of our fifteenth-century coroners are recorded in the context of their day-to-day duties. Their actions,

²⁴⁹ Palmer is described as being of Trim when appointed second engrosser of the exchequer in 1412 – CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. IV, no. 110.

²⁵⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 95.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Pat. 23 Hen. VII, no. 12.

where they do appear, were those undertaken by their predecessors – holding the county court, causing the election of a sheriff, etc. The solitary appearance of the coroners as a body in the statute rolls shows them undertaking the same duties, and engaged in similar extortionate practices, as their predecessors.

From what evidence survives it is clear that in the fifteenth century it was the usual practice for there to be two coroners in each county or liberty at any one time. There is no evidence that these coroners were formally assigned to particular geographical subdivisions of the county. The reappearance of John Talbot, Robert Barnewall, and especially Peter Fitzrery in office make it unlikely that the coroners were elected on an annual basis, as was the case for the sheriff and escheator. Similarly, the appearance of John Loghlan as coroner in the county court of Meath alongside John Barnewall in March 1466 and alongside John Durham later the same year is suggestive more of the appointment of new coroners as need arose than of regular annual election. The elections recorded in 1485 were more likely the result of the accession of Henry VII than any particular need to select new coroners, particularly given the re-election of Peter Fitzrery.

As to the personnel of the office, there is a striking degree of affinity between certain individuals and certain families and the office of coroner, particularly in County Dublin, which strongly suggests a degree of specialisation not seen in the other county offices. It is especially noteworthy that for three of the seven years for which at least a coroner of Dublin is named a Barnewall was a coroner, and for a fourth a Barnewall was among the electors; while a Barnewall from another branch of the family held the office in Meath. Further evidence for specialisation is provided by the parallel elections of members of two branches of the Golding family as coroners in Dublin and Meath in 1485.

It is clear that in terms of social status the majority of the coroners were not in the first rank of the gentry of the county. Peter Fitzrery came from a family that had been among the leading knightly families of Dublin in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, but which had declined by the time of his election to being of only local importance through the extinction of the main line at Cloghran. In contrast Henry Golding came from a family whose fortunes were much more recent and which were on

the up. But he came from a junior branch of the family that had only recently been established in county Dublin, and there is reason to believe he was a younger son of the family. James Caddell, similarly, appears to have been the founder of a cadet branch of a family whose main line was primarily associated with county Meath. The Barnewalls had been established as leading landholders in the county since the early thirteenth century, and the head of the family had often served as sheriff of the county. But the Barnewalls who served as coroner in Dublin were younger sons or otherwise junior members of the leading branch of the family. Similarly, John Barnewall of Kilbrew, coroner of Meath in 1466, was likely head of a cadet branch with a record of service in the comparatively humble office of sheriff of the cross.²⁵² Patrick Hackett comes from a family that make few appearances in the record; certainly he was not from one of the leading county families. John Talbot was from a cadet branch of a leading county family. He was exceptional among the men who served as coroner of Dublin in that he also held the more prominent office of sheriff and justice of the peace of the county. The Talbots of Belgard were serial office-holders in late medieval Dublin, providing three sheriffs of the county over the course of the fifteenth century. It is surely noteworthy that John's tenure of the office of coroner predates his other, more prestigious offices by several years. The distinct impression is that the coronership was an office of a rank below sheriff, as indeed has been the conclusion of those who have studied the office in England.²⁵³ The coroners of Dublin were from families that were undoubtedly part of the gentry of the county, but they were men of the second rank or junior members of leading families. In Meath the coroners included men from very humble backgrounds, such as John Wilde, who appears to have hovered on the border between the wealthy yeoman and the poor gentleman. However they also included the heads of some quite prominent gentry families such as the Cusacks of Gerrardstown and the Baths of Rathfeigh. While none of these individuals appears to have served as sheriff of the county, several held the lesser but still significant office of escheator and clerk of the market, while Edmund Golding served as knight of the shire. They thus represented the second rank of the landed elite of the county. With the shrievalty dominated by cadet branches of the magnate families, their energies were funnelled towards the lower

²⁵² See above, pp. 62-3.

²⁵³ Hunnisett, *Medieval coroner*, pp. 170-1 .

levels of county office. The office of coroner was thus open to a broad spectrum of the gentry, ranging from the heads of relatively humble families and of cadet branches to the younger sons of the leading men of the county, but it was generally avoided by the heads of families of the first rank, both in Dublin and Meath.

Chapter four: The escheator and clerk of the market

Duties of the escheator

The escheator was a fiscal officer of the crown and as such is better represented than most county officers in the surviving Irish material, much of which is a product of the exchequer. His original function was the financial exploitation of the escheats – lands held in chief that had defaulted to the king through want of an heir. These windfalls were rare and in fact made up little of the incomes with which the office was later charged.¹ To the very specific duty of exploiting the king's escheats was added responsibility for a range of related, irregular sources of royal revenue. These included lands forfeited by felons and lands held in chief by military tenure to which the heir was underage, both of which might on occasion be described as escheats.² With the latter went the custody and marriage of the heir, a valuable source of royal income and patronage, which the escheator was responsible for securing into the king's hand. The escheator was further responsible for taking into the king's hand lands alienated in mortmain or otherwise without the king's license.³ Though the lands seized for these infractions tended to be of less value than the lands of royal wards, they took up a great deal of the escheator's time and combined were doubtless a welcome source of revenue.⁴ Lands endowed for a particular purpose, such as the maintenance of a highway, might be seized by the escheator if he felt their profits were not being employed correctly.⁵ Of considerably greater value were the temporalities of vacant bishoprics and abbeys, which the escheator was to bring into the king's hand and deliver to the new incumbent when so instructed.⁶ These lands and incomes could be very considerable, especially in County Dublin where roughly half of the land in the county was in church hands by the sixteenth century, one quarter being in the possession of the

¹ Stevenson, 'The escheator', p. 109.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10; See, for example, RC 8/36, pp. 447-59; CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Edw. II, nos. 98, 115, 151, 203; Cl. 20 Edw. II, no. 169

³ RC 8/38, pp. 345-6; 8/40, pp. 186-8.

⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 27; Stevenson, 'The escheator', pp. 112-13.

⁵ RC 8/36, pp. 338-43.

⁶ Stevenson, 'The escheator', p. 112

archbishops of Dublin alone.⁷ If these lands were rarely in the king's hand for long, the fact that incumbents were generally advanced in years by the time of their accession ensured that they would return to his hand frequently. In Ireland, the escheator was further charged with taking into the king's hand two-thirds of the lands of those absent from Ireland without the king's license and without adequately providing for the defence of their lands, although he appears to have shared this duty with other royal officials.⁸ They might also seize lands of Englishmen or women who married Irish spouses without licence.⁹ Furthermore, the Irish escheator, and later the escheators of the counties, also held the office of clerk of the markets and measures, responsible for the regulation of weights and also, in certain cases, of prices.¹⁰ It should be noted that the escheator's office had something of the quality of a Russian doll. When great lords like the Mortimer lords of Trim were underage (as was not infrequently the case during the fourteenth century), their feudal rights escheated to the king, whose escheator was henceforth responsible for taking into the king's hand the lands of their tenants by military tenure who died leaving underage heirs, and so on.¹¹

The lands that passed through the escheator's hands could thus be very considerable. In addition to discovering lands and wardships due to the king, the escheator was required to hold inquisitions to determine their value.¹² He apportioned dower to widows and partitioned land between co-heirs.¹³ He took the proof of age of heirs reaching their majority and accepted their oath of fealty to the king, upon which the heir would pay a relief to be delivered his lands.¹⁴ This was conceived as being a temporary expedient until

⁷ Otway-Ruthven, 'The mediaeval church lands of Co. Dublin', p. 56.

⁸ See for example CIRCLE, Cl. 12 Hen. IV, no. 19. Lands were taken into the king's hand for this reason by inquisitions held before the barons of the exchequer and before specially appointed commissioners – RC 8/36, pp. 16-21, 61-3, 88-90, 256-7, 289-93, 307-10, 490-3 and *passim*; CIRCLE, Cl. 8 Hen. V, no. 16; Cl. 10 Hen. V, no. 4.

⁹ See for example NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 50-2; NLI MS 761, p. 319.

¹⁰ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 129-130; CIRCLE, Pat. 49 Edw. III, nos. 65, 66; Cl. 49 Edw. III, no. 4; Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 5; Pat. 35 Hen. VI, nos. 2, 6, 15, 16; *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 48; *Stat. Rolls Ire. John-Hen. V*, pp. 418-19; RC 8/41, pp. 60-1, 160; *Letters and papers Hen. VIII*, iv, part 2, no. 2405.

¹¹ See for example CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. V, no. 12; RC 8/38, pp. 108-13, 345-6.

¹² Stevenson, 'The escheator', p. 135

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1; CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Ric. II, no. 3; Cl. 4 Hen. IV, no. 14; Cl. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 2-5; Pat. 13 Hen. VI, no. 96; Cl. 19 Hen. VI, nos. 1, 13, 16; *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 347.

¹⁴ RC 8/36, pp. 494-7; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 176; Cl. 19 Hen. VI, nos. 13, 15, 16.

the heir could do homage to the king in person, but doubtless for many the act of homage never took place, especially in the case of Irish landholders.¹⁵ He might also be assigned miscellaneous duties. Stevenson observed that the division of labour among the king's officials was not complete, with the individual escheator 'liable to be called upon to perform any task for which their superiors, the exchequer, the council, or the king deemed them the suitable agents.'¹⁶ However, the workload of the escheator was not as heavy as it might appear. As a rule, his duty of administering the lands which he took into the king's hand was limited to a brief period before the crown granted or farmed them out, in which case he made delivery to the grantee.¹⁷ He was not responsible for the lands of the royal demesne.¹⁸

The escheator was clearly a very important officer from the crown's point of view, its purpose being to enable the thorough exploitation of all possible sources of revenue and patronage. For the latter purpose the wardship of an heir and the custody of their lands was especially valuable. The marriage of an heir enabled the recipient to provide for their daughter and acquire an interest in the heir's lands. The marriage of an heiress provided a permanent addition to the family's landholdings, or could be used to provide for a younger son. As such their disposal was an important means of rewarding servants of the crown or allies of those in power.¹⁹ Grants of wardship and marriage were specifically exempted from statutes of resumption by the Irish parliament.²⁰ The farm or custody of lands in the king's hand were similarly sought after and access to such grants was undoubtedly an incentive to royal service; they could be a valuable, if temporary, boost to the incomes of the lesser gentry families or cadet lines that provided many officers of the royal administration. The escheator was also a very important officer from the point of view of the county

¹⁵ Stevenson, 'The escheator', p. 111

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121

¹⁷ See, for example, CIRCLE, Cl. 20 Edw. II, no. 159; Cl. 17 Edw. III, no. 127; Stevenson, 'The escheator', p. 121

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 'The escheator', p. 113.

¹⁹ See for example CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Hen. IV, no. 20; Pat. 10 Edw. IV, no. 9; Pat. 11 Edw. IV, no. 9. Patrick Bermingham was granted the wardship and marriage of Marion Serle in 1546. He married her to his son Christopher – *Calendar of patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland, Henry VIII to 18 Elizabeth*, ed. J. Morrin (Dublin, 1861), i, p. 121; Lodge, *Peerage of Ireland*, v, pp. 45-6

²⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 180-7, 719-31.

landholders. He had power to interfere with the very basis of their wealth and status, by taking lands into the king's hand for pretexts real or fabricated, or denying or delaying delivery of lands to the heirs. Even a temporary seizure of lands could be costly in time, legal expenses and fines for release.²¹ The records are full of orders to escheators to return lands wrongfully taken into the king's hand.²² The complaint of Richard Sedgrave to the Irish parliament in 1455 against the former escheator Thomas Bath, who had seized his murdered father's lands and left him too poor to pursue justice in the courts, was an extreme example of a common complaint.²³ Bath's behaviour as escheator may have been especially egregious – as we shall see, it probably played a role in the reform of the Irish escheatorship that took place at this time – but similar complaints against the actions of the escheator or his deputies are not hard to find for any period. Let us now examine the evolution of the office.

The office of escheator was a creation of the reign of Henry III and was undergoing a process of experimentation into the fourteenth century.²⁴ As such it postdated the extension of English governmental and legal structures to Ireland overseen by King John. In the reign of John's father Henry II, the duty of discovering escheats due to the king had fallen to the justices itinerant. Once discovered, the sheriff was responsible for their issues at the exchequer.²⁵ This system had the disadvantage that the escheats could be left unexploited for long periods of time before the arrival of the justices in the county. In 1232 the first officers specifically charged with keeping the king's wards and escheats were appointed, two being assigned to each county.²⁶ Five months later the supervision of the escheats and wardships due to the king was entrusted to Peter de Rivaux, as part of the

²¹ *Stat. Roll Ire. John-Henry V*, p. 333; Joseph R. Strayer, 'Introduction' in William A. Morris and Joseph R. Strayer (eds.) *The English government at work, 1327-1336 ii: Fiscal administration* (Cambridge, MA, 1947), 3-40, p. 22

²² See for example CIRCLE, Cl. 4 Hen. IV, no. 13; Cl. 7 Hen. IV, no. 1; Cl. 12 Hen. IV, no. 10; Pat. 12 Hen. IV, no. 22

²³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 328-33.

²⁴ Stevenson, 'The escheator', pp. 113-20; Gibson, 'Escheatrics', pp. 218-20.

²⁵ Stevenson, 'The escheator', pp. 113-14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115; *Close Rolls 1231-34*, pp. 129-31; Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward: The community of the realm in the thirteenth century* (Oxford, 1947), i, pp. 105-8.

extraordinary collection of administrative functions entrusted to him by Henry III at this time.²⁷ The popular reaction against Rivaux (led by Richard Marshal, earl of Pembroke and lord of Leinster) and the perceived injustice of the distribution of wardships led to the downfall of this unified escheatry two years later.²⁸ For the majority of the next hundred years England was divided into two escheatrics *citra Trentam* and *ultra Trentam* (relative to the location of the court), although the river Trent only roughly coincided with the border between the two.²⁹ This organisation was abandoned for a period of eight years later in the thirteenth century (1275-1283) when the escheator's duties were divided between the sheriffs and new officers, the stewards of the royal demesne.³⁰ The stewards increasingly came to fulfil the functions of an escheator by themselves, displacing the sheriffs who came to act effectively as sub-escheators in the counties. By 1283 the division of the country between two escheators north and south of the Trent had been firmly re-established.³¹ These escheators were represented in the counties by the men appointed as their sub-escheators, and not by the sheriffs.³²

The next steps in the evolution of the office took place during the troubled reign of Edward II. In 1323, during the ascendancy of the Despencers, the two escheatrics were divided up into eight groups of counties, ignoring the previous dividing line of the Trent, each with their own escheator.³³ The accession of Edward III and the triumph of Roger Mortimer led to the reversal of this policy, and the two larger escheatrics were re-established.³⁴ After Mortimer fell from power, the realm was once more divided between

²⁷ T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the administrative history of medieval England* (Manchester, 1920), i, pp. 215-18; F. M. Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, i, pp. 84-9; *Patent Rolls 1225-32*, p. 491; G. L. Harriss, *King, parliament and public finance in medieval England to 1369* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 196-7; Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 2.

²⁸ Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, i, pp. 123-138; Tout, *Chapters*, pp. 224-5

²⁹ Saul, *Knights and esquires*, pp. 135-6; Stevenson, 'Escheator', pp. 115-16; S. T. Gibson, 'The escheatrics, 1327-41' *English Historical Review*, xxxvi, no. 142 (Apr., 1921), 218-225, pp. 220-2; T. F. Tout, *The place of the reign of Edward II in English history* (Manchester, 1914), p. 361.

³⁰ Stevenson, 'The escheator', pp. 117-18

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19, 160

³³ *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1319-1327*, pp. 251-2; Tout, *Place of the reign of Edward II*, p. 361; Gibson, 'Escheatrics', p. 219.

³⁴ Gibson, 'Escheatrics', p. 219

eight escheatrics. It is clear that the now traditional division of the country into two escheatrics was favoured by the barons, while the royal or bureaucratic party favoured the smaller divisions.³⁵ In January 1335 the escheatrics north and south of the Trent were revived. At this point parliament appears to have come round to the smaller divisions, as it pressed an indebted Edward for their restoration in 1340 claiming that 'the king and the people were worse served [by the existence of the two great escheatrics] than in the time when there were divers escheators'.³⁶

The reinstatement of the eight escheators was short-lived, however. In November 1341 new commissions were issued, appointing a separate escheator to each shrievalty (that is, each county or each pair of counties sharing a sheriff, such as Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire). In each case the man appointed as escheator was the incumbent sheriff.³⁷ The appointment of an escheator to each county (or pair of counties) was henceforward the standard practice.³⁸ The original intention appears to have been not to merge the offices of sheriff and escheator (writs were still addressed to the escheator) but to unite the two offices in the same individual. In 1342 the Irish parliament was informed that 'it has newly been ordained in England that those who are sheriffs be also escheators in the same counties.'³⁹ Where names of escheators survive, however, it is clear that they were not always identical with the sheriffs. For example, of ten men named as escheators of English counties in May 1400, only three, Thomas Brownfleet of Yorkshire, William Lowther of Cumberland and John Cope of Northamptonshire, were currently sheriffs of those counties.⁴⁰ A fourth, John Gateford, escheator in Nottinghamshire, was appointed sheriff of that county the following year.⁴¹ References to the escheator in statutes of parliament do not suggest that the office was annexed to the shrievalty.⁴² It was instead the case that many of the men who served as sheriff also served as escheator in the same county,

³⁵ Tout, *Place of the reign of Edward II*, p. 361

³⁶ *Stat. Realm*, i, p. 283; *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1337-47*, pp. 199-201; Gibson, 'Escheatrics', p. 220

³⁷ Gibson, 'Escheatrics', p. 220; *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1337-40*, pp. 246-8, 250-1

³⁸ Gibson, 'Escheatrics', p. 218

³⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire., John to Henry V*, p. 357

⁴⁰ *Close Rolls 1399-1402*, pp. 141-2; cf. *List of sheriffs*, pp. 2, 27, 60, 79, 87, 93, 103, 136, 145, 162.

⁴¹ *List of sheriffs*, p. 103.

⁴² *Stat. realm*, i, pp. 388; ii, pp. 55, 206, 252-3, 443-4.

possibly, but not necessarily, holding the offices concurrently. Certainly the same men from the same class served in both offices.

In Ireland as in England the reign of Henry III saw a process of evolution in the new office of escheator. It would appear that under John and in the early years of the following reign the justiciar was responsible for the escheats. In 1218 Thomas fitz Adam, who had come to Ireland in the company of King John in 1210, was appointed to oversee the king's escheats (and other sources of royal income, such as fines) alongside John St. John, the treasurer of Ireland.⁴³ The experiment was swiftly abandoned. Geoffrey de Marisco's appointment as justiciar in 1220 specified that he had charge of the king's escheats.⁴⁴

It would appear that the escheats remained part of the justiciar's purview until 1232. In that year the Irish escheatorship was granted to Peter de Rivaux.⁴⁵ At much the same time Peter was granted the keeping of the king's wards and escheats in England and a host of other offices, marking a unique concentration of fiscal powers in a single pair of hands. Peter never set foot in Ireland and presumably exercised the office by deputy (as was the case with the majority of the offices he received, such as that of custody of no fewer than nineteen English counties, wherein he was to appoint his own sheriffs).⁴⁶ The name of his deputy (or deputies) in Ireland has not survived.⁴⁷ Peter's time at the pinnacle of the royal bureaucracy came to an end within two years. No escheator is named in Ireland until 1250. It would seem that in the interim period the keeping of the king's escheats was once more in the hands of the justiciar.⁴⁸ The man appointed to the office in 1250 was Geoffrey St. John, a relative of the man who had shared responsibility for the escheats forty years earlier.⁴⁹

⁴³ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 28, 30, 125; Ball, *Judges*, i, pp. 44, 49; *Rot. Litt. Cl.*, pp. 365, 400

⁴⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 28; *Patent Rolls, 1216-1225*, pp. 263-5.

⁴⁵ Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, i, p. 130.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Vincent, 'Rivallis, Peter de (d. 1262)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23688>]

⁴⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 28-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 49.

Richardson and Sayles have recreated a fairly complete list of escheators of Ireland from 1250 to 1377.⁵⁰ For the entirety of this period a single escheator was appointed for the whole lordship, although they might exercise the office by one or more deputies. The men that held the office were prominent servants of the crown, and there was a great deal of overlap between the occupants of the escheatorship and the occupants of the higher echelons of the judiciary and exchequer. Geoffrey St. John, for example, was a close relation of a former treasurer, who had been charged with keeping the king's escheats forty years earlier. Geoffrey served on multiple occasions as a justice intinerant; his service was rewarded in 1254 when he was made Bishop of Ferns.⁵¹ Few of the men who served as escheator were from major landholding families, having instead earned their appointment through service in the royal administration. Walter of Islip served twice as escheator, in 1310-1313 and again in 1328.⁵² He had been baron of the exchequer in the years before 1310, served as treasurer of Ireland in 1314, and acquired several prebends and other church livings in Ireland and England.⁵³ Hugh Canon, described as keeper of the office of escheator immediately before Islip's appointment, had been a justice of the bench and served as deputy justiciar in 1316.⁵⁴ Walter Wogan, escheator in 1327, was the son of a former justiciar and had served the king militarily in both Ireland and Wales. He had been a justice of the justiciar's bench before his appointment as escheator.⁵⁵ Simon fitz Richard, appointed deputy to escheator Thomas Exeter in or around 1345, had earlier served as king's attorney in Ireland and as a justice of the bench.⁵⁶ Richardson and Sayles' list comes to an end with the accession of Richard II, but in the following decades much the same pattern held true. Members of gentry families might hold the office, such as John Fitzrery (escheator in 1381 and 1388, and one of two deputies to escheator Thomas Clifford in 1385)

⁵⁰ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 125-30.

⁵¹ Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 49

⁵² Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 126-7.

⁵³ Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 61.

⁵⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 126; Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 62.

⁵⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 127; Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 64.

⁵⁶ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 128; Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 71.

and John Cruise (pardoned the debts of his time as escheator in 1407).⁵⁷ These men had already distinguished themselves in the royal administration. Often they were from junior branches of their families. Both Fitzrery and Cruise established wealthy cadet lines through service of the crown; doubtless the escheatorship was a valuable means to this end.⁵⁸

The Irish escheatorship was apparently unruffled by the turmoil of the reign of Edward II. No attempt was made to divide the lordship into multiple escheatries. The final step in the organisation of the English escheatorship, the appointment of an escheator to each shrievalty, was not extended to the Irish office. A series of petitions were addressed to the king and his English council by the Irish parliament in 1342. In its response to petitions concerned with the election of sheriffs and other county officials, the crown suggested that the sheriffs of the counties henceforth be escheators in their counties, as had recently been instituted in England, 'but this matter the King places in the discretion of the Justiciar of Ireland or his lieutenant'.⁵⁹ That the king's advice was not acted upon was undoubtedly due to the influence of John Darcy, the justiciar, who secured a grant of the Irish escheatorship for his second son Roger at precisely this time.⁶⁰ In 1342 the grant was stated to be held for life, and Roger was exercising the office by deputy.⁶¹ In 1360 a more forceful effort was made by the crown to enforce the English model of sheriff-escheators; this too appears to have been ignored, with the crown finding the Irish escheatorship too valuable a source of patronage.⁶² Nonetheless, the office of Ireland was not immune to pressure for reform. In the thirteenth century the office had been from its inception one of the most important in the lordship, handling considerable sums.⁶³ When Henry III granted the lordship of Ireland to his son Edward the office was retained in the king's hand, with the effect that the office

⁵⁷ CIRCLE, Cl. 4 Ric. II, no. 50; Cl. 5 Ric. II, no. 20; Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 134; Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 23; Pat. 8 Hen. IV no. 66.

⁵⁸ For Fitzrery see above, pp. 119-22. For Cruise, see Ball, *History of the county of Dublin*, iii, pp. 115-17.

⁵⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. John to Hen. V*, pp. 355-7.

⁶⁰ *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1337-1347*, p. 221; Ronan Mackay. 'Darcy, Sir John' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a2401>]

⁶¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 127, n. 4

⁶² *Stat. Roll Ire. John-Henry V*, p. 423; Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 128; *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1356-1368*, pp. 261-2.

⁶³ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 27-8.

came to serve as the king's representative in the lordship.⁶⁴ The escheator was a member of the king's council in Ireland and attended parliament as such as a matter of course.⁶⁵ However, over the course of the fourteenth century the importance of the office appears to have declined. The misfortunes that beset the lordship reduced the area from which he drew revenues and the value of lands in the area that remained, diminishing the importance of Irish escheats in absolute terms, if perhaps not relative to the other Irish revenues. By the later part of the fourteenth century the escheator had ceased to appear at parliament as a member of the council.⁶⁶ At much the same time there appears to have been an increase in the frequency with which absentee escheators were appointed, acting through one or occasionally two deputies.⁶⁷ In general the men who served as their deputies came from the same class of judicial and exchequer officials that had provided earlier escheators. John Fitzrery, for example, served as escheator in his own right and also as deputy escheator.

The commons of the Irish parliament were increasingly unsatisfied with this state of affairs. In 1410 the commons made a series of requests concerning the execution of the escheator's office. In addition to those concerned with unjust seizures of property by malicious or incompetent escheators and their deputies, the commons demanded that no clerks of the chancery or exchequer be appointed as escheator or escheator's deputy. As we shall see, this petition was of limited effect. Clerks of the royal administration continued to dominate the office until its reform in 1454. Such men were obviously possessed of the clerical skills required to carry out the escheator's duties, and were admirably well placed to represent an absentee escheator's interests at the Irish exchequer. The commons accused the exchequer clerks of using their position as deputy escheator to enrich themselves and acquire lands against statute, and of taking no care for the office beyond profit. The same petitions requested that the escheator be resident in Ireland and possessed of at least £20 in land or rent in the lordship, and that he execute his office in

⁶⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 27.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Eidem.*, *Irish parliament*, pp. 26-33

⁶⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, pp. 128-30.

person and not by deputy. In each case the response was evasive; 'the governor will be advised.'⁶⁸ Eleven years later the Irish parliament presented a slightly toned-down request that the escheator of Ireland not appoint deputies in Irish counties unless the deputy 'have sufficient lands and tenements within the same county wherein he shall be deputy'. The petition explicitly drew on the English model of county escheatrics. No answers to these petitions have been preserved.⁶⁹

In November 1399 Henry IV granted the Irish escheatorship to Ralph Standish during pleasure, soon confirmed for life.⁷⁰ Ralph was an absentee, exercising the office by a deputy or deputies including Robert Sutton, William Tynbegh, Henry Stanyhurst, William Barret and William White, all of whom were clerks of the Irish exchequer.⁷¹ Both Stanyhurst and Barret are recorded carrying out the escheator's duties.⁷² Ralph had a confirmation of this grant in 1413, despite the petitions of the Irish parliament noted above.⁷³ Ralph would appear to have died (or otherwise vacated the office) by 1418. At this point the escheatorship was given, probably under the Irish seal, to Thomas Talbot, the younger brother of John, lord Furnival, then justiciar, and Richard, archbishop of Dublin. He too employed Henry Stanyhurst as a deputy when he was otherwise engaged (for example, carrying out his duties as seneschal of Meath).⁷⁴

In February 1419 at Rouen Henry V granted the Irish escheatorship to John Pilkington for life. Pilkington had spent several years in the king's French campaigns, and was knighted at Agincourt.⁷⁵ He came from a Lancashire family closely associated with ducal and later royal service; a close relative had served among the retinue of John Stanley in

⁶⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. John-Henry V*, pp. 522-6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 577, 585.

⁷⁰ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1399-1401*, pp. 48, 294; CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Hen. IV, no. 56.

⁷¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Hen. IV, no. 61; Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 35; Walter Ever and John Cophull were appointed by Standish as his attorneys in Ireland in February 1400 and may well have acted as deputy escheators – *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1399-1401*, p. 145.

⁷² CIRCLE, Pat. 7 Hen. V, no. 24; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 9

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 35.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Cl. 6 Hen. V, no. 2; Cl. 7 Hen. V, no. 1; RC 8/36, pp. 26, 615, 668; RC 8/37, p. 6; *Christ church deeds*, no. 1076.

⁷⁵ Rosemary Horrox, 'Pilkington family (*per. c.1325–c.1500*)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52792>]

Ireland in the 1386.⁷⁶ However in September of the same year the office was granted for life to John Charnels by Richard Talbot, then deputy lieutenant of Ireland. Charnels was a personal retainer of the archbishop and the grant was his reward for 'his good service'.⁷⁷ Charnels was thus physically present in the lordship, unlike Pilkington. In 1422 he was appointed attorney there for a citizen of London.⁷⁸ As such he may have been more acceptable to the Irish commons. He carried out the duties of the office in his own person on at least one occasion.⁷⁹ However, in general the duties of the office were being carried out by Henry Stanyhurst and later John Stanton as his deputies.⁸⁰ At this point the history of the succession of the escheators of Ireland becomes rather confused. In 1420 Henry Stanyhurst was ordered to make an assignment of dower to Katherine Uriel as Charnels' deputy. However that November Stanyhurst came before the barons of the exchequer and swore to render faithful account as deputy of John Pilkington, escheator of Ireland.⁸¹ In the following year a writ was directed to Pilkington as escheator of Ireland to inquire concerning the lands of Margaret wife of Robert Orell. The inquisition was carried out by Stanyhurst as Pilkington's deputy.⁸² The writ addressed to Pilkington was dated at Dublin, so it would not appear that one escheator was recognised by the English chancery and another by the Irish. In 1421-2 Pilkington is listed as escheator of Ireland among the officials making their proffers at the Irish exchequer.⁸³ In 1423 Pilkington's appointment as Irish escheator was confirmed by English letters patent; in 1424 Charnel's appointment under the Irish seal in 1419 was likewise confirmed by English letters patent.⁸⁴ Further confusion arises from the appointment at Dublin in December 1422 of John Fountains as escheator of Ireland. This appointment was made under the Irish seal.⁸⁵ Writs were addressed to Fountains in 1423

⁷⁶ Horrox, 'Pilkington family'; *CPR 1385-1389*, p.156

⁷⁷ RC 8/40 pp. 282-3; CIRCLE, Pat. 7 Hen. V, no. 81; *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1429-1436*, p. 57.

⁷⁸ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1416-1422*, p. 411

⁷⁹ RC 8/40, pp. 186-8.

⁸⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 7 Hen. V, no. 22; Cl. 1 Hen. VI, no. 5; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 18; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 6.

⁸¹ RC 8/39, p. 86.

⁸² CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 52.

⁸³ RC 8/39 pp. 214, 217.

⁸⁴ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1422-1429*, pp. 51, 257.

⁸⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 22, 83. Fountains was summoned in Easter 1424 to deliver the issues of the office of clerk of the market and measures in Ireland from 27 October 1422 until the date of summons, which delivery he apparently made – RC 8/40, p. 45.

and 1424 and he made his proffers as escheator of Ireland at the exchequer in 1423 (the last recorded proffers for the reign of Henry VI).⁸⁶ Fountains' appointment excluded the office of clerk of the market, and perhaps escheator, in the county of Meath, which had already been made into a separate office for Stanyhurst.⁸⁷ Outside Meath Fountains, like Charnels and Pilkington, appears to have employed Henry Stanyhurst as his deputy.⁸⁸ This experiment appears to have been very short-lived but prefigures the later division of the Irish escheatorship. Fountains also employed James Delahide as his deputy, and appointed other deputies in county Wexford.⁸⁹ In 1425 yet another grant of the Irish escheatorship was made, this time to Nicholas White during good behaviour.⁹⁰ No writs addressed to White have survived.

In 1427 writs dated at Dublin were once more addressed to John Pilkington as escheator of Ireland, with Henry Stanyhurst as his deputy.⁹¹ In 1428 he was once more 'former escheator' and writs were instead addressed to John Charnels.⁹² Thus for the nine years after 1419 there were two men with life grants of the office of escheator in alternating possession of that office, while at least two others had grants of the office. This confusion may perhaps explain in part the appointment of the archdeacon of Meath and Peter Arthur to inquire into forfeited lands 'and to do all things which pertain to the office of the escheatorship in Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth' in January 1430.⁹³ It is surely no coincidence that the archdeacon's name was John Stanyhurst. Pilkington appears once again in 1435, when Christopher Plunkett, kt., made an assignment of dower as Pilkington's deputy.⁹⁴

Four further escheators of Ireland are named for the period 1430 to 1441. Thomas Hawksley, Robert More and James Blakeney were apparently appointed under the Irish

⁸⁶ RC 8/40, pp. 255, 268; CIRCLE, Cl. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 1, 49; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, nos. 2, 18.

⁸⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 22.

⁸⁸ RC 8/40, pp. 307-11.

⁸⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 83; Cl. 7 Hen. VI, no. 18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 95.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Pat. 5 Hen. VI, nos. 29, 30.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Cl. 7 Hen. VI, nos. 3, 10, 14.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 33.

⁹⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 166, 169.

seal.⁹⁵ Hawksley, who replaced John Charnels in August 1430, would appear like Charnels to have been an esquire of Archbishop Talbot; he held the office of second engrosser of the Irish exchequer, apparently as a sinecure, and had received other royal grants while Talbot was justiciar.⁹⁶ Robert More, of Liverpool, gentleman, had a grant of protection in July 1431 when he was travelling to Ireland in the company of the lieutenant, Thomas Stanley.⁹⁷ James Blakeney was the only one of the three to come from a family based in the lordship; he was the son of the chief justice of the common bench.⁹⁸ Henry Stanyhurst served as deputy for the all three men.⁹⁹ Thomas Bath secured an appointment by English letters patent in 1439. He was at this time present in England, having apparently recently been released from Ludgate prison.¹⁰⁰ He had been admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1433.¹⁰¹ Throughout this period John Pilkington continued to assert his right to the office with varying degrees of success. The Irish chancery recognised his appointment of Henry Stanyhurst, James Delahide and others as his deputies in 1434 and writs were addressed to him in the following year.¹⁰² However, in 1436 writs were instead addressed to James Blakeney.¹⁰³

John Pilkington's final attempt to secure the Irish escheatorship triggered a minor constitutional crisis. An act of the Irish parliament of 1437 decreed that all those holding office by the king's gift had to be resident in the lordship or forfeit their grant.¹⁰⁴ Pilkington appealed to the English parliament in 1439 that the Irish justiciar, Richard Talbot, had no right to summon a parliament, and that the 'great convocation called a parliament'

⁹⁵ CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. VI, no. 3; Cl. 10 Hen. VI, no. 9; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 42; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 28. None of these appointments appears among the calendared English letters patent.

⁹⁶ NLI MS 761, p. 319; RC 8/40, p. 53; CIRCLE, Pat. 2 Hen. VI, no. 29; Pat. 6 Hen. VI, no. 2; Pat. 8 Hen. VI, no. 7; Pat. 9 Hen. VI, nos. 38, 40, 55; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 144.

⁹⁷ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1429-1436*, p. 144.

⁹⁸ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 174

⁹⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 43; Cl. 11 Hen. VI, no. 1; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, nos. 6, 28; *Register of Primate John Swayne*, pp. 130-1

¹⁰⁰ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1436-1441*, pp. 302, 385; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 652-3.

¹⁰¹ *Lincoln's Inn admissions, A.D. 1420-1893* (2 vols, London, 1896), i, p. 7; Paul Brand, 'Irish law students and lawyers', p. 167.

¹⁰² CIRCLE, Pat. 13 Hen. VI, no. 32; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, Cl. 14 Hen. VI, nos. 3, 6, 44, 46.

¹⁰⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 84-5.

summoned by the justiciar had no right to invalidate an appointment made under the great seal of England. The Irish parliament which met in 1447 before Richard's brother John, the lieutenant, was loudly outraged by Pilkington's 'sinister conceits' and affirmed Thomas Bath's right to the office.¹⁰⁵ The ambiguous constitutional status may perhaps explain Bath's desire to have his appointment confirmed by English letters patent; the Irish parliament implies that the crown took advantage of Pilkington's deprivation by the 1437 Irish statute to make the appointment to Bath.¹⁰⁶ Pilkington's attempt to recover the office from Thomas Bath at law were apparently unsuccessful.¹⁰⁷ Bath remained in possession of the Irish escheatorship until the reforms of 1454.¹⁰⁸

The difficulties caused by confusion over the rightful incumbent of the escheator's office was probably mitigated by the long service of a small number of individual deputy escheators. The frequent appearance of Henry Stanyhurst in this capacity has already been noted. He acted as deputy to at least five escheators over a thirty-year period. John Fountains appears to have acted in person; he is one of the few not to be represented by Stanyhurst. It is tempting to interpret this as a clash of parties – a party of absentee escheators represented by Stanyhurst, and a party of resident, locally-appointed escheators appointed by Richard Talbot. But while Charnels was clearly present in Ireland and was appointed by Talbot in opposition to Pilkington, he too appointed Stanyhurst as his deputy.¹⁰⁹ Henry was a clerk of the Irish exchequer. In 1414 Ralph Standish was ordered to pay him arrears of his pay as second chamberlain of the exchequer from the profits of the escheatorship. As Stanyhurst was Standish's deputy he was effectively ordered to pay his own wages for the one office from the profits of the other.¹¹⁰ Stanyhurst was especially prominent as deputy escheator. As we have noted, John Fountains' grant of the escheatorship of Ireland excluded the escheatorship of Meath, which had previously been

¹⁰⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 84-9; Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, pp. 255-7.

¹⁰⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 86-7.

¹⁰⁷ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, pp. 255-7.

¹⁰⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 652-5.

¹⁰⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 18.

¹¹⁰ RC 8/36, pp. 681-2, 698-9.

granted to Stanyhurst.¹¹¹ He had presumably acquired a degree of specialised knowledge that made him desirable as a deputy. He also served as attorney in Ireland for Pilkington.¹¹² In addition he appears to have attempted to make the office something of a family business. Richard Stanyhurst served alongside him as attorney for Pilkington, and as deputy with him for Robert More and for James Blakeney.¹¹³ The appointment of John Stanyhurst, archdeacon of Meath, to a commission charged with carrying out the escheator's duties in the four counties of the Dublin hinterland has already been noted.¹¹⁴ It would appear that Richard and John were Henry's sons.¹¹⁵ Both secured positions in the church; in December 1422 they each had a grant of license to be absent from Ireland for a year 'for the purpose of learning'.¹¹⁶ Their mother Juliana Passavaunt was presumably a relative of John Passavaunt, clerk of the Irish chancery, who served alongside Henry as attorney for William Sutton, a clerk of the exchequer, in 1423.¹¹⁷ Henry Stanyhurst and his family were not the only deputies of long standing. James Delahide had an almost equally lengthy career, acting as deputy to John Pilkington, John Fountains, and Robert More. Delahide and Stanyhurst thus acted as deputies to many of the same escheators, occasionally sharing the same commission.¹¹⁸ The surviving appointments do not make clear how these deputies were intended to divide their duties. Surviving returns are invariably by one deputy or the other, as are the surviving writs issued to deputy escheators.¹¹⁹ There is insufficient evidence to

¹¹¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 22.

¹¹² *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1422-1429*, p. 457.

¹¹³ CIRCLE, Pat 10 Hen. VI, nos. 42, 43; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 28.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 33.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Cl. 9 Edw. IV, no. 1; Pat. 19 Edw. IV, no. 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 8, 9.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Cl. 12 Hen. IV, no. 16; Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 10; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 66. 'Passavaunt's lands' in the city of Dublin were in the hands of the Stanyhurst family in the first years of the sixteenth century – *Christ church deeds*, no. 1130.

¹¹⁸ CIRCLE, Cl. 7 Hen. VI, no. 14, 18; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, nos. 42, 43; Pat. 13 Hen. VI, no. 32; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 9.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Cl. 7 Hen. IV, no. 1; Cl. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 2-5; Cl. 6 Hen. VI, no. 6; Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 52; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, nos. 6, 44. Henry Stanyhurst and Walter Glerne made return of 'various inquisitions' concerned with the possessions of the fifth earl of Kildare as deputies of Robert More in 1432. These presumably were separate inquisitions carried out in several counties. More was ordered to deliver seisin to the earl's daughter and her husband the earl of Ormond; Henry appears to have carried out this duty alone – CIRCLE, Cl. 11 Hen. VI, no. 1.

say whether they acted as deputy escheators in particular counties. Both Delahide and Stanyhurst made returns concerning lands in County Meath, for example.¹²⁰

At some point in the 1450s, the Irish parliament abolished the office of escheator of Ireland in favour of county escheatrics, to be filled by election. The statute has unfortunately not survived, and there is some confusion as to its date. References in the statute rolls for the remainder of the reign of Henry VI ascribe it variously to 1454 or 1455; the former date is almost certainly the correct one, as the statute is consistently stated to have been passed in a parliament before Edward Fitz Eustace, deputy lieutenant of Ireland, who died in October 1454.¹²¹ Thomas Bath, the last escheator of Ireland, was roundly condemned for his crimes by the Irish parliament in 1460.¹²² Among these was included (rather cynically, in light of earlier events) his dispossession of John Pilkington as escheator of Ireland. The central part of parliament's condemnation of Bath concerned his abuse of John Stakeboll and were not related to Bath's position of escheator. Bath's (temporary) fall from grace was undoubtedly the result of high politics. He was condemned by a parliament held before the Richard, duke of York. In December 1459 Thomas had been appointed deputy to James Butler, earl of Wiltshire, who was appointed lieutenant of Ireland in opposition to York.¹²³ While the reform of the escheatorship preceded Bath's fall from grace by at least five years, Bath's misdeeds as escheator are included in the 1460 indictment. The Irish parliament claimed that Thomas admitted had admitted to seeking to enrich himself to the tune of 200 marks worth of annual income, and that the reform of the office was a direct result of Bath's abuses.¹²⁴ Richardson and Sayles maintain that Bath was no worse than his predecessors in office.¹²⁵ Undoubtedly, complaints against escheators are not lacking for any period, and Bath continued to enjoy royal favour in the years following the reform of the office. In 1458, for example, the Irish parliament still accorded

¹²⁰ CIRCLE., Cl. 1 Hen. VI, no. 49; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 2; Pat. 5 Hen. VI, no. 30; Cl. 7 Hen. VI, nos. 14, 18.

¹²¹ *Stat. Roll Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 357, 369, 655. The statutes of a parliament held before Fitz Eustace in 1454 are very imperfectly preserved – *ibid.*, pp. 292-9.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 653-9.

¹²³ *Close Rolls, 1454-1461*, p. 426.

¹²⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 655.

¹²⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, p. 222.

him the title of lord of Louth, which it was so stridently to condemn in 1460.¹²⁶ In the same year he was given power to amerce those failing to respond when summoned to work on the fortifications of the town of Louth.¹²⁷ Nonetheless the number of complaints against Bath's actions as escheator preserved in the statute rolls of the Irish parliament suggests that his tenure of the office catalysed a movement for reform that had been long in the making.¹²⁸

The precise details of these reforms are not preserved. A statute of 1455 says that it had been established that an escheator be made in 'every county of the [said] land' by the return of the sheriffs.¹²⁹ Similarly in 1460 the Irish parliament claimed that it had been enacted that there be an escheator in 'every county of the different counties of the said land'.¹³⁰ However a petition of 1456 (which assigns the reforms to what is probably the correct date) says that the statute ordained that there be one escheator for each of the counties of Dublin, Louth, Kildare, and Meath, and another for the liberty of Trim.¹³¹ The petition was from William Welles, who had been appointed by York as his escheator for his liberty of Trim, and successfully challenged the king's right to appoint an escheator for the liberty. The 1456 petition goes on to state that the escheators were to be elected 'in the form as the sheriffs are elected from year to year'.¹³² The petition accurately reflects the picture of the office as it appears from records of appointments and proffers after 1454. No more escheators of Ireland are named. Every single reference to the office is to an escheator of Dublin, Meath, Kildare or Louth. No escheator is named for any other counties of the lordship, with the sole exception of John Grace, appointed escheator and clerk of the market in Kilkenny in 1516.¹³³ Records of proffers in the memoranda rolls continue to include the names (or at least titles) of sheriffs and seneschals from Munster, Connacht and south Leinster who rarely if ever appeared at the exchequer to make their proffers. There

¹²⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 533, 565.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 502-5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 298, 329-35, 475-81.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-7.

¹³⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 655.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ormond deeds*, iv, p. 36; Quinn, 'Anglo-Irish local government', p. 364, n. 1.

is no indication that these regions also had county escheators that were theoretically obliged to appear at the exchequer.¹³⁴ Nowhere is it made clear to whom responsibility for escheats in these regions had fallen. Presumably the appointment of an escheator to these regions in the fifteenth century would have been purely notional. As late as 1420 Henry Stanyhurst, as deputy escheator, had apparently carried out inquisitions in Limerick, Kerry and even Ardahan in modern co. Galway, but these inquisitions were carried out in exceptional circumstances following the death of the sixth earl of Desmond and the rehabilitation of his uncle James; furthermore, there is reason to believe that a degree of fabrication was involved.¹³⁵

There was clearly impetus for change in the early decades of the fifteenth century to deal with the difficulties arising from a single, lordship-spanning escheatorship. In the reign of Henry IV the mayor of Drogheda was granted the office of escheator in the town.¹³⁶ In 1420 the mayor of Dublin was granted the same privilege.¹³⁷ In England the mayors of many cities received such grants during the reign of Edward III.¹³⁸ Another response was the appointment of deputy escheators for specific regions. Invariably this meant either the four counties of the Dublin hinterland or for the remaining counties of the lordship excluding these four. For example, in 1436 James Blakeney, engaged in warfare against the Irish, was given permission to appoint deputy escheators. He appointed Henry and Richard Stanyhurst and John Welles in Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth Walter fitz Thomas St. John, John Sutton, John fitz Dennis Stafford, Nicholas Everard and John Brown in Kilkenny, Wexford, Tipperary and Waterford.¹³⁹ Earlier in the century, Henry Stanyhurst appears to have sublet his duties as deputy escheator and clerk of the markets and measures in County Kilkenny to William Fitzgerald and Patrick Coterell, both veterans of judicial commissions in

¹³⁴ RC 8/41, pp. 23-30; RC 8/43, pp. 63-5, 97-101.

¹³⁵ *Ormond deeds*, no. 45; CIRCLE, Pat. 8 Hen. V, no. 18; Otway-Ruthven, *History of medieval Ireland*, pp. 352-3, 359; Peter Crooks, 'James the Usurper of Desmond and the origins of the Talbot-Ormond feud' in Seán Duffy (ed.) *Princes, prelates and poets in medieval Ireland: Essays in honour of Katharine Simms* (Dublin, 2013), 159-84, pp. 176-7 and *ibid.*, p. 176, n. 18.

¹³⁶ CIRCLE, Cl. 1 Hen. VI, no. 1; *Cal. Charter Rolls, 1341-1417*, pp. 447-50.

¹³⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 7 Hen. V, no. 107; *Cal. Charter Rolls, 1427-1516*, pp. 22-3.

¹³⁸ Stevenson, 'The escheator', p. 120.

¹³⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 28.

Munster and south Leinster.¹⁴⁰ Patrick White appears as escheator in county Kilkenny in 1419.¹⁴¹ In 1450 Thomas Bath was given permission to appoint deputies to exercise his office except in the counties of Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Louth.¹⁴² John Stanyhurst and Peter Arthur had a commission to exercise the duties of escheator in the same four counties in 1430.¹⁴³ It is clear that some degree of experimentation was taking place in the periphery. It appears to have become the usual practice for the escheator to have appoint separate deputies for County Wexford in the first half of the century.¹⁴⁴ These men all appear to have been members of the county's landholding families, presaging the later developments in the Dublin hinterland.¹⁴⁵ It might be observed that of the men appointed as James Blakeney's deputies in Munster and south Leinster in 1436, only Nicholas Everard had a surname not represented among the leading families of County Wexford in the period. No escheators or deputy escheators are named for other counties of the periphery.

A third response was to spread the duties of the office among a wider body of officials. The multi-county fiscal commissions which are such a feature of government of the lordship of Ireland in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were charged with investigating a broad range of revenues from customs to royal service. These might on occasion explicitly include the duty of the escheator, as when a group of royal administrators, including the treasurer and the chief baron of the exchequer, were charged with levying debts due to the king, extending the lands of debtors in the king's hand, discovering the lands of those absent from Ireland without license, collecting customs on wool and other merchandise, and inquiring 'concerning escheats, wards, marriages and reliefs belonging to the King or his predecessors... and all other things pertaining to the office of escheator' in Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Louth and Carlow.¹⁴⁶ The powers and tasks

¹⁴⁰ *Ormond deeds*, iii, no. 10; CIRCLE, Pat. 7 Hen. IV, no. 140; Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 116.

¹⁴¹ *Ormond deeds*, iii, no. 35, p. 23.

¹⁴² *Stat. Roll Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 224-5.

¹⁴³ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 33.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, nos. 22, 24; Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 12.

¹⁴⁵ Possible exceptions were James Kent, appointed escheator of Wexford in 1423 'for service in the wars', and Andrew Sampford, who may or may not have held the office c. 1441 – CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 24; Cl. 19 Hen. VI, no. 17.

¹⁴⁶ CIRCLE, Cl. 5 Hen. V, no. 15. Drogheda here is presumably in error for County Louth.

given to Robert Thame and John Lombard, justices in Waterford, Tipperary, Kerry, Cork and Limerick in 1384 included concluding peace with Irish enemies and English rebels, as well as discovering and escheats, wardships and marriages.¹⁴⁷ In 1400 Lombard served on a commission with the earl of Ormond, deputy treasurer and deputy escheator on a commission of oyer and terminer in Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford, Tipperary, Cork and Limerick to which was added responsibility for discovering escheats due to the king in the same county.¹⁴⁸ Similar powers were granted to the earl of Kildare and others in Cork, Limerick and Kerry the same year.¹⁴⁹ The commission issued in 1445 to James Power and Philip Walsh, clerks, and others, was charged with all the duties usually the responsibility of the escheator; it is possible that these were their only duties.¹⁵⁰ The men who staffed these commissions were generally experienced members of the royal administration. In 1425, when there were at least two claimants to the Irish escheatorship, Christopher Barnewall (the king's serjeant-at-law), Richard Sedgrave (chief baron of the exchequer) and Walter Thowme were appointed to a commission to inquire concerning 'wards, marriages, reliefs, escheats, and other royal profits' in Dublin, Louth and Drogheda.¹⁵¹ Barnewall had served on a similar commission in Kildare the previous year.¹⁵²

Escheators and clerks of the market of Dublin

On the subject of the escheators appointed for county Dublin we can be a deal more positive that is possible for the office of coroner. Seventeen individuals are named holding the office between the reforms of 1454 and the close of our study in 1513, comparing favourably with most of the offices examined. This is undoubtedly a direct consequence of the fiscal nature of the escheator's duties. Before 1454 the escheator of Ireland was listed with the sheriffs of the counties and seneschals of liberties as the officers making (or failing

¹⁴⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 8 Ric. II, no. 87.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 144.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 147.

¹⁵⁰ *Ormond deeds*, iii, no. 165; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 150-151v.

¹⁵¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 113. For Barnewall and Sedgrave's positions see CIRCLE, Cl. 2 Hen. VI, no. 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, Pat. 2 Hen. VI, no. 45.

to make) their proffers at the Irish exchequer at Michaelmas and Easter. After 1454 the escheators of Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Louth take their place. As already noted, no escheators of other counties feature after 1454. The appointment of local escheators, which can be seen for County Wexford in the first half of the century, may perhaps have continued. The accounts and returns of these escheators have unfortunately not been preserved. Comparison with the fourteenth-century records suggests that such accounts would have formed part of the pipe roll of the exchequer; however, none have been preserved among the few surviving extracts from the pipe rolls for the second half of the fifteenth century.¹⁵³ Where evidence has been preserved, it is clear that these men continued to exercise the normal duties of the Irish escheator.¹⁵⁴ The records of early sixteenth-century inquisitions that survive make it clear that the county escheators were actively carrying out their duties.¹⁵⁵

Even a quick perusal of the names of the escheators is sufficient to reveal that the great majority of these men came from the leading county office-holding families. Six of the seventeen named escheators also served as sheriff of Dublin, while three others (Reginald Talbot, Thomas Talbot, and John Field) were the sons of former sheriffs. John Field and Robert Burnell, escheators in 1458 and c. 1460 respectively, both served on the commission of the peace for Dublin in 1461, while James Caddell had served as coroner of the county ten years before being elected escheator.¹⁵⁶ Of the remaining seven men, four came from families that also provided sheriffs of the county while only three were from families not otherwise represented in county office. There is thus a very pronounced overlap between the shrieval families of the county and the men who held the office of escheator in Dublin.

When the escheatorship was reformed in England in 1341 it was intended that the sheriffs hold the office of escheator in their counties, and the crown tentatively suggested that this model might be extended to the lordship of Ireland. In England the occupants of

¹⁵³ See for example *RDKPRI*, xxxvi, pp. 22-3, 30-1, 60-5; xxxvii, pp. 33-7; xxxviii, pp. 37-42, 58-9, 77-84; xxix, pp. 22-4, 39-44; NLI MS 761, p. 319, and *passim*.

¹⁵⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 21 Hen. VII, no. 8; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 180-1.

¹⁵⁵ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, nos. 4, 7, 8, 16 & *passim*.

¹⁵⁶ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 13; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 206.

the office of sheriff and escheator had ceased to automatically coincide within a few years of this reform. Nonetheless it was still not uncommon for one man to hold both offices simultaneously or in short succession and the occupants of both offices were clearly of similar class and the same families. Clearly much the same held true for county Dublin in the later fifteenth century. John Gateford's progression from escheator in Nottinghamshire in 1400 to sheriff of the county in the following year was exactly paralleled by Robert Bath's promotion (if we may use such a term) from escheator to sheriff of Dublin a century later.¹⁵⁷ However, unlike in England, no man served as sheriff and escheator of Dublin concurrently. It would appear that this reflected deliberate policy on the part of the Irish authorities. In 1455, a year after the establishment of the county escheatrics, a statute of the Irish parliament condemned the practice whereby serving sheriffs, ordered to cause an escheator for the following year to be elected, ensured that the electors were predominantly their own friends and relations to the end that the serving sheriff be returned to the escheator's office.¹⁵⁸ The statute ordained that no man could serve as escheator in the year following his tenure of the shrievalty, strongly suggesting that parallel tenure of both office was also ruled out. It also testifies to the desirability of the escheator's office; there is nowhere a suggestion that men were keen to fix elections to ensure their own return as sheriff. Likewise, there is no suggestion that Dublin suffered from a dearth of willing men eligible to serve as escheator as was the case for the shrievalty in 1476.¹⁵⁹ The statute was not always obeyed. John Burnell served as escheator in 1472, immediately after a term as sheriff.¹⁶⁰ His father, Robert, may have done the same twelve years previously.¹⁶¹ Other former sheriffs who held the office included Robert Holywood, sheriff in 1480 and escheator four years later. In these cases the office perhaps served as an incentive to take up the less popular office of sheriff at a time when willing recruits were

¹⁵⁷ *Close Rolls 1399-1402*, pp. 141-2; *List of sheriffs*, p. 103; RC 8/43, pp. 206, 211, 224-5.

¹⁵⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 356-7.

¹⁵⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, p. 257.

¹⁶⁰ As no other escheator is named between 1472 and 1479, when Burnell reappears in that office, it is possible that he served for several years.

¹⁶¹ He was named as former sheriff in 1459 and as escheator in 1459-60 – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 608-11; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 21.

apparently difficult to find.¹⁶² The same may perhaps be true of the election of James Caddell, who had earlier served as coroner of the county and was rewarded elsewhere with sums of money for his service in the king's wars.¹⁶³ The office brought with it power over land – the basis of the gentry's status – and escheators were not above deploying these powers in their own interest. John Burnell was accused in 1473 of using the office to secure his deceased mother's lands in Coolock and elsewhere at the expense of her second husband.¹⁶⁴

In other cases the office may have functioned as an introduction to county office for men from shrieval families. Three of our escheators went on to serve as sheriff shortly after serving as escheator. John Talbot of Belgard was escheator in 1470 and sheriff three years later.¹⁶⁵ Robert Bath's immediate transition from escheator to sheriff of Dublin has already been noted. Richard Luttrell served as escheator in 1498-9 and as sheriff in 1502.¹⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that none of our escheators appears to have held that office at a time when a family member was sheriff (or in the year following), despite the fact that Reginald Talbot, John Field of Fieldstown, John Burnell, Thomas Talbot, Robert Holywood and Richard Luttrell are known to have been the sons of sheriffs. It is also striking that only two of our escheators served more than one year as escheator.¹⁶⁷ Only two families, the Talbots of Belgard and the Burnells of Balgriffin, appear to have provided more than one escheator of the county, in striking contrast to the shrievalty.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 674-7; ii, pp. 256-7; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 232, 255-255v, 256, 270.

¹⁶³ RC 8/41, pp. 222-3.

¹⁶⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 178-81.

¹⁶⁵ RC 8/41, p. 240; CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Edw. IV, no. 7; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, p. 139.

¹⁶⁶ NLI MS 761, p. 336.

¹⁶⁷ John Field of Corduff may have been a third example. He is named as escheator in 1484 and called 'former escheator' twenty-two years later; but the circumstances of the later record suggest that he had not held the office recently. It concerned illegal alienation of land by John Burnell of Balgriffin who died no later than Easter 1496 – RC 8/33, pp. 394, 536; CIRCLE, Pat. 21 Hen. VII, no. 8; BL Royal 18 C xiv, f. 57v.

¹⁶⁸ I have been unable to discover a close familial connection between John Field of Fieldstown (escheator in 1458) and John Field of Corduff (escheator in 1484). Corduff (bar. Castleknock) belonged to a cadet branch that appears to have been established by 1470 – NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 71; *Cal. Inquis Dublin*, P & M, nos. 12, 32, 33.

The escheatorship was thus very much an office for the same small group of families that provided sheriffs. Given that the office was clearly a desirable one, it would appear that election to it was shared out quite evenly amongst themselves by this small group of leading families. As these families were the same that supplied sheriffs of the county, an apparently unpopular office, one could perhaps argue that shared participation in the one office was in a way compensation for shared responsibility for the other. Unfortunately, no list of electors of the escheators has survived, but the likelihood that the men who elected the escheators would have been much the same men who elected the sheriffs is supported by the overlap in personnel between the two offices and the 1455 statute concerning the election of the county escheators. Let us now examine the families that provided escheators of Dublin.

As a result of the overlap between the offices, many of the families that supplied escheators have already been discussed in chapters on the shrievalty and commissions of the peace. The Talbots of Belgard (par. Tallaght, bar. Uppercross), for example, have already been noted as perennial Dublin office-holders. Indeed this cadet branch of the Talbot family account for the great majority of the Talbot officers of Dublin in the fifteenth century.¹⁶⁹ Four generations of the family provided three sheriffs, two escheators, a coroner and a justice of the peace of the county over the course of the fifteenth century. Though a junior branch of the Talbots of Malahide, the Talbots of Belgard were thus among the most prominent families of the county in their own right. They were players in the high politics of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ireland; Robert Talbot of Belgard was murdered by the brothers of the ninth earl of Kildare on his way to spend Christmas with the earl of Ossory.¹⁷⁰

Reginald Talbot of Feltrim was in fact from the family described elsewhere as of Belgard. Feltrim (par. Kinsaley, bar. Coolock) would appear to have been the original base of this branch of the Talbot family. They were established there as a junior branch of the

¹⁶⁹ With the exception of Thomas Talbot, prior of Kilmainham, justice of the peace in 1461 – Frame, ‘Commissions of the Peace’, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ Edmund Campion, *Historie of Ireland*, pr. in *Ancient Irish Histories* (2 vols., Dublin, 1809), ii, p. 161.

Malahide Talbots by 1331 at the latest.¹⁷¹ Belgard became the usual designation of the family in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but appears to have been in the family's possession in the fourteenth century. Reginald Talbot, grandfather of our escheator, received a series of summons to proceed 'well and sufficiently armed' to his lands in the south Dublin marches during times of conflict with the Leinster Irish.¹⁷² Belgard was still in the family's possession in the seventeenth century, while Feltrim was not.¹⁷³ In the first decades of the fifteenth century John fitz Reginald Talbot was one of the most prominent office-holders in the county. He was a coroner in 1402 and 1407 and served as sheriff in 1416-1418, 1423, 1427 and 1430. He is almost certainly the John Talbot 'of Warde' who was appointed to a commission of the peace in Dublin in 1415.¹⁷⁴ As discussed elsewhere, Ward was almost certainly Belgard (bar. Uppercross), and not the modern parish of Ward (bar. Castleknock).¹⁷⁵ The same John Talbot appears as John Talbot of Feltrim, appointed attorney in Ireland for John Pilkington in 1423; he described himself as lord of Feltrim in a grant of land in Dalkey to Thomas White in 1439.¹⁷⁶ It is surely not a coincidence that John's confirmation as Pilkington's attorney by English letters patent in October 1423 came just a month before he was appointed sheriff of Dublin for the third time.¹⁷⁷ It is possible that John Talbot of 'Mayne' (Maynetown, par. Baldoyle, bar. Coolock), appointed alongside the serving sheriff of Dublin to inquire concerning the behaviour of purveyors of the household of the deputy lieutenant in County Dublin in 1403, was also John fitz Reginald.¹⁷⁸ Maynetown and Feltrim were both part of the patrimony of Robert Talbot of Belgard in 1509; but it is possible that Maynetown was in the hands of a separate branch of the family in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.¹⁷⁹ John Talbot of 'Ma...' was summoned

¹⁷¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Edw. III, no. 4. Richard Talbot of Malahide had died two years previously and his son Thomas was a minor – CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Edw. III, no. 1; Pat. 7 Edw. III, no. 2.

¹⁷² CIRCLE, Cl. 1 Ric. II, nos. 92-3; Cl. 4 Ric. II, nos. 118-19.

¹⁷³ *Civil survey*, vii, pp. 184, 301.

¹⁷⁴ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 12; c.f. CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 132.

¹⁷⁵ See above, p. 97.

¹⁷⁶ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1422-1429*, p. 140; *Christ church deeds*, no. 927.

¹⁷⁷ Talbot had an earlier appointment as Pilkington's attorney in April 1422 – *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1416-1422*, p. 426.

¹⁷⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. Hen. IV, no. 276. John Derpatrick was sheriff in 1403 – Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', p. 286.

¹⁷⁹ *Cal. Inq. Dublin, P&M.*, no. 13.

to a great council at Dublin in 1372 alongside Reginald Talbot of the Feltrim family and Thomas Talbot of Malahide, while in 1379 John Talbot of Mayne, outlawed at the suit of Maurice Stafford, was granted a pardon.¹⁸⁰ Ball, discussing the history of Belgard, found the earliest mention of the townland to be in the late fifteenth century when it was the residence of Robert Talbot 'son and heir of John Talbot, of Feltrim'.¹⁸¹

Reginald, escheator in 1456, was the son of John fitz Reginald Talbot.¹⁸² As such he came from one of Dublin's premier shrieval families, being the son and father of sheriffs even if he did not apparently ever hold that office himself. Reginald is the first escheator of the county of Dublin whose name has been preserved. He was elected in November 1456.¹⁸³ His election may well have been due in part with his family's earlier familiarity with the escheator's office. As we have seen, his father John had served as attorney in Ireland for John Pilkington, and was appointed as one of his deputies in 1423.¹⁸⁴ Other men appointed as attorneys to absentee escheators are known to have acted as their deputies in office include William Ashebourne and Henry Stanyhurst.¹⁸⁵ The escheatorship required a degree of professional competence and favoured those familiar with the workings of the royal exchequer; hence the preference for the Talbots of Belgard and those from families with experience of county office in general.

In contrast to the Reginald and John Talbot, three escheators of Dublin came from families with no history of service in county office. The first of these was Thomas Serle of Garristown (bar. Balrothery), escheator of Dublin from late 1465 until November 1466.¹⁸⁶ It is striking that of the three escheators from families without a history of service, two were described as being 'of Garristown' (the other being John Walsh, escheator in 1493).¹⁸⁷ A third escheator, James Caddell, who was elected as escheator to replace Serle in November

¹⁸⁰ CIRCLE, Cl. 46 Edw. III, no. 122; Pat. 2 Ric. II, no. 13.

¹⁸¹ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, iii, p. 15.

¹⁸² NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, pp. 151-2.

¹⁸³ CIRCLE, Pat. 35 Hen. VI, no. 15; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 204.

¹⁸⁴ RC 8/40, pp. 272-3.

¹⁸⁵ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1416-1422*, p. 426; *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1422-1429*, p. 457. CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. V, no. 6.

¹⁸⁶ RC 8/41, pp. 26, 34; CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Edw. IV, no. 8.

¹⁸⁷ RC 8/43, p. 53.

1466, was also described as of Garristown.¹⁸⁸ He was from a family well represented in office in Dublin and Meath (although he may have been of a junior branch of the family).¹⁸⁹ The disproportionate frequency with which families from Garristown were returned as escheator of Dublin is difficult to explain; it is not to be found among the occupants of other county offices. Garristown was a manor of the Talbots of Malahide.¹⁹⁰ Thomas Talbot of Malahide was escheator in 1471, while two members of a Talbot cadet branch held the escheatorship in the period. If our Garristown escheators were Talbot tenants, it may suggest a particular interest on the part of that family in controlling the escheatorship, but as neither they nor members of the cadet branch of the family were sheriff when the Garristown escheators were elected this is a difficult suggestion to substantiate. Another possible connection is provided by James Blakeney, the former escheator of Ireland, who was appointed sheriff of the county in October 1466.¹⁹¹ James' family held land in the area of Garristown in 1641.¹⁹² Blakeney was closely associated with Sir Robert Burnell, who died during the last of several stints as sheriff of the county in 1465.¹⁹³ If Blakeney's association with Burnell extended to the latter's time as sheriff (not unlikely, given that James was sworn in as sheriff after his death), he may be the reason why two Garristown escheators were elected in succession at this time.¹⁹⁴ It is surely not unreasonable that a panel of electors summoned by a sheriff with links to the Garristown area might be skewed toward prominent locals. Alternatively, Garristown's status as a market town may have been significant, as the escheatorship went hand-in-hand with the office of clerk of markets and measures.¹⁹⁵ Such an explanation may go some way towards explaining the election of Thomas Serle, who was not from the class of families that usually dominated the office.

Serle and his family make little impression on the record. What few appearances they make before the fifteenth century are almost all associated with the barony of Ardee,

¹⁸⁸ RC 8/41, p. 34; CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Edw. IV, no. 8.

¹⁸⁹ See above, pp. 117-19.

¹⁹⁰ D'Alton, *History of the county of Dublin*, pp. 497-8.

¹⁹¹ RC 8/41, pp. 30, 32.

¹⁹² *Civil survey*, vii, pp. 22, 28.

¹⁹³ RC 8/41, pp. 24, 35-7.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 32.

¹⁹⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Hen. V, no. 14.

where the parish of Charlestown bears witness to their presence.¹⁹⁶ The associated manor was in the hands of the Plunkett family by the early fifteenth century.¹⁹⁷ The Serle family appear in the same area as yeomen in a sixteenth-century enfeoffment.¹⁹⁸ Other men with the surname appear as burgesses of Drogheda and Dundalk.¹⁹⁹ Adam Serle of Drogheda was involved in a patriotic act of piracy in 1342.²⁰⁰ John Serle 'lord of Gilbertstown and Stormanstown' (both in bar. Ardee) claimed the right of presentation to the vicarage of Clonkeen in 1411; Brendan Smith cites him as an example of the type of obscure individuals who might claim a lordly title.²⁰¹ It would appear that John died without a male heir shortly afterward, as various portions of these lands were being farmed out by the king from Easter 1412.²⁰² A branch of the family based in county Meath seem to have done better from themselves, holding lands at Silloge (bar. Morgallion) and Shallon (bar. Duleek).²⁰³ They appear to have been closely connected to the Serles of Ardee.²⁰⁴ In 1546 the wardship of Marion sister and heiress of John Serle of Shallon, was granted to Patrick Barnewall.²⁰⁵ In due course she was married to his son Christopher, and was commemorated on the family's monument at Turvey in north county Dublin.²⁰⁶ The property at Shallon appears to have passed from the Barnewalls to the Delahides by marriage in the next generation.²⁰⁷

Thomas Serle's connection to the Serles of Ardee and Shallon is unknown but probable. Henry Serle, who appears as proprietor of Shallon and Silloge, was addressed as Henry Serle of 'Shalwyn in county Dublin', gentleman, on the plea roll of 9 Hen. VI (1430-

¹⁹⁶ *Inquisitions and extents*, nos. 191, 270; CIRCLE, Cl. 5 Ric. II, nos. 74-6; *Christ church deeds*, nos. 1076, 1101; *Dowdall deeds*, no. 225; *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, p. 534.

¹⁹⁷ RC 8/33, p. 314; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 9.

¹⁹⁸ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 83; *Cal. Patent Rolls Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, i, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹⁹ *Gormanston register*, pp. 37, 74; *Dowdall deeds*, nos. 214, 548.

²⁰⁰ Smith, *Crisis and survival*, p. 169; *Close Rolls, 1341-1343*, p. 655.

²⁰¹ Brendan Smith (ed.) *Register of Nicholas Fleming*, no. 163; Smith, *Crisis and survival*, pp. 8-9.

²⁰² RC 8/36, pp. 197-9, 515-20, 568, 573-4, 600, 622, 665-6. In the sixteenth century Gilbertstown at least was, with Charlestown, in the possession of the Plunkett lords of Louth. *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Eliz., no. 88.

²⁰³ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 35; NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 172; iv, p. 41; *Cal. P&C Rolls Ire. Hen. VIII - Eliz.*, p. 121. Lodge, *Peerage*, v, p. 46.

²⁰⁴ *Christ church deeds*, no. 1076.

²⁰⁵ *Cal. Patent Rolls Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, i, p. 121.

²⁰⁶ Lodge, *Peerage*, v, pp. 45-6.

²⁰⁷ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Eliz. no. 129; Jas. I, no. 138; Lodge, *Peerage*, v, p. 47.

1).²⁰⁸ This may be a simple error, mistaking Henry's lands for a townland with the same name in Dublin (Shallon, bar. Castleknock). Conversely, it may reflect landed interests in the county that do not otherwise appear. Thomas' own landholdings are obscure. As we have seen, the Irish parliament had earlier sought that the escheator of Ireland have £20 of lands in fee in the lordship. What landed income was required to be considered a sufficient escheator for a county is not stated, but possession of lands in fee in the county was a standard requirement for office in Ireland and England at this period. In October 1466 Thomas was a mainpignor for a grant of land in Garristown to John Fleming.²⁰⁹ Fleming, described elsewhere as John Fleming of Naas, was a clerk of the Irish treasury and exchequer and a frequent recipient of royal largesse.²¹⁰ Thomas's connection with Fleming may perhaps indicate a familiarity with the royal administration that is otherwise unrecorded. The lands were granted to Fleming while they remained in the king's hand. It seems at least possible that Serle, as serving escheator, had brought the lands to Fleming's attention. Thomas' fellow mainpignor was given the title of yeoman and the lands in question were of limited extent, but the context suggests that Serle had a connection to royal administration or was a man of at least some local prominence. If Thomas was familiar with the personnel of the royal administration, it is probable that this familiarity would have extended to James Blakeney, who, as we have seen, had earlier held the escheatorship of Ireland and was the son of a chief justice of the common bench.²¹¹ Thomas himself was not given a title here or in the memoranda rolls. The title accorded to the other escheators of Dublin, where one is recorded, are those of gentleman or esquire.

The presence of the Serle family in the Garristown area did not end with Thomas. John Serle of Garristown was among the electors of Peter Fitzrery and Henry Golding as coroners of Dublin in 1485.²¹² These electors are not all accorded status titles, but as with the escheators all for whom a title is recorded bear that of gentleman. John Serle is not

²⁰⁸ NLI GO 192, p. 377.

²⁰⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Edw. IV, no. 7.

²¹⁰ RC 8/33, pp. 516-7, 543, 547-8, 550; CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Edw. IV, no. 12; Pat. 11 Edw. IV, no. 9; Pat. 12 Edw. IV, no. 10; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 564-6; ii, pp. 396-9.

²¹¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 26; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 4.

²¹² RC 8/43, p. 9.

given a title, but there is no indication that the presence or absence of a title in this record reflects a social hierarchy; Serle is listed before several electors with the designation of gentleman. John Serle of Shallon, gentleman, sued Henry Babe of Ardee for trespass on his lands there in 1486.²¹³ The Serle family were clearly members of the minor gentry of north Dublin, east Meath and south Louth for at least two generations. Thomas Serle is undoubtedly less prominent than most of our escheators and it may be that political connections or a place in the royal administration enabled him to secure election to the office. Thomas did not perhaps justify his electors' confidence: in both Michaelmas and Easter terms he was fined for failing to make his proffers.²¹⁴

Like Serle, Walter Bermingham of Ballough (par. Lusk, bar. Balrothery), escheator of Dublin in 1509, was the only member of his family to hold office in Dublin. He was the younger son of a family on the rise. Patrick Bermingham, who had been educated at Lincoln's Inn and was chief justice of the king's bench from 1513 until his death in late 1532, was a close relative.²¹⁵ Attainders against a number of high profile members of the Irish administration, including the chancellor and Philip Bermingham, the chief justice, were annulled by the Irish parliament in 1480. John, Patrick and Walter Bermingham were among those named.²¹⁶ Thomas Bermingham, gentleman, one of the electors of the coroners of Dublin in 1485, may perhaps have been another brother.²¹⁷ Patrick's grandson, also named Patrick, made an entail of his lands in 1597, in which he made reversion, after his own son and the heirs male of his father, to William Bermingham of Ballough, whom he described as his cousin.²¹⁸ In addition to disposing of parcels of land in the city and county of Dublin, Patrick's entail included the hereditary chief serjeanty of Meath and Westmeath, which his ancestor Thomas Bermingham had inherited through marriage to an heiress of the Bacon

²¹³ *Christ church deeds*, no. 1076.

²¹⁴ RC 8/41, pp. 23, 29.

²¹⁵ *Lincoln's Inn, Admissions*, i, p. 21; Richard Hawkins. 'Bermingham, Patrick' in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a0616>].

²¹⁶ The reason for the attainders does not appear – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 768-9.

²¹⁷ RC 8/43, p. 9; Patrick Bermingham inherited his brother John's lands in 1483, so their grandfather Thomas was presumably deceased by this point. CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Edw V., no. 1.

²¹⁸ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Jas. I, no. 55.

family in the middle of the fifteenth century. This appears to have been the foundation of the family's wealth; the entail implies that the Meath possessions of the family also came via the Bacon marriage. The lands that Patrick held in north county Dublin were held of the archbishop's manor of Lusk. They appear to have been acquired separately. When they acquired these lands I have been unable to discover, but they were certainly in the family's hands by 1534.²¹⁹ It is probable that the lands were acquired over the course of the second half of the fifteenth century or during Patrick's own legal and administrative career.

The establishment of a junior branch at Ballough was even more recent. Ballough had in the fourteenth century been held of the archbishops by the Bealing family, at least one of whom served as sheriff of the county.²²⁰ Their land appears to have escheated back into the archbishop's hand by the end of the century, as in March 1390 the archbishop made a lease of the same for forty years to two chaplains.²²¹ The lease was later extended by a further sixty years. In 1487, near the end of this extended term, Archbishop Walter Fitzsimon confirmed the lease to the current tenant, Walter Bermingham, and his heirs, and extended it by a further fifty-nine years.²²² At what point the family acquired the lease is uncertain, but in 1455 a Christopher Bermingham of Ballough is named on the Irish plea rolls.²²³ Christopher makes no further impression on the record. As the family were still in possession in 1591, it is to be presumed that they either acquired a further extension of the lease or had a grant of the lands in fee. They were no longer in possession of Ballough in 1641.²²⁴ Ballough was in the same parish as the lands of the main line of the family, suggesting a deliberate policy of land acquisition in the area. Walter Bermingham II of Ballough acquired a thirty-one-year lease of Haystown (probably Haystown, par. Balscadden rather Haystown, par. Lusk) from the earl of Ormond in 1543.²²⁵ The family were strongly associated with the Ormond lordship in north County Dublin. Patrick, the

²¹⁹ *Alen's reg.* p. 179.

²²⁰ Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', p. 282.

²²¹ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 249-50.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ NLI, GO 192, p. 398.

²²⁴ *Civil survey*, vii, p. 131.

²²⁵ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Edw. VI, no. 3; *Ormond deeds*, v, p. 313.

future chief justice, was paying an annual fee of £6 8s 4d to be earl's seneschal in 1491; while Walter of Ballough received £3 (a significant addition to the income of a middling gentry family) from the earl's receiver there that same year for serving three terms as chief serjeant of the lordship. Walter's son William was receiver of the lordship in 1501.²²⁶ There is little evidence that the Berminghams of Ballough had landholdings to compare with other escheator families such as the Burnells of Balgriffin. It may be that the incomes and prestige associated with service of the Butlers in north county Dublin compensated for their being the junior branch of an apparently parvenu family. Walter Bermingham had served as collector of a subsidy in Balrothery in 1495, but as we shall see that office cannot be taken as proof of gentry status.²²⁷

The origins of Thomas Bermingham I have been unable to discover. The family's interests in north county Dublin and the legal career of Patrick Bermingham mirror those of a family of Berminghams that pursued careers in the royal administration throughout the fifteenth century. Richard Bermingham of this family had served as a justice of the peace and collector of a subsidy in Dublin during the reign of Henry V.²²⁸ He inherited the manor of Baldongan and part of the manor of Ward through his marriage to a Travers coheiress.²²⁹ Philip Bermingham of that family had been chief justice of the king's bench from 1474 to 1490. His pardon in 1480 alongside John, Patrick and Walter Bermingham, Thomas' grandsons, has already been noted. This is strongly suggestive of a link; on the other hand, while the three brothers are named in succession in the statute, their names are not placed in association with that of Philip.²³⁰ Philip shared the family's Butler associations, acting as the earl's attorney in Ireland.²³¹ Both families were tied by marriage to the St. Laurences of Howth. Amy, sister and heiress of Richard Bermingham of Baldongan, was married to Christopher, lord Howth, while Patrick Bermingham's son

²²⁶ *Ormond deeds*, iv, pp. 316-17, 349.

²²⁷ BL Royal MS 18 C xiv, f. 85. See below, pp. 281-4.

²²⁸ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 12; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 180.

²²⁹ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, vi, pp. 50-1.

²³⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 768-9.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 856-7.

William married a daughter of Thomas St Laurence, Christopher's uncle.²³² However there is no concrete evidence of a link between the two families. If Thomas Bermingham belonged to the Baldongan family, he must have been a younger son; it is difficult to imagine his securing such a fortuitous marriage in such circumstances. Richard Bermingham of the Baldongan family was a prominent opponent of the Duke of York in Ireland; it is hard to imagine he could secure the marriage of a younger son to an heiress of the duke's tenant-in-chief.²³³ Baldongan and Ward passed from Bermingham possession to the St. Laurences of Howth in the early sixteenth century.²³⁴ Another possibility is a link with the Berminghams of Carbury. Again no certain evidence of a connection has emerged, but it is clear that the Berminghams of north Dublin believed such a connection to exist. After his cousin of Ballough, Patrick Bermingham made reversion of his lands to his 'cousin', Edward Bermingham of Carrick, and then to Thomas Bermingham of Dunfiarth (both bar. Carbury).²³⁵ Nevertheless such a connection must have been quite distant by the time Patrick made this entail in 1591. The extinction of the Berminghams of Baldongan in the male line before this point makes it impossible to know if Patrick felt a similar connection to that family.

William Hackett of Sutton, gentleman, who was escheator in 1507, is the first of his family to appear in connection to this area of Dublin. The Hackett family had, however, been present in the county from the thirteenth century.²³⁶ Until the end of the fifteenth century, the family's presence had been concentrated in the south of the county, although the townland of Hacketstown in the barony of Balrothery attests to an earlier presence north of the Liffey, while in 1349 John Hackett was recorded as the former tenant of a small parcel of land held of the archbishop in Portraine.²³⁷

²³² *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Edw. VI, no. 22; J. H. Baker, 'Bermingham, Patrick (c.1460–1532)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22311>]; Ball, *History of County Dublin*, v, pp. 60-1, 63-4; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, I, p. 202.

²³³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 658-61.

²³⁴ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, pp. 60-1.

²³⁵ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Jas. I, no. 55.

²³⁶ CIRCLE, Antiquissime Roll, no. 41.

²³⁷ *Alen's reg.*, p. 205. Hacketstown was out of the family's hands by 1366, when it was granted to the prior of Holmpatrick by Robert Holywood – CIRCLE, Pat. 40 Edw. III, no. 12.

The family's lands were concentrated in the barony of Rathdown, where they held Stillorgan and Newtown (Newtownpark) of the king in chief, as well as lands in Leopardstown (as tenants of the Hospital of St. Stephen) and Tipperstown (as tenants of Christchurch).²³⁸ Hackettsland in the parish of Killiney was presumably part of the family's possessions. In 1641 it was held by William Wolverston, who also held Stillorgan, Newtown, and Leopardstown.²³⁹ In 1345 John Chamberlain, bailiff of Christ church's manor of Clonken (Kill of the Grange, bar. Rathdown), accounted for two shillings paid to a servant of Oliver Hackett for watching the tithes of Killiney and Loughlinstown.²⁴⁰ John Hackett and his family were frequent guests at the table of the prior of Holy Trinity.²⁴¹ On St. Colman's Day in 1346 John received a gallon of white wine from the prior.²⁴² The family's service to the priory is indicated by gifts of clothing – shoes and gloves – and by money payments, with John receiving a fee of twenty shillings in 1343.²⁴³ John further appears to have had the lease of one of the prior's mills.²⁴⁴

Edmund Hackett held land in Taney (bar. Rathdown) in south county Dublin of the archbishop, which he appears to have sub-let to other members of the family.²⁴⁵ These lands appear to have been granted to the family by Archbishop Alexander Bicknor in exchange for a surrender of their right to the rents of the manor of Coolmine (par. Saggart, bar. Newcastle), which Bicknor had acquired from the family's tenant there. John Hackett witnessed Bicknor's grant of the manor to the chapter of St. Patrick's in 1349.²⁴⁶ It is

²³⁸ *Christ church deeds*, nos. 386, 646; CIRCLE, Cl. 3 Edw. III, no. 6; Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 252; *RDKPRI*, 43, p. 34; Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, i, pp. 63-4, 109, 115; *Account roll of the priory of the Holy Trinity, Dublin, 1337-1346*, ed. James Mills, intro. by James Lydon and Alan J. Fletcher (Dublin, 1996), pp. 202, 207-9; *Civil survey*, vii, p. 263; Myles V. Ronan, 'St. Stephen's hospital, Dublin' *Dublin Historical Record*, iv, no. 4 (Jun. - Aug., 1942), 141-148, p. 142; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Eliz., no. 242; Jas. I, no. 69.

²³⁹ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, i, pp. 117-20; *Civil survey*, vii, pp. 264, 269, 271.

²⁴⁰ *Account roll of the priory of Holy Trinity*, p. 68.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1,7-8, 15, 70-1, 76, 100, 115, 117-18.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 44. The office or service by which John earned this fee is not specified.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 87

²⁴⁵ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 8, 302-3.

²⁴⁶ D'Alton, *History of county Dublin*, pp. 726, 816; Newport B. White (ed.), *The 'Dignitas decani' of St. Patrick's cathedral, Dublin* (Dublin, 1957), pp. 67-72; Monck Mason, *History and antiquities of St. Patrick's cathedral*, pp. 60, 75-6. John fitz Peter Hackett, who granted Coolmine to the archbishop, was apparently not the more prominent John Hackett of Stillorgan, who appears as a witness to the grant – *Dignitas decani*, pp. 70-1.

possible that the Hacketts took advantage of the worsening security of the church's lands in the south of the county to secure favourable leases.²⁴⁷

The family were active in the defence of the south Dublin marches in the fourteenth century. Walter Hackett was constable of Newcastle Mackynegan in 1309-1311, when he was granted twenty marks for the maintenance of four men-at-arms there.²⁴⁸ John Hackett was heavily involved in military action against the Gaelic Irish of the Dublin mountains during the reign of Edward III. In 1329 he was pardoned a twenty-year old debt of royal service for Stillorgan because of his actions in the company of John Darcy against the O'Byrnes and other felons in the mountains.²⁴⁹ In 1333 he was a keeper of the peace in Dublin alongside Wolfram Barnewall and others.²⁵⁰ He was one of several south Dublin marcher lords, including Harolds, Archbolds, Lawlesses and Howels, as well as one Murchadh O'Toole, who received payment for the service in arms against the O'Byrnes, and against Mageoghan and his Lacy allies in Meath.²⁵¹ In 1352 he received another pardon of debts of royal service because of 'the great labours and expenses that he bore in the defence of the march from Bray to Tallaght against the Irish frequently invading those parts'.²⁵²

In the late fourteenth century the family's fortunes appear to have been on the wane, as in 1374 John Hackett (perhaps a son or grandson of the warrior of 1329) granted the manors of Stillorgan and Newtown to John Cruise, who was busily acquiring land in south Dublin in the latter part of the century.²⁵³ The Hackett family appear to have continued to reside in the area. In 1400 Simon Hackett of Balylower (*Baile na lobhar*, Lepers' town; now Leopardstown, bar. Rathdown) was one of the mainpernors for William Archbold when he was appointed constable of Newcastle Mackynegan.²⁵⁴ The same Simon was mainpernor for another leading marcher, Maurice Walsh (justice of the peace in Dublin

²⁴⁷ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, ii, pp. 66-7.

²⁴⁸ *Ir. Exch. Payments*, pp. 211-12, 596, 599; CIRCLE, Cl. 3 Edw. II, nos. 17, 19, 38-9; Cl. 5 Edw. II, no. 9.

²⁴⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 3 Edw. III, no. 6.

²⁵⁰ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 10.

²⁵¹ *RDKPRI*, 43, pp. 28-9; CIRCLE, Cl. 3 Edw. III, no. 14.

²⁵² CIRCLE, Cl. 26 Edw. III, no. 15.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 252; Pat 12 Ric II, no. 228.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 71.

in 1425), when he had a grant of custody of his family lands in 1420.²⁵⁵ In 1439 Richard Hackett 'of Newtown' was granted custody of the manor of Stillorgan, which was then in the king's hand, by mainprise of Thomas Hackett and William Rede of Dublin.²⁵⁶ It is possible that he held Newtown as a tenant of Stephen Derpatrick, heir to Cruise's south Dublin estates, as the Loughnan (or Loughlin; the family gave their name to Loughlinstown, par. Killiney) family did in Stillorgan.²⁵⁷ Richard was perhaps the same Richard Hackett who held Astagob of the Serjeant purparty of Castleknock in 1408.²⁵⁸ George Hackett owned half a carucate of land in Astagob in 1641.²⁵⁹ Perhaps significantly, the remainder of Astagob belonged to Christchurch (though Hackett did not hold the lease).²⁶⁰ At what point the Hacketts of Astagob diverged from those Sutton (if such a connection existed) I have been unable to discover.

In the middle of the fifteenth century the Stillorgan family disappear from the record. In 1463 Leopardstown and the surrounding area were pillaged by William Harold.²⁶¹ No mention is made of Hacketts as tenants, victims or perpetrators. They seem to have maintained their presence in Rathdown as tenants of religious foundations. Deponents in an investigation into competing claims to Tipperstown in 1508 agreed that that the lands belonged to the prior of Christchurch, but disagreed over whether the lands were let to Nicholas fitz Adam Loughnan or to Walter Hackett.²⁶² There is no surviving extent of the lands of St. Stephen's Hospital, which came into the hands of the corporation of Dublin upon dissolution.²⁶³ In 1541 Walter Walsh of Balloure (Leopardstown) appears as a juror at an inquisition concerned with the Wicklow lands of the archbishop, which may suggest that the Hacketts had been displaced by the expansion of the Walsh families of south Dublin, as

²⁵⁵ NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 182; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 13.

²⁵⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 17 Hen. VI, no. 2.

²⁵⁷ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, i, pp. 115-17.

²⁵⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 37.

²⁵⁹ *Civil survey*, vii, p. 244.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250; *Christ church deeds*, nos. 379, 1605.

²⁶¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 66-9; Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', pp. 130-1.

²⁶² *Christ church deeds*, no. 386. Robert Hackett had had a lease of these lands in the mid-fourteenth century – *Account roll of the priory of the Holy Trinity*, pp. 205-7; *Christ church deeds*, no. 646.

²⁶³ Ronan, 'St. Stephen's hospital', p. 143

had the Lawlesses a century earlier.²⁶⁴ Patrick Hackett, gentleman, appears as an elector of Peter Travers as sheriff of the county in 1465 and was coroner of the county Dublin in c. 1475.²⁶⁵ There is nothing in either instance to link him to the Hacketts of Stillorgan, Sutton, or Astagob, but it is clear that he was the representative of a branch of the family that were comfortably among the gentry of the county.

There is no concrete evidence to connect William Hackett of Sutton, our escheator, to the family of Stillorgan. It seems likely, however, that such a connection existed. In the late sixteenth century Thomas Hackett of Sutton, William's great-grandson, was summoned as a free tenant to the archbishop's manor courts at St. Sepulchres, Clonmethan, and Shankill.²⁶⁶ The Sutton family thus retained (or had acquired) landed interests in the crosslands of south County Dublin. Thomas and his son Michael appeared as feoffees to several land transactions concerned with lands in the north of the county at the close of the sixteenth century.²⁶⁷ But Thomas also appeared as a witness to a marriage settlement negotiated between Robert Barnewall of Shankill (who had been summoned alongside Thomas to the archbishop's court there as a free tenant in 1587) and Theobald Walsh of Carrickmines.²⁶⁸ The Hacketts of Sutton thus clearly maintained social and landed interests in Rathdown.

In 1641 Sutton was held of the St Laurences by ten shillings rent and suit of court at Howth, although it was no longer in the possession of the Hackett family.²⁶⁹ It was a substantial property, valued by the surveyors at £60, one-fifth of the value of the St. Laurence's demesne lands on the peninsula.²⁷⁰ The family were still in possession of Sutton in 1606, when Thomas Hackett of Sutton, gentleman (probably a great-grandson of our escheator) was one of a number of north County Dublin feoffees in a land transaction.²⁷¹ I

²⁶⁴ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 146; Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', pp. 127-8.

²⁶⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5, 121; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 267.

²⁶⁶ *Court book of the liberty of St. Sepulchre*, ed. Herbert Wood (Dublin, 1930), pp. 4, 14, 20, 36, 48-9, 57-8, 67-8. For Thomas' relationship with William, see Rev. William Ball, *Genealogical memoirs of the Ussher family in Ireland* (Dublin and London, 1889), p. 277.

²⁶⁷ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Jas. I, nos. 24, 75.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Eliz., no. 227; *Court book of the liberty of St. Sepulchre*, p. 20.

²⁶⁹ *Civil survey*, vii, p. 168.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

²⁷¹ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Jas. I, no. 151.

have been unable to discover the means by which William Hackett became seised of Sutton. Ball posits that it was held by the family of the same name in the early fourteenth century from their appearance as jurors in inquisitions alongside members of the St Laurence family. As Sutton was a very common name in the lordship (being, for example, one of the generic English names which Irishmen dwelling in Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Louth were obliged by parliamentary statute to adopt) the connection is difficult to prove.²⁷² It is possible that William gained the patronage of the St Laurence lords of Howth through his connection to Walter Fitzsimons (archbishop of Dublin, 1484-1511). In 1480 William Hackett was pardoned alongside the dean of St. Patrick's cathedral and Fitzsimons, then precentor, for unspecified transgressions of which they had (wrongly) been convicted by 'the King's commissioners in Dublin'.²⁷³ Fitzsimons was closely connected to the St. Laurences. Walter's sister Anne married Nicholas, third baron Howth, in 1505, while Thomas Fitzsimons, recorder of Dublin city and Walter's close relative, was married to Nicholas' sister Janet.²⁷⁴ William's son Thomas Hackett of Sutton was pardoned alongside Robert Howth, of Howth, and Thomas Talbot of Malahide, gentlemen, and a number of others in 1519.²⁷⁵ A political dimension to this pardon seems likely. It was witnessed by Maurice Fitzgerald, knight, as deputy to his nephew, the ninth earl of Kildare, three months after Kildare had been summoned to court, to be replaced as chief governor by the earl of Surrey.

It is clear that William and Thomas were both actively acquiring land in the early sixteenth century. In 1509 William acquired a fifty-nine-year lease of Robert Talbot of Belgard's lands in Maynetown.²⁷⁶ Thomas was busily acquiring leases from religious foundations in the years before the dissolution. In 1530 he and a canon of All Hallows had a forty-one-year lease of a house and an acre of land in Baldoyle from that foundation, together with the tithe fish of Baldoyle due to the priory.²⁷⁷ He held a small tenement in

²⁷² Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 33; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 290-1.

²⁷³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 826-7.

²⁷⁴ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, pp. 56, 60.

²⁷⁵ *Ormond deeds*, iv, pp. 60-1.

²⁷⁶ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, P&M., no. 13.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Hen. VIII, no. 133

Gracedieu held of the convent there at the time of its dissolution.²⁷⁸ The appearance of his son (or grandson) Thomas as an archiepiscopal tenant in Clonmethan, St. Sepulchre's and Shankill has already been noted.

It is likely that the key to the family's rise was service to the religious foundations that owned such a large proportion of the land in Dublin. William's connection to St. Patrick's cathedral – and to Walter Fitzsimons – has been noted, as has the earlier relationship between the Hacketts of Stillorgan and the diocese's two cathedrals. The Hacketts appear not infrequently among the religious of the county. In the 1470s James Hackett was one of the canons of the cathedral, and prebendary of Stagonill (now Powerscourt, Co. Wicklow).²⁷⁹ In 1468 the archbishop's Official, Robert Warren, carried out a visitation of the convent of Gracedieu. Of the six nuns whose names are recorded in the visitation, three, including the prioress, had the surname Hackett (although no Hacketts were among the nuns who received a pension upon the convent's dissolution).²⁸⁰ Thomas Hackett's acquisition of leases from Gracedieu has already been noted; it may indicate a familial connection with the Hackett nuns of the late fifteenth century. Thomas' wife Maud Sedgrave was a first cousin of Richard Sedgrave of Ballyboughal, and thus a significant landowner in the area.²⁸¹ Richard was escheator of County Dublin in 1538.²⁸² It may be no more than coincidence that other tenants of Gracedieu included Thomas Fitzsimons, who had an annuity from the priory for his legal services.²⁸³

The family do not appear to have come to prominence through practice of the law or through service in the royal administration. In 1535 Walter Golding was given the office of second engrosser of the Irish exchequer, to have for life, 'with such fees as Thomas Hackett had'.²⁸⁴ However there is no indication that William had any such position. William

²⁷⁸ *Irish monastic possessions*, p. 73; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 138.

²⁷⁹ *Christ church deeds*, no. 306; Monck Mason, *History and antiquities of St. Patrick's cathedral*, Notes, p. lxxxiii.

²⁸⁰ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 175-6; *Irish monastic possessions*, p. 77.

²⁸¹ Wright, *Genealogical memoirs of the Ussher family*, p. 277; *Irish monastic possessions*, p. 11.

²⁸² *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 125.

²⁸³ *Irish monastic possessions*, p. 75; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 138.

²⁸⁴ *The Irish fiants of the Tudor sovereigns during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Philip & Mary, and Elizabeth I* (4 vols., Dublin, 1994), Hen. VIII, no. 43; *Cal. Patent Rolls Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, i, p. 16.

Hackett served as escheator at or around the same time that Roger Duff of Kilcoskan, another new man, served as sheriff of the county.²⁸⁵ The two men were connected by marriage. Roger's daughter Katherine married Clement Sedgrave of Borranstown, while Clement's sister Maud married William's son Thomas Hackett. Others who contracted marriages with the Sedgrave family were the Usshers, an urban family beginning their transition to the county gentry.²⁸⁶ Thomas' daughter Eleanor married Richard Field of Corduff, a descendant of John, escheator of the county in 1484.²⁸⁷ These marriages are suggestive of a family establishing itself in the middling gentry of the county.

In 1641 Sutton was in the possession of William Gough. The fate of the descendants of William Hackett is unclear. The White family of Correston (now part of the townland of Quarry, Howth), the other St. Laurence tenants on the peninsula, lost possession of the castle and lands there to their St Laurence lords towards the close of the sixteenth century in circumstances that are far from clear. In 1607 the family were living as merchants in Dublin.²⁸⁸ Interestingly, William Gough of Dublin, alderman, had in 1597 displayed an interest in another Hackett possession, the lands on Leopardstown formerly of the Hospital of St. Stephen and now of Dublin Corporation, which he disputed with James Wingfield, who held the former Hackett manor of Stillorgan as a tenant of the Plunkett family.²⁸⁹ As the Hacketts were in 1597 still in possession of Sutton, this is likely to be coincidence rather than the pursuit of an inherited claim.

Among those summoned to archbishop's manor court at Lusk as free tenants was Richard Hackett of Ballymaguire.²⁹⁰ I have been unable to discover Richard's connection to

²⁸⁵ RC 8/43, p. 273.

²⁸⁶ Rev. William Ball Wright, *Genealogical memoirs of the Ussher family in Ireland* (Dublin and London, 1889), appendix, p. 277.

²⁸⁷ *A vistingation begonne in the cittie of Dublin by Daniell Molyneux Esquire, otherwise called Ulster Kinge of Armes and Principall Herald of All Ireland, in the yeere of grace one thousand six hundreth and seven*, NLI GO 48, pp. 51-2.

²⁸⁸ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 45; *A vistingation begonne in the cittie of Dublin by Daniell Molyneux Esquire, otherwise called Ulster Kinge of Armes and Principall Herald of All Ireland, in the yeere of grace one thousand six hundreth and seven*, NLI GO 48, p. 28. William White of Corrstown, 'freeholder' was a feoffee in a land transaction in 1575 – *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Jas. I, no. 67.

²⁸⁹ *CARD*, ii, p. 308; Ronan, 'St. Stephen's Hospital', p. 145; Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, i, pp. 117-18. Witnesses to the will of Sir Edward Wingfield in 1638 included Thomas Loughlin and Richard Hackett – *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Appendix, no. 48.

²⁹⁰ *Court book of the liberty of St. Sepulchre*, pp. 4, 14, 20, 36, 48-9, 57-8, 67-8.

the Hacketts of Sutton. Ballymaguire (par. Lusk) was not held by the family in the fourteenth century. Alen's register does not mention Hacketts as the current tenants of the townland, so it may be the case that they acquired it after 1534.²⁹¹ In 1641 Ballymaguire was in the possession of John Jordan 'as inheritance, by way of purchase'.²⁹² As the Hacketts of Ballymaguire and of Sutton disappear at roughly the same time (i.e., in the sixteenth century but before 1641), this may be a clue to the family's disappearance. The Richard Hackett of Rathcoole who was a juror at the archbishop's court of Rathcoole in 1589 appears to have been of humbler status, as was John Hackett of Balcunna (par. Lusk), who in 1590 was found to owe twenty shillings to John Cantwell of Lusk.²⁹³ In 1578 John Hackett of Balcunna, yeoman, was found guilty of keeping greyhounds despite owning less than forty shillings worth of land 'contrary to the statutes of 13 Richard II and 10 Henry VII'.²⁹⁴ George Hackett of Astagob is the only member of the Hackett family to appear as a landowner in the mid-seventeenth century, and his connection to the family of Sutton is unknown.

William Hackett of Sutton, escheator of Dublin in 1507, thus appears to have been something of a self-made man. His descendants' continued interest in the barony of Rathdown suggests that his origins lie in the knightly family based at Stillorgan in the fourteenth century. It would appear that the fortunes of that family had been in decline and they make almost no impression on the surviving records of the county between their alienation of Stillorgan and Newtown in 1374 and William's pardon in 1480. There is no indication that William was a royal administrator or a successful burgess, in contrast to newly-established gentry families such as the Berminghams of Baldongan or the Blakeneyes who also provided escheators of the county. The close ties between William Hackett and his family and the religious foundations of the county, especially St. Patrick's cathedral, suggest that service to these institutions provided the means for him to (re)establish

²⁹¹ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 165-6, 177-8.

²⁹² *Civil survey*, vii, p. 118.

²⁹³ *Court book of the liberty of St. Sepulchre*, pp. 51, 60.

²⁹⁴ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin, Eliz.*, no. 126.

Hackett fortunes, with Archbishop Walter providing a plausible connection between William and the St. Laurence family from whom he would hold Sutton.

Escheators and clerks of the market of Meath

Separate escheators and clerks of the market in Meath predate the act of 1454. The liberty had its own escheator and clerk of the market. It would appear that the king continued to appoint escheators for the liberty even when the liberty was in the king's hand. Those who served as escheators of Meath before the reforms of 1454 were generally veterans of the royal administration. Henry Stanyhurst, in particular, was deputy excheator of the lordship of Ireland for much of the early fifteenth century. In 1423 John Fountains had a grant of the office of escheator of Ireland, with the exception of the county of Meath, which was reserved to Henry Stanyhurst. This was perhaps simply to boost Stanyhurst's income, as he appears to have acted as Fountains' deputy elsewhere in the lordship.²⁹⁵ The William Sutton appointed clerk of the market in Meath in 1425 and the William son of Roger Sutton who was appointed escheator in 1432 may have been separate individuals, but were almost certainly closely related. The latter was referred to as William Sutton junior when he had a grant of the office of chief serjeant of Meath, also in 1432.²⁹⁶ Both men had long careers in the service of the royal administration, as did other members of the same family.²⁹⁷ There is no evidence that the family held land in the county, but the younger William Sutton clearly had some association with the county. He was appointed by the duke of York as one of the justices to hear an assize of *novel disseisin* in the liberty in 1447.²⁹⁸ As with Henry Stanyhurst, William Sutton and William Sutton junior would appear to owe their appointment primarily to service in the royal administration. In 1425 the office of clerk of the market (and by extension probably escheator) of Meath was stated to be in the king's

²⁹⁵ RC 8/40, pp. 307-11.

²⁹⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 67.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 66; Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 16; Pat. 10 Hen. IV, nos. 93, 225; Pat. 11 Hen. IV, nos. 33, 102; Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 20; Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 1; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, nos. 24, 67; Pat. 11 Edw. IV, no. 6; Pat. 12 Edw. IV, no. 8; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 120-5; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 488-91; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 201v; RC 8/41, p. 17.

²⁹⁸ NAI, Lodge MS 1, f. 55.

hand by the death of Edmund Mortimer.²⁹⁹ Clearly the royal administration had chosen on this occasion not to merge the office with the escheatorship of Ireland, and to use it to reward one of their own.

The same is likely true in the case of Richard Gille and John Cawode. Gille, 'late... our escheator in the county of Meath' was captured and held prisoner by the Irish of Leinster while executing the king's commission in March 1400.³⁰⁰ Gille had been second chamberlain of the Irish exchequer and deputy collector of the customs and cocket in Drogheda.³⁰¹ Gille had also had a grant of two minor offices of the liberty, then being in the king's hand: keeper of the park, and serjeant of the betaghry of Trim.³⁰² John Cawode, who had a grant of the office of clerk of the market in Meath in 1399, was a servant of the household of Henry IV. There is no indication that Cawode ever set foot in Ireland and the office would appear to have been a sinecure, as was his grant of the office of justice of labourers 'in Ireland and in the lordship of Meath' in April 1401.³⁰³ Here again we see the royal administration choosing to retain certain aspects of the liberty's organisation while the liberty was in the king's hand, and using these offices to reward its servants.

Thomas Bacon and William Welles are the only escheators named for the liberty when it was not in the king's hand. Welles, as we have seen, was a career administrator who was seneschal of the liberty for much of the period 1432-1454. He is named as escheator in 1450 and again in 1455, when he claimed that he had a grant of the office for life.³⁰⁴ The date of the grant is not mentioned but it is likely that he had been escheator for at least some of the preceding twenty years. He continued to serve as escheator of the liberty after he had ceased to serve as seneschal, and defended his right to the office when infringed upon the new, elected escheators after the act of 1454.³⁰⁵ The Irish parliament confirmed his right to the office of escheator of the duke of York. In November 1456 –

²⁹⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 1.

³⁰⁰ G. O. Sayles (ed.) *Documents on the affairs of Ireland before the king's council* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 274-5.

³⁰¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 44.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 23; Potterton, *Trim*, p. 376.

³⁰³ *CPR, 1399-1401*, pp. 20, 43, 469; CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Hen. IV, no. 51.

³⁰⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 368-71.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 368-71.

Welles then being alive and active in the government of the liberty – escheators were elected for both the crosslands and the liberty of Trim, so Welles’ petition may have been of little lasting value.³⁰⁶ Thomas Bacon, hereditary chief serjeant of Meath, was the earl of March’s escheator in 1424. He held an inquisition in that year concerning the lands of Simon Cusack.³⁰⁷ Bacon, the head of a county gentry family without any known experience as an administrator, prefigures the escheators of the later fifteenth century.

After 1454 the escheators were elected by the commons of the county. As in Dublin, there was a remarkable lack of men serving multiple terms or of dominance by any small group of families. Of the 28 men who held the office (including two escheators of the crosslands, and one escheator of the liberty) between 1454 and 1513, only three – Richard Cusack (escheator in 1494 and 1505), Edmund Golding (escheator for two consecutive years, 1499 and 1500), Thomas Nangle (escheator 1461, 1466, c. 1468 and 1470) – served for more than one year.³⁰⁸ Fifteen families provided escheators in this period. The most prolific were the Cusacks, who provided five escheators from at least three separate branches of the family, including the Cusacks of Gerrardstown, and the Goldings, who provided three escheators from three branches of the family (Churchtown, Ardraccon and Piercetown Laundey). Walter Golding of Churchtown and Patrick Golding of Ardraccon were elected side-by-side in 1456, Walter as escheator of the liberty and Patrick as escheator of the crosslands. A similar example of parallel service by branches of the family can be seen in 1485, when Edmund Golding of Piercetown Laundey and Henry Golding of Tobersool were elected coroners of Meath and Dublin respectively. A degree of coordination in these elections seems probable.

No members of the Golding family served as sheriff of Meath, though Edmund served as knight of the shire for Meath in addition to serving as coroner and escheator.³⁰⁹ This made them something of an outlier among the escheators. Five escheators of the

³⁰⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 454-7.

³⁰⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, pp. 416-17; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 102.

³⁰⁸ Assuming that Thomas Kent, escheator in 1465, and Thomas Kent of Drogheda, escheator in 1495, are two different individuals.

³⁰⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 15 Hen. VII, no. 2.

county (Robert Cusack of Cushinstown, John Delahide, Robert Rede, Thomas Nangle and Christopher Barnewall of Crickstown), also served as sheriff, sheriff of the cross, or sheriff of the liberty. A further nine escheators came from families that had provided sheriffs of the county. Others had held other county offices, such as coroner (for example, John Durham, coroner in 1466 and escheator c. 1468). There was thus a very pronounced overlap between the office of escheator and that of sheriff, as in county Dublin.

In contrast, there were some striking differences between the personnel of the shrievalty of Meath and the personnel of the escheatorship. One is the absence of members of the Meath magnate families. Only one member of a magnate family held the office of escheator. This was Thomas Nangle, baron of Navan (who admittedly held the office more often than any other single individual). Nangle was not a peer of the Irish parliament. He was one of the few Meath magnates to serve as sheriff (indeed perhaps also as sheriff of the liberty, a position directly subordinate to the seneschal) in the latter half of the century.³¹⁰ He is on occasion referred to not as baron of Navan but as Thomas Nangle of Ardsallagh, esquire; an elision that highlights the decline in the relative importance of these customary titles as the peerage became increasingly formalised.³¹¹ The magnates of Meath had ceased to occupy the office of sheriff in the later fifteenth century as it came to be seen as beneath their dignity. The escheatorship as a county office effectively only came into existence in 1454, so it is difficult to draw a meaningful comparison. However, in striking contrast to the shrievalty, few members of cadet branches of the magnate families served as escheator of county Meath. The total absence of the Plunketts from the office is particularly notable, given their prominent role in the shrievalty at this time. The reason for this absence is difficult to discern. The implication, however, is that the overlap in the offices was between the more prominent men of those who served as escheators and the

³¹⁰ See above, pp. 63-4.

³¹¹ RC 8/41, p. 209; CIRCLE, Pat. 10 Edw. IV, no. 8. It is possible that Thomas Nangle of Ardsallagh was a different individual; but his period of service coincides with that of Thomas, baron of Navan, who is also given the addition of esquire. No Nangle family of Ardsallagh is listed among the gentry of Navan in Cusack's commonplace book; the only Nangles listed in the barony are the barons of Navan themselves. There was a separate branch of the family established at Ardsallagh by 1641 – NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 32; RC 8/33, p. 514; TCD MS 594, ff. 26v-27; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 172; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 235-6.

less prominent of those who served as sheriffs. In Meath the relative importance of the military resources of the shrievalty and the fiscal resources of the escheatorship may have been seen in a different light than they were in wealthier, more peaceful Dublin. Only one outsider served as escheator of the county in our period. Gerald Fitzgerald, son of Thomas, earl of Kildare, was escheator in December 1473, when he held an inquisition at Dunboyne.³¹² The influence of his father, then chief governor, and his interest in the county are sufficient explanation for his presence, which is further testament to the desirability of the office.

Two Thomas Kents served as escheator of the county, the latter of whom is described as Thomas Kent of Drogheda, gentleman.³¹³ He too would thus appear to be an outsider, or at the very least further testament to the thin line separating the civic elite of the English towns from the gentry of their hinterland. This Thomas Kent was a baron of the exchequer and a kinsman and close associate of William Darcy of Platin, knight.³¹⁴ He was killed fighting a rearguard action against the Irish of Thomond during an expedition led by the earl of Kildare. Kent appears to have been fighting among the Meath and Dublin levies; another man killed on this occasion was Edward Barnewall of Crickstown, sheriff of Meath in 1503.³¹⁵ Taking part in warfare against the Irish was a regular occurrence for the civic elite of late fifteenth century Ireland. Kent's presence on this expedition is however more likely to have been due to his role as senior figure in the Irish administration – he is called *barún Cint*, baron (of the exchequer) Kent, in the Annals of Ulster – or as a Meath landholder, than as a member of the civic elite of Drogheda. William Darcy had a grant of custody of Thomas' lands in c. 1517. The lands were stated to be held of the baron of Skreen.³¹⁶ The lands in question were almost certainly the ploughland held by Nicholas Kent in Danestown (bar. Skreen) in 1641.³¹⁷ These lands border Kentstown in the barony of

³¹² *Christ church deeds*, no. 997.

³¹³ CIRCLE, Pat. 11 Hen. VII, no. 6.

³¹⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., iv, ff. 52-52v, 56-7; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 89; Ellis, 'Sir William Darcy of Platten', p. 30.

³¹⁵ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 118; *Annals of Ulster*, pp. 491-5.

³¹⁶ The entry is ambiguous and could in fact be referring to Darcy's custody of the lands of the baron of Skreen; but that the lands were held from the baron is clear – NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 118.

³¹⁷ *Civil survey*, v, p. 57.

Duleek, which was not held by the family in 1641, but presumably took its name from them. Thomas Kent of Danestown, gentleman, held an inquisition in October 1462 that found that James Fay had alienated two ploughlands in Macetown to Ferold' Osrydan, chaplain, an Irishman.³¹⁸ The capacity in which Kent held this inquisition is not specified, but it was surely as escheator of the county, an office he is known to have held at some point in the range 1461-1465.³¹⁹ Thomas Kent of Drogheda, then, was a Meath landholder as well as a citizen of Drogheda.

James Dillon, escheator in 1480, came from a long-established family that had only rarely appeared in office before the second half of the fifteenth century. The family were present in the parishes of Tara and Skreen in the barony of Skreen by the late fourteenth century, having at that time no visible connection to the Dillon lineage of the western frontier of the county.³²⁰ They held Riverstown (par. Tara) from at least 1401 to 1641.³²¹ Members of the family had been collectors of subsidies in the baronies of Skreen and Moyfenrath in the first decades of the fifteenth century, but are not recorded serving as keepers of the peace in either, suggesting that they were not among the leading families in the baronies.³²² John Dillon, collector in Skreen in 1421, was an assessor of subsidy for the county in the same year, alongside Richard Lynham, a former sheriff of the cross, and William Stakeboll, a man with a long association with the administrative and legal work of county office. None of those appointed to assess this subsidy were from the leading families of the county; appointment probably owed more to administrative acumen than prominence in the county. Dillon was receiver for five of the eastern baronies of the county, including Skreen, for another subsidy two years later, again suggesting that he was a man with administrative experience. John Dillon (or his namesake) appears again in c. 1451, when he was the duke of York's serjeant-at-law in his liberty court.³²³ John was seised of Proudstown (par. Skreen); Nicholas Dillon of Proudstown, sheriff (probably of the cross) in

³¹⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 65-70.

³¹⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 418-23.

³²⁰ CIRCLE, Cl. 18 Ric. II, no. 27; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 11; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 93-4, 115.

³²¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 11; *Civil survey*, v, p. 71.

³²² Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 163, 172; CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 11.

³²³ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 194-6.

1442 was presumably a near relative.³²⁴ He was the first of four county officers from the family during our period. John Dillon of Staffordstown, was sheriff in c. 1463, while James Dillon and Gerald Dillon, both described as of Skreen, were escheator and clerk of the market in 1480 and 1513 respectively. For the Dillons, legal practice, the acquisition of land, and (perhaps above all) the retirement of the magnate families from county office in the latter half of the century opened the way to the leading offices of the county. They were closely associated with other men who served in county office. James and Patrick Dillon were among the founders in 1474 of the fraternity of the Blessed Virgin in the parish church of Skreen alongside the earl of Kildare, the bishop of Meath, and Walter Cusack, escheator and clerk of the market in 1469.³²⁵

Other families suddenly appear in office at the level of escheator and clerk of the market, but were clearly well established in the county. Thomas Birte of Tullog (par. Duleek), gentleman, was escheator in 1507, and served again in the same office nine years later.³²⁶ The family had last appeared in office in Meath in 1403, when John Birte, also described as of Tullog, was one of those appointed alongside William Nugent, baron of Delvin, to inquire in Meath concerning improper practices by the purveyors of the household of the king's lieutenant.³²⁷ John had served as a keeper of the peace in Duleek in 1398, but the family do not appear on either of the two commissions of the peace for Duleek that survive for the early fifteenth century; so their presence was clearly not felt to be vital for the commission's success.³²⁸ The family were clearly among the gentry of the county and are numbered among the gentry of Duleek in Cusack's list.³²⁹ They are but one example of a family that show that holding office was not necessary to assert or retain membership of the county gentry. The Berfords were another such family. Simon Berford was justice of the peace in Ratoath in 1388, 1398, and 1403.³³⁰ There is subsequently a 96-

³²⁴ CIRCLE, Cl. 7 Hen. VI, no. 18; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 56.

³²⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 14 Edw. IV, no. 10.

³²⁶ RC 9/8, pp. 21-2; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 181.

³²⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 277.

³²⁸ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 26-9; where Coolock is in error for Tullog.

³²⁹ TCD MS 594, f. 25v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 170.

³³⁰ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 25-7.

year gap before the appointment in 1499 of Simon Berford as collector of a subsidy in Ratoath.³³¹ This latter Simon, described as of Kilrue (par. Ratoath), gentleman, was escheator in 1508, the first appearance of the family in county office. The family's preference for the forename Simon and for avoidance of county office gives an impression of inertia that is doubtless highly misleading; but it certainly would appear that the Berfords were content to serve in the important local office of keeper of the peace in their barony and avoid the inconvenience of more demanding offices. They clearly felt no need to assert themselves in county office, and did not need to do so to retain their place among the gentry of the county.

Conclusion

The reform of the Irish escheatorship in 1454 served to secure this valuable office, whose powers touched the very basis of gentry wealth, to the county elite of Dublin and Meath. In Dublin it is clear that the office of escheator was dominated to a great extent by the same families, and many of the same individuals, as that of sheriff. Nonetheless the office appears to have been quite evenly distributed among these families, with few individuals serving more than once and no one family monopolising appointment. It was also open to men from cadet branches and those from newly established families (or both in the case of William Bermingham of Ballough). In general, the office of escheator and clerk of the market of county Meath was held by moderately prominent county gentry families. While some might serve as sheriff of the county, the majority came from families that did not hold that office. Those who held both offices invariably held the escheatorship before the shrievalty. The escheatorship was clearly considered a suitable office for younger members of leading families and men of less prominent families as a (potentially lucrative) introduction to county office. With few exceptions, the men who held the office are accorded the lowest status title, that of gentleman. Finally, the office-holding habits of the

³³¹ RC 8/43, p. 166.

Birt and Berford families serve as a reminder, if such were needed, that office-holding was far from the defining mark of a gentry family or the ambition of each county gentleman.

Chapter five: Chief serjeants and subserjeants

Role, duties and powers of the serjeants

The role of chief serjeants, serjeants and subserjeants has received little attention in the half century and more since the publication of A. J. Otway-Ruthven's articles on county government in thirteenth-century Ireland.¹ It might be observed at the outset that the titles of chief serjeant (*capitalis serviens*) of a county and subserjeant of a barony are unique to the lordship of Ireland. The equivalent in England of these offices was the bailiff (*ballivus*) of the hundred. In thirteenth-century England *serviens* might be used in some cases for the officer more generally called a *ballivus*.² In contrast, the staff of the liberty of Cheshire included bailiffs, serjeants, reeves and beadles, although there appears to have been little distinction between the duties of these men.³ The serjeanties of the peace of Cheshire, a peace-keeping office which appears to have been held in farm in the manner of the chief serjeanties in Ireland, were forfeited in c. 1354, when their duties were taken over by the 'beadle-bailiffs' of the hundreds.⁴ As we shall see both *ballivus* and *serviens* (and other terms) were used for the same officers on the archiepiscopal manors of Dublin, while bailiff might in the early fourteenth century be used as a synonym for the chief serjeant of Louth.⁵ Why *serviens* should have become the usual designation in Ireland is unclear. There is little to suggest that the Irish *serviens* had a role in warfare; like the English *ballivus* his principal roles were policing and administrative.

It is clear that the duties of the English bailiff of a hundred and the Irish serjeant or subserjeant of a barony were more or less identical. It was they who carried out the execution of royal government at the sheriff's direction. They served the writs, made the arrests, and summoned juries. Otway-Ruthven demonstrated the execution of these

¹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish Shire Government', pp. 21-26; *eadem*, 'The Medieval County of Kildare' *Irish Historical Studies*, xi, No. 43 (Mar., 1959), 181-199, pp. 193-4.

² William Alfred Morris, *The medieval English sheriff to 1300* (Manchester, 1927), pp. 188-91; Helen M. Cam, 'Shire officials', pp. 171-83; Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish Shire Government', p. 21.

³ P. H. W. Booth, *The financial administration of the lordship and county of Chester, 1272-1377* (Manchester, 1981), pp. 53-5.

⁴ Booth, *Financial administration of Chester*, pp. 43 (n. 10), 54; Clayton, *Administration of Chester*, p. 215.

⁵ *Cal. Justiciary Rolls Ire. 1295-1303*, p. 81.

duties by the serjeants during the better-documented thirteenth century.⁶ The fifteenth-century evidence for our Dublin serjeants provides little detail, but what little it does provide is in accordance with the English material and that from the earlier centuries of the lordship. In addition to serving warrants, making arrests and empanelling juries, they might be responsible for summoning labourers for the purposes of fortifying towns or other strategic locations.⁷ Two of our subserjeants were recruited to aid the recovery of debts owed to a former sheriff.⁸ The positions of the subserjeants in this commission is perhaps instructive. They are named last, after the former sheriff, two men accorded the title of clerk, and four men given the title of yeoman. This suggests that they were themselves of comparably humble status; a finding in line with the observations of Otway-Ruthven.⁹ Such a conclusion is supported by other evidence for the social status of the individuals and families that provided subserjeants of Dublin baronies in the fifteenth century, as we shall see.

One significant difference between the Irish serjeant and the English bailiff of the hundred was in their respective chains of command. The English bailiff was appointed by and under the direct command of the sheriff; exceptions, where a hundred was in the hands of a magnate or religious house, or had a bailiff intruded by royal command over the head of the sheriff, led to strife, and were condemned by sheriffs in parliament.¹⁰ In Ireland the appointment of serjeants was in the hands of the chief serjeant of the county, a position that was usually hereditary.¹¹ As the serjeants were responsible for the physical execution of the duties of the sheriff's office, their appointment by a third party was a frequent source of friction. Irish parliamentary statutes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries make it clear that this division of powers was ripe for abuse and inefficiency. Sheriffs struggled to close their accounts of office at the exchequer because of uncooperative chief serjeants.¹² Chief serjeants and

⁶ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', pp. 24-25, 27; *eadem*, 'Medieval county of Kildare', p. 194

⁷ RC 8/34, pp. 189-93; RC 8/41, pp. 162-3, 337-8, 340, 413; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 209v; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 2-5, 70-3.

⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 22 Hen. VI, no. 3.

⁹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 25.

¹⁰ Morris, *The medieval English sheriff*, pp. 188-91; Cam, 'Coroners, constables and bailiffs', pp. 171-83.

¹¹ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', pp. 22-3.

¹² *Stat. Ire. John-Hen. V*, pp. 393-5, 427, 461-3; *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 115.

their deputies were accused of maliciously returning ‘great issues upon divers persons who have nothing’, obliging the sheriffs to act upon these returns, which, being impossible to levy, lead to the sheriffs being ‘charged with all such forfeitures... by reason whereof divers gentlemen have heretofore been destroyed’.¹³ Others were lax in the execution of writs.¹⁴ Christopher Cusack, sheriff of Meath in 1510, issued commands directly to William Murray, subserjeant of Skreen, without mention of a chief serjeant.¹⁵ It is possible that this flattened hierarchy of command reflects a response to the criticisms of the Irish parliament noted above. Alternatively it may have been a result of the chief serjeanty of Meath becoming the hereditary possession of the Berminghams, a family based outside the county, who were likely less inclined to assert their role – even as intermediaries – in the daily business of the office.

To Otway-Ruthven, the normal organisation of the serjeants of an Irish county was as follows. The chief serjeant, usually hereditary, appointed serjeants of baronies, who themselves appointed subserjeants (*subservientes*).¹⁶ There is no evidence for this three-part hierarchy in fifteenth-century Dublin. Only one man, Henry Kerran, was named as *serviens* of a Dublin barony over the course of the century; and he was serjeant of the barony of Newcastle, which as shall see was anomalous in several respects. Richard Delaharne was described as subserjeant of John Walsh, chief serjeant of Newcastle in 1466; there is no suggestion of an intermediate serjeant.¹⁷ Kerran aside, all were specifically described as *subservientes*.¹⁸ William Smith was appointed to the office of serjeant (*servientis sive sergentie*) of Swords, with power to hold by deputy.¹⁹ This deputy might presumably have gone by the title of *subserviens*; but Swords was an archiepiscopal manor and not one of the baronies of the county. As part of the liberty of the archbishop of Dublin, Swords was expressly outside the jurisdiction of the sheriff and serjeants of county Dublin. There is no reason to suspect that these *subservientes* were subject to unnamed *servientes*; all the evidence suggests that they were direct

¹³ *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 498-501, 668-71.

¹⁴ *Stat. Ire. John-Hen. V*, pp. 391-3, 461.

¹⁵ TCD MS 594, f. 7.

¹⁶ Otway-Ruthven, ‘Anglo-Irish shire government’, p. 23.

¹⁷ RC 8/41, pp. 162-3.

¹⁸ William Russell is called both *serviens* and *subserviens* of Balrothery in 1472, but *subserviens* is used more consistently – RC 8/41, pp. 337-8, 340, 343, 404-5.

¹⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 28 Hen. VI, no. 9

subordinates of the chief serjeant. The case of William Cruise, *subserviens* of Coolock in 1406, is instructive in this regard. William was a close relative – perhaps the son and heir – of the incumbent chief serjeant of Dublin, Thomas Cruise, and a member of one of the leading families of County Dublin. While William is of unusually high status for a *subserviens*, it is not difficult to imagine him serving under his father or near relative. It is difficult to believe he would have served under one of his father’s subordinates. The same holds true of John Exeter, subserjeant of Coolock in 1466, who was married to William Cruise’s daughter. Attention might be drawn to the practice in England. Where in theory each hundred had a bailiff directly under the sheriff, on occasion a *capitalis ballivus* might have charge of multiple hundreds (if not, apparently, of whole counties). Such a man would have had a *subballivus* in each hundred under his control.²⁰ The chain of command in Dublin apparently ran thus: the sheriff issued writs to the chief serjeant, who delivered them to his subserjeant, who then served the writ. In Meath there is likewise no evidence in the fifteenth century for the existence of a *serviens* interpolated between the chief serjeant and the subserjeants of the baronies. On several occasions, however, the chief serjeant had licence to appoint one or more deputies to represent him in office or share the load.

The appointment of deputy chief serjeants was of course necessary for those who held the office as a sinecure and who were not present in the lordship or those, like Edward Perrers, whose duties doubtless left them little opportunity to exercise the office in person. However, it was also a result of the sheer size of the county. Nicholas Taaffe was granted permission to appoint deputies ‘as this county extends into various baronies, [and thus] he cannot be present in the king's courts and in every barony’.²¹ Thomas Bacon, likewise, had permission to exercise the office by deputy in 1386. The size of his bailiwick is not explicitly given as the reason, but it is notable that he appointed no fewer than three men to exercise the office, at least two of whom – John Derpatrick and John Netterville – were themselves from gentry families. Perrers appointed two deputies, neither from prominent county families, though one, Peter Comyn, was from a family that provided collectors of subsidies in the Delvin, Farbill,

²⁰ Cam, ‘Coroners, constables and bailiffs’, pp. 171-83

²¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 2 Hen. IV, no. 7.

Moyashel, and other western baronies the first three decades of the fifteenth century.²² It is likely that in any division of labour, he would have exercised the chief serjeant's duties in the western part of the county.

Chief serjeants of County Dublin

Of the five men named as chief serjeant of county Dublin between 1399 and 1513, all but one were members of the Cruise family. The exception was John Haselbury, who accounted for the issues of the chief serjeanty between 15 October 1396 and 20 February 1400.²³ Haselbury is an obscure figure who makes no other appearance in the Irish record; nor have I been able to find any reference to his existence in the English chancery, fine roll, or other material. It is likely that he was chief serjeant while the office was in the king's hand before its restoration to Thomas fitz Simon Cruise. This is the only surviving instance of a chief serjeant accounting to the king for his office in the fifteenth century, further suggestive of a grant while in the king's hand.²⁴

At the turn of the fifteenth century, there were two important branches of the Cruise family in Dublin and the neighbouring counties. The Cruises of Naul held the hereditary chief serjeanty of Dublin.²⁵ The Cruises of Killsallaghan had significant lands in Meath and acquired the manors of Merrion and Thorncastle to the southeast of the city of Dublin, and other lands in south County Dublin, during the lifetime of John Cruise, who was active in the royal service in the latter half of the fourteenth century.²⁶ Both branches had lands in County Meath in addition to their lands in Dublin, and both were prominent in county office-holding, with Thomas fitz Simon of Naul and Thomas fitz John of Killsallaghan serving on commissions of the peace and other royal commissions

²² CIRCLE, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 221; Pat. 1 Hen. IV, no. 122; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 62; Pat. 7 Hen. IV, no. 167; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 139, 164, 172.

²³ NLI, MS 761, p. 268.

²⁴ Thomas fitz Simon Cruise was summoned to account of the chief serjeanty of the county in 1416 'for many years preceding', but he had cease of execution without, apparently, rendering any such account – RC 8/36, pp. 631-2.

²⁵ Lynch, *Feudal dignities*, pp. 103-7; CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, nos. 132, 133; RC 8/36, pp. 631-2

²⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 252; Pat. 8 Hen. IV, no. 66; Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 107; Ball, *A history of the County Dublin*, i, pp. 115-17.

in Dublin and Meath.²⁷ The William Cruise who served as subserjeant of Coolock in 1406 appears to have been the son and heir of Thomas fitz Simon. William himself died leaving two daughters to inherit his lands.²⁸ The lands were secured for the family by the marriage of at least one and possibly both of these sisters to members of other branches of the Cruise family. Reginald Cruise, who married William's daughter Joan, appears to have been from a relatively minor branch of the family based in Meath.²⁹ During this time, the right of the family to the chief serjeanty of County Dublin appears to have been in question. Fragmentary records of a parliament held in 1453-4 record the confirmation of a grant of the office by letters patent a Thomas Johnson.³⁰ This however would appear to be in error. Thomas Johnson had a grant of the office of chief serjeant of Kildare by English letters patent in June 1447.³¹ He was still in that office in 1456-7.³² There is no evidence that Thomas Johnson exercised the office of chief serjeant in county Dublin.

In 1455 the bishop of Meath complained to parliament at his harassment by Reginald Cruise and Robert Cusack of Cousinstown, escheator of the crosslands of Meath. Reginald and Robert were duly dismissed as commissioners of the king and from all offices 'except the occupation which the said Robert has in the office of the escheatorship for this year, and except the office which the said Reynald pretends to the serjeanty of the county of Dublin'.³³ Reginald was the husband of William Cruise's daughter Joan. He was apparently successful in his claim to the office, as he (or his namesake) reappears in 1469 as 'chief serjeant of Leinster and Fingal', an archaic term for the chief serjeanty of Dublin.³⁴ Reginald died sometime before the end of 1471, apparently without a male heir.³⁵ In 1478 James Cruise had livery of a moiety of the

²⁷ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 12, 28; RC 8/33, p. 191.

²⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 730-3.

²⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 19 Hen. VI, no. 18; *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 92-5, 440-5.

³⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 299

³¹ *CPR, 1446-52*, p. 86.

³² NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 210.

³³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 318-25.

³⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 228v; NLI MS 761, p. 268. Richard, son of Reginald, was heir to one moiety of Naul in 1460; it is possible that the chief serjeant of 1469 was in fact his son and thus grandson of the chief serjeant of 1455 – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 730-1; CIRCLE, Cl. 19 Hen. VI, no. 18.

³⁵ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 230.

manors of Naul and Gralagh as son and heir of Matilda Cruise.³⁶ Matilda was stated to have been seised, in addition, of a 'moiety' of the office of chief serjeant of Dublin, underlining the extent to which the office was a hereditary possession. Similar terminology had been used in 1416, when Thomas fitz Simon Cruise was summoned to account as 'tenant and occupier of the serjeanty of county Dublin'.³⁷ James was apparently restored to the office in full. Matilda was the one of the daughters and coheireses of William Cruise.³⁸ Her (probably elder) sister Joan was married to Reginald Cruise in 1441.³⁹

There are no further references to the chief serjeanty of Dublin until 1536, when Robert Savage, yeoman of the crown, was granted the office of chief serjeant of all the baronies of the county Dublin, 'and of the cantred of Newcastell near Lyons' for life, with a fee of £4 10s. sterling, 'and such other fees as Bartholomew Fitzgerald or John Egyr alias Pety John had'.⁴⁰ Who these men were and when they served I have not been able to determine, nor whether they held both offices or served in the two offices simultaneously. The period in which they held office, the timing of the grant, and Bartholomew's surname suggest a connection to the earls of Kildare, who had a direct interest in Newcastle Lyons.⁴¹ It would appear that the chief serjeanty was no longer treated as the hereditary possession of the Cruises, who continued in possession of their north Dublin estates.⁴² At what point this occurred is unclear. The family maintained their claim to the office, and it would be reinstated in the reign of Edward VI, four chief serjeants having been appointed by the crown in the interim period.⁴³ The Cruises were clearly among the most prominent gentry families of county Dublin, and thus confirm Otway-Ruthven's observation on the social status of these officers.⁴⁴

³⁶ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 236v.

³⁷ RC 8/36, pp. 631-2.

³⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 730-1.

³⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 19 Hen. VI, no. 18.

⁴⁰ *Tudor fiants Hen. VIII*, no. 53.

⁴¹ Ball, *History of the County Dublin*, iii, p. 130.

⁴² CIRCLE, Pat. 24 Hen. VII, no. 8; RC 8/43, p. 284.

⁴³ Lynch, *Feudal dignities*, p. 105-7.

⁴⁴ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 25.

Chief serjeants of Meath

As in Dublin, the chief serjeanty in Meath was the hereditary possession of a county family; in the case of Meath, this was the Bacon family of Baconstown (bar. Moyfenrath).⁴⁵ They had held the office from its first appearance in the record in the early fourteenth century until the family's extinction in the male line in the mid-fifteenth century, at which point it passed to the Bermingham family of north Co. Dublin, descended from the daughter of Thomas Bacon.⁴⁶ The Berminghams were still in possession of the office at the close of the sixteenth century.⁴⁷ Both the Bacon family and their Bermingham successors had to constantly assert their right to the office against the royal habit of awarding the office as a sinecure to favoured individuals. These included prominent servants of the crown in Ireland, such as Edward Perrers, knight, and Nicholas Taaffe, both of whom were granted the office during the lifetime of Thomas Bacon – as well as men who may never have set foot in Ireland, such as Peter Curtis and Edmund White, described as the king's servants in the English letters patent appointing them jointly to the office in 1471.⁴⁸ There appears to have been an element of confusion – or perhaps of disagreement – over whether the Bacons were hereditary chief serjeants of the county, or hereditary chief serjeants to the lords of the liberty. Nicholas Taaffe's appointment was stated to be during the minority of the heir of Roger Mortimer. Perrers' appointment does not survive but it is very possible that it contained a similar clause; certainly his appointment was during the Mortimer minority. Thomas Bacon had a grant of the office of chief serjeant of both crosslands and county of Meath in 1386, but it is not clear that the two were automatically united.⁴⁹ Separate chief serjeants of the liberty and of the crosslands are attested in 1425, c. 1435, 1440, 1453 and 1457.⁵⁰ Nonetheless after the dissolution of the liberty the Berminghams

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Potterton, *Trim*, pp. 123-5; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 192-5.

⁴⁷ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Jas. I, no. 55.

⁴⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 7 Hen IV, no. 167; *CPR, 1399-1401*, pp. 219-20; 1467-77, p. 273; Potterton, *Trim*, pp. 123-5.

⁴⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Ric. II, no. 227.

⁵⁰ Perhaps also in 1408, 1415, 1472, though these examples are questionable – NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 16; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 55v; Pat 3 Hen. VI, no. 86; Pat. 31 Hen. VI, no. 13; NLI MS 761, p. 299; *CPR 1452-61*, p. 351.

successfully established their hereditary right to be chief serjeant of the county of Meath, and after 1542 chief serjeants of both Meath and Westmeath.⁵¹

Whether in the possessions of the Bacon family or their successors or in the hands of a beneficiary of royal patronage, the chief serjeanty appears to have been largely a sinecure. The actual work of serving writs and empanelling juries was no doubt handled by the subserjeants as it was in Dublin; but in Meath the job of coordinating these subserjeants was often if not always in the hands of deputy chief serjeants, an office not seen in Dublin.

One chief serjeant who likely did exercise his office in person was Maurice Avenall, who held the office in 1425 and 1440 (and very likely for much of the intervening period). Avenall was chief serjeant of the crosslands of Meath, so his bailiwick was rather less than half that of the county as a whole; although it was clearly considered a possibility that he might exercise that office by deputy.⁵² Avenall had a long career at the lower levels of county office in Meath. He was undersheriff in 1431, and clerk of the seneschal in 1447.⁵³ This association continued into the next generation, as John Avenall, gentleman, was appointed clerk of the seneschal in 1472.⁵⁴ The family do not appear in the record as landholders in the county, but a strong connection to the lower levels of office in Meath is clear.

Subserjeants of Dublin

Only ten serjeants (*servientes*) of Dublin baronies are named for the period 1399 to 1513. Four of these were subserjeants (*subservientes*) of Coolock, three were subserjeants of Balrothery, and one was subserjeant of Castleknock. Newcastle, for which two named serjeants survive, was a special case, as we shall see below. No name of a serjeant of the barony of Rathdown has survived for the period. In addition, William Smith was appointed as serjeant of Swords in 1450; this was not a barony of the county but an archiepiscopal lordship temporarily in the king's hand.⁵⁵ This scarcity of named

⁵¹ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Jas. I, no. 55.

⁵² CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 86; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 114-15.

⁵³ TNA, E 101/248/8; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 569; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 159.

⁵⁴ RC 8/41, pp. 366-7.

⁵⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 28 Hen. VI, no. 9.

serjeants is a reflection of the nature of our sources. The serjeants did not make biannual proffers at the exchequer in the manner of the sheriffs and escheators, and so feature far less frequently in the memoranda rolls than these more prominent officers. As with the undersheriffs of Dublin, the serjeants surface in the record only occasionally, and effectively by chance; few are recorded in the context of the standard duties of the office. William Cruise and William Birgham, the subserjeants of Coolock in 1406 and 1484 respectively, both feature in the exchequer rolls because they were fined for unspecified acts of contempt.⁵⁶ They were probably guilty of wrongful empanelment; that is to say, jury-fixing and related extortionate practices.⁵⁷ Henry Kerran, serjeant of Newcastle, was accused of contempt in Michaelmas term 1414, when his mainpernors included John Barrett, a man with a long career in local administration.⁵⁸ Henry was held to be in contempt for no fewer than five instances of wrongful empanelment the previous May.⁵⁹ Similar examples can be found from other counties.⁶⁰

Richard Bartholomew, subserjeant of Castleknock, and Robert Gurveys, subserjeant of Balrothery, were appointed together with others in 1444 to levy the debts of a former sheriff of Dublin. Many such commissions were issued to former sheriffs in fifteenth century Dublin, though the inclusion of subserjeants is apparently unique to this instance. It is possible that other commissions included men who held the office without being identified in the letters patent as such; as we shall see, at least one future subserjeant was appointed to a commission to levy debts. The names of Michael Walsh, subserjeant of Balrothery in 1456, and Richard Delaharne, subserjeant of Newcastle in 1466, are preserved because it was brought to the attention of the exchequer court that men they arrested had broken their arrest, providing a rare glimpse of the subserjeant in action.⁶¹ Walsh notified the exchequer court himself, presumably to avoid being held financially liable for his failure to carry out the arrest. The scarcity and nature of references to subserjeants of baronies in fifteenth-century Dublin make definitive statements about the tasks and personnel of the office difficult.

⁵⁶ NAI, RC 8/33, pp. 355, 370, 535.

⁵⁷ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 24.

⁵⁸ RC 8/34, pp. 293, 452; see below, pp. 236-7.

⁵⁹ RC 8/34, pp. 189-93.

⁶⁰ RC 8/36, pp. 55-8, 158-60, 200-1, 376-9.

⁶¹ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 209v; RC 8/41, pp.

It seems clear, however, that with few exceptions, the men who served as subserjeants in fifteenth-century Dublin were not men of high status.

In contrast to the other serjeants of Dublin baronies, William Cruise, subserjeant of Coolock in 1406, had a surname that is instantly familiar from study of office- and landholding in medieval County Dublin. The Cruises of Naul were hereditary chief serjeants of County Dublin from the thirteenth century; a cadet branch were chief serjeants of Louth.⁶² William is very likely to have been the William Cruise who was son and heir of Thomas Cruise, the incumbent chief serjeant at the time of William's appearance in the record; although it is possible that he might be identified instead with the William Cruise who held Cruiserath of the manor of Castleknock in 1408, who was most likely from a cadet branch of the family.⁶³ It is also worth observing that William's appearance in the Irish chancery material was a result of a pardon for contempt: few others of the men who served as subserjeant are likely to have had his connections and were concomitantly less likely to escape fines. If William was indeed the son of Thomas fitz Simon Cruise, he is the only one of our subserjeants to go on to serve as chief serjeant of the county.⁶⁴ As a member of the Cruise family he was of course the only subserjeant who had the possibility of doing so. He was not, however, the only subserjeant with a close connection to the Cruise family.

John Exeter, subserjeant of Coolock in 1466, bears a surname more usually associated with the barony of Slane in county Meath.⁶⁵ There is very little evidence of a separate branch of the Exeter family in county Dublin.⁶⁶ John is thus almost certainly John Exeter of Carrick (Carrickdexter, bar. Slane), esq., who was the second husband of Matilda Cruise, daughter of William fitz Thomas Cruise, or a close relative and namesake.⁶⁷ John was thus a member of a prominent Meath gentry family and connected by marriage to one of the leading families of county Dublin. With the possible

⁶² Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 22; Lynch, *Feudal dignities*, pp. 104-6; *Cal. Justiciary Rolls Ireland, 1295-1303*, p. 81.

⁶³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 730-3; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 37; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 44.

⁶⁴ NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 38.

⁶⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 62; Pat. 13 Hen. IV, no. 120Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 53; NLI MS 761, p. 264; RC 8/41, p. 59; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 27, 29.

⁶⁶ Thomas Exeter 'of Clonee' was a debtor of Richard Porter in 1472 – *Wills and inventories*, p. 42.

⁶⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 730-3; *Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 878-91; CIRCLE, Cl. 19 Hen. VI, no. 18.

exception of William Cruise, he was by far the most prominent man to hold the office of subserjeant in county Dublin in the fifteenth century. The fact that both William Cruise and John Exeter were subserjeants of Coolock suggests that the barony was of particular importance to the Cruise family, despite the fact that the family's main landed interests lay in the barony of Balrothery. Whether Exeter was Matilda's husband or his relative and namesake, his appointment as subserjeant emphasises the fact that such appointments were in the hands of the chief serjeant rather than the sheriff.

The other men named as subserjeants of Coolock were considerably less prominent than William Cruise or John Exeter. David Rede was subserjeant in 1472, when he arrested William Finglas of Baldoyle at the suit of Henry Rowe, a clerk of the common bench. Rede told the exchequer court that Finglas had subsequently broken this arrest, presumably so that he could escape financial liability for Finglas' non-appearance.⁶⁸ Rede is otherwise entirely obscure. There are few references to men with this surname in fifteenth-century Dublin. William Rede was collector of subsidy for the crosslands of Shankill, in the far south of the county, in 1421; as we shall see, such a position, particularly in the crosslands, was by no means the preserve of the gentry.⁶⁹ Richard Rede of Loughshinny was one of a group of comparatively humble-looking individuals from the parish of Lusk (bar. Balrothery) involved in a suit of trespass against Richard Travers of Hacketstown in 1479, while Thomas Rede, cook, was a witness to a land transaction in Crumlin in 1488.⁷⁰ David's relationship to these men is impossible to discover, but it is clear that he was not from a Dublin gentry background.

William Birgham, who served as subserjeant in Coolock in 1484, has a surname that makes no other appearance in office in fifteenth-century Ireland; indeed I have been unable to trace any certain evidence of the family's presence in Ireland.⁷¹ The surname appears to be a straightforward English placename, Burham (Kent), Brigham

⁶⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 54-5, 413. Rede is described as subserjeant of Duleke (Duleek, co. Meath), but as the arrest took place at Baldoyle (bar. Coolock) it is likely that Duleke is an error on the part of the record commissioners; especially given the usual rendering of Duleek as Dyvelek, Dyveleke, etc. – see, for example, RC 8/36, pp. 337-8; RC 8/41, p. 417.

⁶⁹ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp.181-2; see below, pp. 284-5.

⁷⁰ Ellis (ed.), 'Plea roll 19 Edw. IV', p. 46; *Christ church deeds*, nos. 1077, 1089.

⁷¹ RC 8/33, p. 535.

(Cumberland, Yorkshire), Bridgham (Norfolk) and Byram (Yorkshire) being among possible derivations. It could perhaps be a corrupt rendering of Bermingham, but I have found no other example of this contraction of a name which would have been very familiar to the clerks of the fifteenth-century exchequer. The association of William with the family is thus highly questionable. A John Byrum was among those charged with buying victuals for the household of Thomas of Lancaster in 1401. He was granted a pardon of all felonies in 1403.⁷² This may provide a more likely family connection for William, although those associated with John as victuallers have surnames that are not common in the lordship and appear to have come from England as part of Thomas' household staff.⁷³ Another possibility is a link to the family of Burg' or Brugges (Bruges or Bridges) that held a small amount of land from the Archbishop of Dublin and served on juries in the immediate hinterland of Dublin city in the fourteenth century.⁷⁴ While neither of these derivations can be very positive, it is clear that William did not come from a family that was prominent either in land- or office-holding in county Dublin.

Richard Bartholomew, subserjeant of Castleknock in 1444, is the only subserjeant of Castleknock whose name survives and also the only member of his family to feature in the records of county office in the fifteenth century. John Bartholomew had held land in Finglas of the Archbishop of Dublin by payment of half a pound of wax and cumin annually in the early thirteenth century; but the tenement was out of the family's possession by the 1266 at the latest.⁷⁵ Thereafter the family is associated in the record exclusively with the city of Dublin. Peter Bartholomew was among the leading civic figures who founded the religious guild of St. Sythe in St. Michan's church in Ostmantown in 1476.⁷⁶ Further down the social scale, 'Gori Bartholomee', mason, was among a number of Dublin tradesmen, several with unambiguously Gaelic surnames, who were named in the foundation charter of the fraternity of the Blessed Virgin, a

⁷² CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 36, 40; Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 264.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 34, 35, 36, 40.

⁷⁴ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 170-1, 173, 201, 234.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁷⁶ Colm Lennon, 'The Foundation Charter of St. Sythe's Guild, Dublin, 1476' *Archivium Hibernicum*, xlviii (1994), 3-12; CIRCLE, Pat. 16 Edw. IV, no. 5.

craftsman's guild, in 1508; he was apparently still a member thirteen years later.⁷⁷ Isabella, Anna, and Janet Bartholomew were all admitted to the franchise of the city as daughters of freemen in the years 1477 to 1481; presumably some or all of them were daughters of Peter Bartholomew, or of the Piers Bartholomew who was named as late occupier of the office of town clerk in 1493.⁷⁸ In 1484 John Cristyn of Suralstown appointed Henry White, clerk, as his attorney in a plea of debt against Peter Bartholomew of Dublin.⁷⁹ Suralstown lies on the Coolock side of the border between that barony and the barony of Castleknock. The same John Cristyn served as a collector of a subsidy in the barony of Castleknock in 1498.⁸⁰ If the plea of debt reflects a familial connection to this part of county Dublin, then, Richard Bartholomew may just perhaps have been a landowner or at least an inhabitant of his bailiwick, but such a connection is highly tenuous. The register of wills of the diocese of Dublin reveal how common it was for the inhabitants of late fifteenth-century county Dublin to be in debt to the merchants of the city of Dublin.⁸¹ Richard Bartholomew, then, is an example of a subserjeant from a family without significant background in land- or office-holding.

Robert Gurveys, who as subserjeant of Balrothery served on a commission to levy the debts of Thomas Field, former sheriff of Dublin, alongside Richard Bartholomew and others in 1444, is another subserjeant of obscure family. As with the others, there is nothing to connect his family to the barony in which he held his office; his is the sole appearance of the family in office in fifteenth-century Ireland. The family of Gurveys was associated in the thirteenth century with the royal manors of south county Dublin, especially the manor of Saggart for which Richard Gurveys was a reeve or representative of the manorial community in the late thirteenth century.⁸² It is notable that he was associated in this regard with John Long, one of the two king's serjeants mentioned

⁷⁷ Henry F. Berry, 'The Dublin gild of carpenters, millers, masons, and heliers, in the sixteenth century', *JRSAI*, Fifth Series, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Dec. 31, 1905), 321-337, pp. 323-4, 327; *CIRCLE*, Pat. 23 Hen. VII, no. 12

⁷⁸ *CARD*, i, pp. 354, 356, 361, 378.

⁷⁹ *RC* 8/33, p. 531.

⁸⁰ *RC* 8/43, p. 93.

⁸¹ *Wills and inventories*, *passim*.

⁸² Áine Foley, *Royal manors of medieval county Dublin* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 82-3, 89-90; *RDKPRI*, 36, pp. 42, 67; *CDI*, 1285-92, no. 855.

below, who also served as a reeve of Saggart in this period.⁸³ The relationship between Richard Gerveys of thirteenth-century Saggart and the Robert Gerveys of fifteenth-century Balrothery is entirely obscure. Saggart was repeatedly devastated by the raids of the Irish of the Wicklow mountains. As early as 1272 it might be described as being 'near the land of war'.⁸⁴ In these circumstances it may well be that one of Robert's ancestors had left Saggart for the more sheltered lands north of the Liffey. This is of course speculative even by our standards. Nonetheless the fact that the surname was not previously associated with a social rank higher than that of a manorial reeve is surely significant. Another possible reference to the family comes in 1483 when Robert 'Grevys', yeoman, was admitted to the franchise of Dublin city by special grace.⁸⁵ If this is correct, it is unlikely that Robert can be identified with the man who served as subserjeant of Balrothery forty years earlier; but the status title of 'yeoman' which he was accorded fits very neatly with the other evidence for the social status of the subserjeants.

The family did make one appearance at a higher level of county government. In December 1375 John Gerveys was among the 44 men who elected Nicholas Howth and William Fitzwilliam to represent the county. The election of knights of the shire was usually the preserve of the leading county families and the appearance of Gerveys as an elector could in normal circumstances be taken as proof of his place among the county gentry. However, the unusual circumstances of this election mean that such a conclusion is far from certain. The election took place in the context of troubled governorship of Sir William Windsor. The representatives elected by Gerveys and his fellows were summoned not to the Irish parliament but to England to discuss the granting of a subsidy, strongly resisted by the Irish commons, and to consult with the king concerning Irish complaints against Windsor's actions in the lordship.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the election of Fitzwilliam and Howth was only one of three elections held on the same day by rival groups of Dublin electors.⁸⁷ Lists of the names of two of these

⁸³ Foley, *Royal manors*, p. 82, *RDKPRI*, 36, p. 42.

⁸⁴ *CDI*, 1252-1284, no. 930; Foley, *Royal manors*, p. 75.

⁸⁵ *CARD*, i, p. 365.

⁸⁶ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', p. 171.

⁸⁷ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', pp. 238-9.

groups of electors survive. There is a striking contrast between the 44 men who elected Fitzwilliam and Howth and the second group of 20 electors who also elected Howth but chose Richard White of Killester in place of Fitzwilliam.⁸⁸ Few of the men who elected Fitzwilliam came from prominent county families. In contrast the 20 electors of Nicholas Howth and Richard White included both of the main branches of the Cruise family and two branches of the Talbots, as well as Nicholas Howth himself. Four of the group of 20 had served as sheriff of Dublin or would later hold that office, compared to three of the 44.⁸⁹ In February 1372 20 leading men of the county had been summoned by name to a great council. Eight of these men were among the 20 electors of 1376, while only two of the group of 44 received a personal summons.⁹⁰ Sheriff Reginald Talbot returned that the Howth and White had been elected by 'the majority of the better sort'; he may have been biased to that party, however, given the presence within it of two of his near relations.⁹¹ It is noteworthy that Gurveys' fellow electors included men such as Robert Kissok, from a family that had provided serjeants in the south of the county at the turn of the fourteenth century, but otherwise were not prominent in county office, and others like John Beg whose family were apparently also of comparatively humble origins; Reginald Beg held the office of provost of Saggart around the same time that Richard Gurveys held that office, while the most prominent office held by a member of the family in the fifteenth century was that of collector of subsidies.⁹² Still others, such as Ralph Prudhomme, Robert Gale and Richard Venerous, came from families that were entirely obscure. A month before these elections, a group of electors identified by the sheriff as the being of the 'better sort' (*de melioribus*) of the commons of Dublin had nominated representatives of the county.⁹³ Their names are not provided but it is surely significant that they, like the men identified by the sheriff as the 'majority of the better sort' in December, chose Nicholas Howth and Richard White. The election was annulled after the governor received a petition from 'many sufficient persons' of County Dublin

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40. The third group apparently consisted of just two men, Thomas Mareward and John Fitzrery, who elected William Fitzwilliam and Richard White. As the two represented opposite parties, this seems to represent an attempt at compromise.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; Foley, 'Sheriff of Dublin', pp. 275-6

⁹⁰ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', pp. 239-40; CIRCLE, Cl. 46 Edw. III, no. 122

⁹¹ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', p. 238

⁹² *CJR, 1305-1307*, p. 251; RC 8/43, pp. 163, 189, Foley, *Royal manors*, p. 82; *RDKPRI*, 36, p. 42

⁹³ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', p. 238

who complained that Howth and White were close relations and 'de une assente'. The petitioners sought to substitute Fitzwilliam for White.⁹⁴ Many of these petitioners were among the 44 electors of Fitzwilliam and Howth in December.⁹⁵

While Nicholas Howth was evidently acceptable to both parties, their disagreement over Richard White and William Fitzwilliam reveals the political dimension of the election. Fitzwilliam was closely associated with William Windsor, having served as sheriff of Dublin during Windsor's time as governor and holding the office of constable of Wicklow castle.⁹⁶ The Treasurer of Ireland was ordered to pay him £5 of arrears of the fees of the latter office by a writ of 20 October 1373 witnessed by Windsor. The writ ordering the Dublin election was issued five days later.⁹⁷ In contrast, Richard White was a committed opponent of Windsor. He travelled to England as part of the Irish delegation and was rewarded for his part in Windsor's fall from grace with a license to export grain, fish and other victuals from Dublin and other ports.⁹⁸ He was subsequently appointed to a commission to investigate the complaints against Windsor alongside the earl of Ormond, who had replaced Windsor as chief governor, and Nicholas Dagworth, who had been despatched to Ireland to summon the representatives of the Irish commons the previous year.⁹⁹ Dagworth was identified by Windsor's wife as a personal enemy of her husband.¹⁰⁰ Further proof of the crucial role of factional politics involved in these events is the inclusion among Fitzwilliam's electors of Robert Hollywood of Artane, chief baron of the Irish exchequer.¹⁰¹ Hollywood was one of the few men among the 44 from a prominent county family. He was closely associated with Windsor's government, and was summoned to England in 1376 to answer the charges levelled against him by the Irish commons. He was dismissed from his exchequer post that August.¹⁰² It is clear therefore that in the election of Fitzwilliam

⁹⁴ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', p. 237.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239 n. 1.

⁹⁶ Peter Crooks, 'Negotiating authority in a colonial capital: Dublin and the Windsor crisis, 1369-78' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin IX*, 131-51, p. 137.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137 n. 39.

⁹⁸ *CPR 1374-1377*, p. 303; Crooks, 'Dublin and the Windsor crisis', pp. 138-9.

⁹⁹ *CPR 1374-1377*, p. 416; Clarke, 'William of Windsor', pp. 154-5, 160.

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', p. 154.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁰² Clarke, 'William of Windsor', pp. 155-8; Crooks, 'Dublin and the Windsor crisis', p. 141.

we see an attempt by Windsor and his associates to influence the choice of delegates. To achieve this result they assembled a larger body of less prominent men to partake in the election, to which the traditional county elite responded vigorously. The appearance of the John Gurveys among the larger body of electors cannot thus be taken as proof of the family's gentry status. However, while they may not have been of the status of the traditional electors of the knights of the shire, they must have been freeholders of sufficient standing that their inclusion as electors could be envisaged by the Windsor party. While the sheriff consistently identified the opposing party as the 'better part' of the commons of the county, there is no suggestion that the legality of the inclusion of Gurveys and his fellows was challenged. In all, the evidence suggests that Gurveys, Kissok and the other men who made up this body of electors were either very minor members of the gentry or prosperous members of the peasantry; a finding in line with that for the families of our other subserjeants.

Michael Walsh is the next subserjeant of Balrothery to appear in the record. In 1456 he arrested Alan [?] Whitacre of Rath (par. Balscadden) at the suit of Nicholas Corr, clerk, but Whitacre 'violently fled'.¹⁰³ Once more we see the subserjeant in his usual role. Michael makes no other appearance in the record and there is nothing to convincingly link him either to the Walshes of south county Dublin or the family of Surgalstown (bar. Coolock). The latter had provided a knight of the shire in 1421 and an assessor of subsidies for Dublin in 1421 and 1434, and perhaps the chief serjeant of Newcastle in 1466, as we shall see.¹⁰⁴ John Walsh of Garristown (bar. Balrothery), gentleman, was elected escheator and clerk of the market of Dublin in 1493, while in 1486 John Walsh of Westpalstown petitioned the king on behalf of his fellow inhabitants of that vill for a reduction of the subsidy charged on them.¹⁰⁵ The relationship between these individuals is obscure. It would appear that there were numerous families with the same surname at varying levels of society in Balrothery and the neighbouring baronies to which Michael may have been connected. One possibility is that Michael (*Mich'l* in Ferguson's version of the exchequer record) has been transcribed in error for

¹⁰³ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 209v.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 179-80; NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ RC 8/43, p. 53; BL Royal MS 18 C xiv, f. 152v; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 323.

Nicholas (*Nich's*) Walsh.¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Walsh, yeoman, was closely associated with Sir Robert Burnell and his son John, sheriffs of county Dublin, in 1466. The Burnells held significant lands in Balrothery and Coolock, and Sir Robert had been sheriff of the county in 1456-7, the year that Walsh was subserjeant.¹⁰⁷

Other men who served as subserjeant appeared in similar circumstances alongside serving or former sheriffs of the county, including William Russell, subserjeant of Balrothery in 1472. He is very likely identical with William Russell, yeoman, who was one of those appointed alongside Richard Gurveys, serving subserjeant of Balrothery, Richard Bartholomew, subserjeant of Castleknock, and others, to levy the debts of former sheriff Thomas Field in 1444.¹⁰⁸ Men with the same surname appear in Balrothery and also in southwestern Dublin as collectors of subsidies at the close of the fifteenth century, but they did not hold any more prominent office in Dublin during our period. Nor do they appear among the (admittedly few) electors of sheriffs or coroners of the county whose names have been preserved.¹⁰⁹ William Russell is again accorded the title of yeoman in 1466 when he was the defendant in a suit of debt.¹¹⁰ Russell can thus be confidently identified with the prosperous peasantry of Balrothery rather than the gentry of county Dublin. Russell was accused of violently breaking his arrest of the marshal of the exchequer, in whose custody he had been held to await judgement for contempt.¹¹¹ In this case the contempt arose not from wrongful empanelment but from William's failure to make arrest Richard Hyriell, clerk, as he was directed by the king's warrant. William pleaded that he had made the arrest and had kept Hyriell under guard until Nicholas Charlton of Clontarf, chaplain, together with others of Baldoyle and Clontarf, assaulted William and broke Hyriell's arrest.¹¹² Russell's mainpernors on this occasion included Nicholas Bath, future sheriff of the county, and Nicholas Fitzlyons, serving undersheriff of the county.¹¹³ He was clearly familiar with many of the more

¹⁰⁶ Similar – indeed worse – errors, whether the fault of Ferguson or of the original roll, include repeated references to Sir Robert Burghill for Sir Maurice Burghill – NAI, Ferguson coll. iii, ff. 256, 270.

¹⁰⁷ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 206-206v, 211v; RC 8/41, pp. 35-7; 166.

¹⁰⁸ NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 58; CIRCLE, Pat. 22 Hen. VI, no. 3. See below, pp. 228-30.

¹⁰⁹ RC 8/41, pp. 7-8, 39-40, 61-5, 119-22; RC 8/43, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ RC 8/41, p. 101.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 343, 404-5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 337-8, 340.

¹¹³ RC 8/41, pp. 353-4, 404-5; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 242.

prominent servants of local government in Dublin. The incident also makes it clear that the assignment the particular barony assigned to a subserjeant was more a guideline than a strict boundary to their authority. Russell arrested Hyriell at Baldoyle, well within the barony of Coolock; while Hyriell's arrest was the result of his failure to satisfy the king for his homage of lands in the barony of Rathdown.

The barony of Newcastle was distinct from the remainder of the county of Dublin in several important respects, as we shall see. However the inferior serjeants of Newcastle – Henry Kerran, described as *serviens* of the county in 1414, and Richard Delaharne, *subserviens* in 1466, bear comparison with the subserjeants of the other baronies. Kerran bears an apparently Irish name, the only serjeant or subserjeant of Dublin to do so, although subserjeants with Irish names were not uncommon in the other obedient shires. Men with his surname had previously appeared in the service of the royal government. Richard Carran was appointed clerk of the hanaper in 1382.¹¹⁴ Shortly afterward he was sent to England on behalf of the Irish council following the death in office of the king's lieutenant, Edmund Mortimer.¹¹⁵ Carran, who had been parson of Dunbeg in the diocese of Armagh, was appointed archdeacon of Dublin in 1402 following a trip to Rome.¹¹⁶ It is very possible that Henry Carran was a relative who benefited from Richard's position as a senior churchman and servant of the royal government. The family did not subsequently hold office in the county. John Kerran of county Dublin was mainpernor to a grant of land on the Dublin-Meath border to Nicholas Field in 1451, so the family clearly retained a presence in the county.¹¹⁷ Kerran's fellow mainpernor on this occasion was Thomas Abbay, who was chief remembrancer of the exchequer and closely associated with the Ormond faction in the lordship's politics.¹¹⁸ Kerran clearly fits the emerging template of the serjeant from a yeoman or lesser gentry background.

¹¹⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Ric. II, no. 55.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Cl. 5 Ric. II, no. 149; Cl. 8 Ric. II, no. 61.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 204; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 83.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Pat. 29 Hen. VI, no. 57.

¹¹⁸ E. A. E. Matthew, *The governing of the Lancastrian lordship of Ireland in the time of James Butler, fourth earl of Ormond, c. 1420-1452* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1994), p. 73.

Richard Delaharne, subserjeant of Newcastle in 1466, was, like many of our subserjeants, the only member of his family to hold office in Dublin in the fifteenth century. Unlike some of the other subserjeants, however, he makes at least one other appearance in the record. He was among the debtors of Reginald Weston and his wife Alice Young when the inventory of their goods was drawn up in December 1474, owing the grand sum of 2d.¹¹⁹ In his will Reginald requested to be buried in the cemetery of St Finian's in Esker, while among his bequests was 12d left to the church of Palmerstown, both in the barony of Newcastle. Nicholas Weston of Newcastle Lyons, who may well have been a near relative, was accused of breaking the arrest of undersheriff Nicholas Fitzlyons in July 1472.¹²⁰ Delaharne's connections place him solidly within the barony of Newcastle. As with most of our subserjeants, there is little to suggest that he came from a gentry background.

William Smith was serjeant of the archiepiscopal manor of Swords and thus does not belong to the class of serjeants of baronies. However it may be worthwhile to compare the two offices and to investigate whether William's background sheds light on that of our serjeants proper. A series of inquisitions were held in the middle years of the thirteenth century concerning the jurisdictional rights of the archbishops of Dublin. These shed light on the normal processes by which these rights were exercised. Among other things, they make it clear that the king's serjeants had no right to enter the archbishop's liberty to serve writs or make arrests. Instead any such writs and commands were to be brought by the king's serjeants to the archbishop's bailiff of St Sepulchre, who would pass them on to the bailiff of the archiepiscopal manor in question. These bailiffs also performed the duties of the royal coroners in their bailiwick.¹²¹ The inquisitions do refer to a serjeant of the manor of Castlekevin; but from their usage here it is clear that serjeant, constable and also provost could be used as alternative terms for the officer more regularly called the archbishop's bailiff.¹²² It is

¹¹⁹ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 89-91.

¹²⁰ RC 8/41, pp. 353-4.

¹²¹ McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', pp. 81-108; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 101-14

¹²² See the dating clauses 'X being then seneschal, Y being bailiff/constable/serjeant' – *Alen's reg.*, pp. 106, 108, 111; McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', pp. 96, 98, 101, 102. The point is strengthened by Alen's division of the 'many bailiffs' into the bailiff 'proper' at St. Sepulchre and the bailiffs 'commonly Constable [or] Provost' and his glossing of provost with '*i.e. ballivus*' – McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', p. 101 n. 2, p. 103 n. 2

clear that the bailiffs of archiepiscopal manors were performing the duties of the serjeants of baronies elsewhere. They made attachments, summoned juries and levied sums of money due to the king. In addition, they were responsible for capturing outlaws and taking the oaths of felons abjuring the realm.¹²³ King's serjeants who intruded on the archbishop's liberties in the course of their duties might expect to be excommunicated, dismissed from their position or even cudgelled around the church of Swords.¹²⁴ The association of the archiepiscopal *ballivus* with the royal *serviens* is strengthened by the fact, already discussed, that bailiff was the normal term in the county administration of England for the official who was the equivalent of the Irish serjeant of a barony. Indeed it is possible that by the sixteenth century and perhaps earlier these archiepiscopal officers were also known as serjeants rather than bailiffs. A note made by Archbishop Alen on his copy of these inquisitions stated that the bailiff of St. Sepulchre was 'the chief bailiff, such in fact and name', the other bailiffs being 'now called servitors only'.¹²⁵ This is supported by the fact that William was granted the office of *serviens* of Swords with fees, wages and rewards 'due and accustomed to that office of old'; implying that *serviens* was by then the established name for this archiepiscopal officer.¹²⁶ The names of the archbishop's bailiffs and other ministers are not often preserved and few appear as such in the Irish chancery or exchequer material, with the exception of the bailiff of St. Sepulchre, who as the conduit between the royal and archiepiscopal administrations appears semi-regularly in the memoranda rolls of the exchequer. As such it is impossible to confirm whether, as seems likely, William Smith had a history of archiepiscopal service before the temporalities came into the king's hand at the death of Archbishop Richard Talbot. Tracing a family with such a common name as Smith can be treacherous, but it is clear that a family bearing that surname were associated with Swords from at least the close of the thirteenth century. Archbishop Richard de Feringes granted Peter Smith (*Faber or le Fevre*) and his heirs 25 acres in Swords in for 25 shillings and half a pound of wax; his son William was in possession of this tenement in 1326.¹²⁷ Geoffrey 'Smythson' acquired lands held of the

¹²³ McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', pp. 81-108; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 101-14

¹²⁴ McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', pp. 97, 105; *Alen's reg.*, pp. 105, 111

¹²⁵ *Alen's reg.*, p. 108; McNeill, 'Secular jurisdiction of the early archbishops', p. 99 n. 1

¹²⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 28 Hen. VI, no. 9

¹²⁷ *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 177; *Cal. Alen's register*, pp. 160, 164-6, 178, 180

archbishop's manor of Swords at around the same time.¹²⁸ Other men with this surname who may or may not have been related held small parcels of land of the archbishop in Finglas in the thirteenth century.¹²⁹ Unlike the men who served as subserjeants of Dublin baronies, the Smiths provided at least one other office-holder in late medieval Dublin. Andrew Smith of Balheary was a collector for Swords of a subsidy levied on the cross lands of Dublin in 1508.¹³⁰ It seems highly possible that William Smith came from a family that had a history of archiepiscopal service in Swords; he may himself have the incumbent bailiff of Swords at the time that the temporalities came into the king's hand; in which case he was an obvious candidate to continue fulfilling the duties of the office. Alternatively, he may be identical with William Smith, yeoman, who was one of those appointed to levy monies of royal service in Meath and Dublin in 1472, in which case royal service may have been his route to the serjeanty of Swords, likely a profitable office.¹³¹

Chief serjeants of Newcastle

There is strong reason to believe that the barony of Newcastle was outside the jurisdiction of the chief serjeant of Dublin. For a start, five individuals – Thomas Denne, John Siward, John Walsh, Robert England and Philip Woodlock – were accorded the title of 'chief serjeant of the cantred of Newcastle Lyons' over the course of the fifteenth century.¹³² This set them very clearly apart from the *subservientes* of the other baronies. With the exception of John Walsh, chief serjeant in 1466, their appointment to the office is recorded, again in notable contrast to the subserjeants. There is nothing to suggest that the *subservientes* of Dublin baronies were appointed by the royal government and the appointment was by right in the hand of the chief serjeant of the county.

The nature of the grants of office to John Siward emphasise this distinction. Siward was granted the office at pleasure, later re-issued for life. That it was a desirable office rather than a burdensome one is suggested by the wording of the grant. Philip

¹²⁸ *Alen's reg.*, p. 218

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77

¹³⁰ RC 8/43, pp. 276-7

¹³¹ RC 8/41, pp. 304-5.

¹³² CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. V, no. 62, Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 111; RC 8/33, p. 395; RC 8/41, pp. 162-3, 222; NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 31.

Woodlock had to find pledges for his grant, in the manner of the grant of custody of a desirable landed estate; indeed the record states that he had a grant of custody of the office, an unusual phrasing. As we shall see, the chief serjeanty of the county was treated as an item of property and there is reference to possession of a 'moiety' of the office. There is no evidence to suggest that the chief serjeanty of Newcastle was ever held as a hereditary possession but clearly it was seen as a desirable good. The contrast with the other baronies is so pronounced that even allowing for the patchy evidence it seems certain that the barony lay outside the jurisdiction of the Cruise chief serjeants of County Dublin.

Newcastle appears to have had an entirely separate chain of command from that elsewhere in the county. When Richard Delaharne, the only man named as *subserviens* in Newcastle in the fifteenth century, made an arrest in 1466, he was described not as the subserjeant of a particular barony but as the subserjeant of John Walsh, chief serjeant of Newcastle.¹³³ He was thus identified first and foremost as Walsh's subordinate rather than an officer of the barony. It is likely that he had been appointed by Walsh. Henry Kerran is the only individual described as serjeant (not subserjeant or chief serjeant) of Newcastle in 1414. No mention is made of a chief serjeant (whether of Dublin or of Newcastle) to whom he was subordinate, but John Siward is attested as chief serjeant in 1413 and 1415, so it is likely that Kerran was under his command.¹³⁴

A case from the early fourteenth century supports this conclusion. In 1306 Henry Pudding appealed against the distraint of his horse by Henry Kissok and John Long, former serjeants of the king. The record goes on to specify that Long was Kissok's subserjeant. The chain of command is quite clear: the sheriff of Dublin ordered Kissok to distraint Pudding, and Kissok despatched his own subordinate to carry out the physical act of distraint. When Pudding sought the return of the animal, it was to the sheriff he appealed.¹³⁵ It is noteworthy that the chief serjeant of Dublin does not appear in this hierarchy, despite the fact that the office was already vested in the Cruise family and that in theory the serjeants of County Dublin were his subordinates rather than the

¹³³ RC 8/41, pp. 162-3.

¹³⁴ RC 8/34, pp. 189-93, 414.

¹³⁵ *CJR*, 1305-1307, p. 251.

sheriff's. Kissok and Long are identified simply as 'serjeants of the king'. The bailiwick of a serjeant in medieval Ireland was universally the barony or cantred and we must assume that to be the case here also. No details are preserved concerning the location of this distraint, but Áine Foley has demonstrated the connection between these three individuals – Kissok, Long, and Pudding – and the royal manors of Saggart and Esker.¹³⁶ It seems very probable then that Kissok was serjeant of the barony of Newcastle in which these manors are located. There is nothing to suggest that Henry Kissok held a title anything like so elevated as chief serjeant, and his appearance in 1306 as a former serjeant indicates that his office was not for life. Nonetheless it is possible that this entry reflects the exemption of the barony from the jurisdiction of the chief serjeants of Dublin. The continued use of the term 'cantred' also sets Newcastle apart from the other baronies of Dublin (although it too might be referred to in parliamentary statutes as 'le baronye' of Newcastle Lyons).¹³⁷ The separation of the two jurisdictions is confirmed by a grant of 1536, when Robert Savage, yeoman of the crown, received the office of chief serjeant of all the baronies of the county Dublin, 'and of the cantred of Newcastell near Lyons'.¹³⁸ The reasons for this separation can only be guessed at, but it seems reasonable to conclude that it was influenced by the presence in this part of County Dublin of the royal manors. Naturally the king's ministers had an interest in retaining a greater level of control of this bailiwick.

Thomas Denne had an appointment as chief serjeant of the cantred of Newcastle Lyons in 1404-5.¹³⁹ Thomas makes no other appearance in the record, but it would appear that he came from a family native to Newcastle. The family of Den or Denne of Saggart appear frequently as jurors on inquisitions of the sixteenth century, appearing alongside both leading men of the county, such as Robert Talbot of Belgard and Walter Cruise of Naul, and men from families whose most important office was that of collector of subsidies – families that can be best described as parish gentry, such as the Nott

¹³⁶ Foley, *Royal manors*, pp. 75-6.

¹³⁷ *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 756-9.

¹³⁸ *Tudor fiants Hen. VIII*, no. 53.

¹³⁹ NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 31.

family of Baldwinstown or the Tyrells of Powerstown.¹⁴⁰ The Denne family were still holding land in Saggart in 1683.¹⁴¹

John Siward, appointed as chief serjeant of Newcastle Lyons during pleasure in 1413 and 1415 for life, is something of an enigma. The only other example of the name I have unearthed in county Dublin is from an inquisition of 1612 concerning lands held of the archbishop of Dublin in Ballisk and Ballalease, adjoining townlands in the vicinity of Donabate. The jurors were a distinctly humble-looking crew and included several men with Gaelic surnames, clearly not members of the gentry. Two of the men on this jury shared the surname Seawer.¹⁴² The possibility of a long-standing Siward presence in County Dublin exists, therefore, but there is nothing to suggest gentle status or a connection with the barony of Newcastle. Robert Siward, merchant of Dublin, was active in the middle of the fifteenth century. He was appointed controller of the auditors of the city treasury in 1456, but was apparently the only member of his family to be prominent in the civic life of Dublin.¹⁴³ The family of Syward or Siward arrived in Ireland as attendants of the Marshal lords of Leinster. Richard Siward, a knight of apparently quite humble origins (hence his Anglo-Saxon patronymic, transformed in the course of his career into a surname) was among the closest adherents of William Marshal II; he accompanied the earl to Ireland in the 1220s, witnessing the earl's quitclaim of lands in the barony of Gowran to Theobald Butler.¹⁴⁴ Willam Siward, a close relative, was commemorated by Marshal in an endowment to the priory of All Hallows near in Dublin, while Richard's nephew, Thomas (who was very possibly William's son) was enfeoffed by Marshal with 1¼ knight's fees in 'Ercekeragh', apparently equating to the parishes of Erke and Glashare in the barony of Galmoy, Co. Kilkenny.¹⁴⁵ Members of the family that

¹⁴⁰ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, nos. 3, 55.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, W&M, no. 8.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, Jas. I, no. 154.

¹⁴³ *CARD*, i, pp. 292, 297; *NAI*, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 201v.

¹⁴⁴ David Crouch, 'The last adventure of Richard Siward', *Morgannwg: Transactions of the Glamorgan Local History Society*, xxxv (1991), 7-30, pp. 7-10; *idem*, 'Siward, Sir Richard (d. 1248)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37971>, accessed 4 Nov 2015]; *Ormond deeds*, i, no. 76; Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, i, pp. 128-9, 136.

¹⁴⁵ *Registrum prioratum omnium sanctorum juxta Dublin*, ed. Rev. Richard Butler (Dublin, 1845), p. 15; *CIRCLE*, Pat. 22 Edw. III, no. 3; St. John Brooks, *Knight's fees in counties Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny (13th-15th century)*, with commentary (Dublin 1950), pp. 181-2; Crouch, 'Last adventure of Richard Siward', p. 10.

appear in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries are clearly associated with the area of the Marshal lordship.¹⁴⁶ Thereafter the family lapsed somewhat into obscurity. By 1324 their knight's fee in Kilkenny was in the possession of John fitz Thomas, the first earl of Kildare. It is also worthy of remark that Severiston (Siward's town) was in 1338 held by John fitz Thomas as a tenant of James Butler's manor of Clonleynan (Ballylinan, bar. Ballyadams, Co. Laois?), itself held of John Hasting's manor of Oboy (Ballyadams).¹⁴⁷ Hastings was one of the many beneficiaries of the division of Marshal Leinster.¹⁴⁸ How the Kildare Fitzgeralds came into possession of the Siward fee is not clear. A connection between the Siwards, Galmoy, and the barony of Offaly in Co. Kildare seems clear. The advowson of the parish churches of Erke and Glashare – apparently corresponding to the original Siward enfeoffment – was granted by the Fitzgeralds to the Hospitallers; it is notable that in 1518 the earl of Kildare held the farm of the tithes of these churches not of the main priory at Kilmainham but of the perceptory of Tully, in the barony of Offaly.¹⁴⁹ In 1356 John Siward was appointed chief serjeant of Offaly.¹⁵⁰ He may or may not have been the same man who served in a number of active posts for the royal government. In 1352 a John Siward was appointed marshal of the exchequer, having previously served as a supervisor of the clerical taxation and royal service in Kilkenny and Munster.¹⁵¹ He was deputy keeper of weights and measures in Ireland in 1358, when he was granted ten marks in compensation for three horses lost while 'labouring diligently in that office'.¹⁵² In the same year he received £10 towards his expenses in travelling to England 'on certain arduous business' by order of the Irish council.¹⁵³ Association of the family with the barony of Offaly is strengthened by the a series of commissions in 1358. In August John and William 'Sewold' were appointed assessors in

¹⁴⁶ *Inquisitions and extents*, nos. 46, 58, 178, and possibly also nos. 150, 235; *Cal. Justiciary Rolls Ireland, 1308-1314*, pp. 229-30, 241-2.

¹⁴⁷ *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 279; Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, iii, p. 105; Otway-Ruthven, 'The medieval county of Kildare', *IHS*, xi, no. 43 (Mar., 1959), 181-99, p. 182; Paul McCotter, 'Medieval Irish political and economic divisions', *History Ireland*, xv, No. 5 (Sep. - Oct., 2007), 17-21, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, iii, pp. 103-5.

¹⁴⁹ St. John Brooks, *Knight's fees*, pp. 181-2; H. F. Hore, 'The rental book of Gerald Fitzgerald, ninth earl of Kildare. Begun in the year 1518' *Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, New Series, ii, No. 2 (1859), pp. 266-280, 301-310, p. 307.

¹⁵⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 30 Edw. III, nos. 12, 13.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Pat. 26 Edw. III, no. 41; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 436.

¹⁵² CIRCLE, Cl. 32 Edw. III, no. 143; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 495.

¹⁵³ CIRCLE, Cl. 32 Edw. III, no. 145; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 499.

Offaly of a subsidy toward the maintenance of a force to make war on the Irish of Slieve Margy. Two months later the sheriff of Kildare, John Siward, and Peter Okebourne were ordered to levy corn and oats in County Kildare for the sustenance of the army, while in November William 'Sewale' was one of two collectors in Offaly of a subsidy of a crannock of wheat, a crannock of oats and a fattened cow from each carucate to support the war against the Leinster Irish.¹⁵⁴ Richard Siward was among the jurors at the inquisition into the lands of Richard fitz Thomas, earl of Kildare, at Kildare in September 1331.¹⁵⁵ Somewhat earlier, Richard Siward was one of two burgesses of Kildare who received a payment from the sheriff of Kildare towards the works at Kildare castle.¹⁵⁶ I have yet to uncover evidence of the family holding land in the area, but a strong connection to the barony of Offaly seems certain. Our chief serjeant of Newcastle Lyons in 1413 is unlikely to have been the same John Siward who was so active in the royal service more than sixty years earlier, but a close family connection – in the absence of a second colony of Siwards elsewhere in Ireland, or an appearance in the English patent rolls – seems certain. If the chief serjeant of Newcastle was the son of the chief serjeant of Offaly, then perhaps his appointment reflected the fruits of a continued family service to the royal government; but there is no evidence for such service after 1358.

Otway-Ruthven observed that the chief serjeants were usually members of prominent gentry families, while the inferior serjeants tended to come from further down the social scale. John Siward, as chief serjeant not of a county but of a barony might be expected to align more closely with the latter than the former.¹⁵⁷ Siward's appointment was accompanied by a grant of lands in the immediate vicinity of the castle which gave the barony its name.¹⁵⁸ The grant was apparently worth 40 shillings a year.¹⁵⁹ The lands granted were not especially large in extent. The amount of landed income necessary to sustain the status of gentleman in fifteenth-century Ireland is extremely difficult to determine. In England, J. M. W. Bean, working from the taxation

¹⁵⁴ Pat. 32 Edw. III, nos. 57, 65, 103.

¹⁵⁵ *Red Book of Kildare*, nos. 122, 131.

¹⁵⁶ *RDKPRI*, 38, p. 102.

¹⁵⁷ Otway-Ruthven, 'Anglo-Irish shire government', p. 25.

¹⁵⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. V, no. 62; Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 111.

¹⁵⁹ *Rotuli selecti ad res anglicas et hibernicas spectantes, ex archivis in domo capitulari Westmonasteriensi, deprompti*, ed. Joseph Hunter (London, 1834), pp. 68-9.

records of the fifteenth century, suggested that £5 of annual landed income was roughly indicative of a wealthy member of the yeomanry, while the gentry might be expected to have something more in the line of £20-£40.¹⁶⁰ In Ireland, on the other hand, the sums were likely much smaller.¹⁶¹ Piers Coolock, with just over one ploughland worth 5 marks could be considered a gentleman in the middle of the fifteenth century.¹⁶² It seems clear that the 40s that John Siward might hope to obtain from his grant – which might be substituted by the unofficial income streams of the office – would not in itself suffice to keep a gentleman in his accustomed lifestyle, although it no doubt would have been a most welcome supplement to his income. Given that there is no evidence that Siward or his family held land in Newcastle – or indeed anywhere else – it seems probable that John’s grant was a reward for service and not due to his position in the locality. If this interpretation is correct, the lands which were granted to him along with his new office may have been intended to provide him with the resources necessary to carry out his duties, and to provide the local landed base which medieval English landholders demanded of their officers.

John Walsh is named as chief serjeant of Newcastle in 1466. He is the only chief serjeant of Newcastle who is named in circumstances other than appointment to that office. Walsh’s name is preserved because of an arrest made by his subserjeant, Richard Delaharne. Walsh himself had no role in the arrest. The implication of the entry on the memoranda roll is that Delaharne drew his authority to make the arrest from his position as Walsh’s subordinate.¹⁶³ There is nothing to suggest that Walsh, or any of the other chief serjeants of Newcastle, held the office of chief serjeant as anything other than a sinecure. We have already seen that Walsh was a common name at varying levels of society in fifteenth-century county Dublin. John Walsh of Surgalstown (bar. Coolock) had been a knight of the shire for Dublin in 1421 and an assessor of subsidies in the county in 1421 and 1434 and was thus clearly a man of some importance in the county.¹⁶⁴ Whether he was the chief serjeant of Newcastle in 1466 is impossible to say.

¹⁶⁰ Bean, ‘Landlords’, pp. 530-5.

¹⁶¹ Ellis, *Ireland in the age of the Tudors*, p. 34.

¹⁶² *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 704-7.

¹⁶³ RC 8/41, pp. 161-2.

¹⁶⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 179-80; NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 55.

It is striking that he does not appear among the unusually well-documented lists of electors of Robert Bath and Peter Travers, sheriffs of the county in c. 1462 and 1465 respectively.¹⁶⁵ Like his predecessors in office Thomas Denne and John Siward, and his successors Richard England and Peter Woodlock, John Walsh appears to have been of gentry background, but was not an individual of particular prominence in county Dublin or in the service of the royal administration. The implication is that the office was not of sufficient value to be used to reward more prominent servants of the crown.

Robert England of Kildroght, who had a grant of the chief serjeanty in 1470, was, like Thomas Denne, a member of a family native to the barony. While Kildroght, now Celbridge (bar. Salt), lies just across the Dublin-Kildare border from Newcastle, the family frequently appear in connection to the Dublin barony. In 1414 Henry Kerran, serjeant of Newcastle, was accused of empanelling Richard England in a jury between the king and the archbishop of Dublin without issuing him with a summons, resulting in England's non-appearance and subsequent fine.¹⁶⁶ Four years later John Reynolds of Newcastle and John England of Leghton paid 6 marks to have a grant of oats, barley and other crops that had been seized for the debts of William Swayne.¹⁶⁷ The townlands of Loughtown Upper and Loughtown Lower (par. Newcastle and par. Kilmactawley) lie in the barony of Newcastle, roughly halfway between Celbridge and Newcastle itself. John Reynolds is probably the man of the same name who had been empanelled in the same jury as Richard England in 1414. Reynolds was the only juror whose complaint against Henry Kerran was upheld.¹⁶⁸ Men with the same surname had appeared among the tenants of the royal manors in the barony of Newcastle in previous centuries. Like Richard Gurveys, John Reynolds appears to have served as provost or reeve of the royal manor of Saggart in or around 1281, and was one of the tenants of the royal manors in 1290.¹⁶⁹ The family resurface at the level of prosperous yeomanry or lesser gentry in Newcastle in the sixteenth century, appearing as jurors on inquisitions alongside similar families from south Dublin as well as more prominent gentry families such as the

¹⁶⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 7-8, 39-40, 61-5, 119, 120-2, 156.

¹⁶⁶ RC 8/34, pp. 189-93. Kerran was acquitted of this particular accusation of wrongful empanelment.

¹⁶⁷ RC 8/37, p. 44; also CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. V, no. 61, where Reynolds is called John Bynewal, in error.

¹⁶⁸ RC 8/34, pp. 189-93.

¹⁶⁹ Foley, *Royal manors*, p. 83; *RDKPRI*, 36, p. 67; *CDI*, 1285-92, no. 855.

Hacketts of Sutton.¹⁷⁰ William Swayne had been the king's receiver for the manor of Newcastle in 1414, when his pledges included John Reynolds.¹⁷¹ John and Richard England thus counted among their peers men who served as administrators of the significant royal estates in the barony. These were men of some local prominence but not men that made much impact on the political life of the county. No member of the Reynolds family is recorded holding office in Dublin or Kildare in the fifteenth century. The only other member of the England family to hold office was Walter England of Cullinstown (bar. Nethercross), collector in the crosslands of Lusk in 1498.¹⁷² Such an office is by no means an indication of high status. Robert England had a grant of the office of chief serjeant during good behaviour 'rendering annually the true value'.¹⁷³ The phrasing of the grant suggests that Robert acquired the office as an investment rather than a reward. On this occasion at least the royal administration would appear to have used the grant of the office to secure revenue rather than for the purposes of patronage.

Philip Woodlock, in contrast, came from a moderately prominent Dublin gentry family. John Woodlock served as sheriff of Dublin at some point before 1292, and again in 1295 and 1302.¹⁷⁴ He received payments from the Irish exchequer as constable of Dublin castle in 1294-1295 and again, apparently quite briefly, in 1304.¹⁷⁵ He is probably identical with the John Woodlock who served as a juror in an inquisition into the value of the manor of Malahide in 1291.¹⁷⁶ A John Woodlock was very busily acquiring land in the archiepiscopal manor of Finglas in the middle years of the thirteenth century; his descendant Thomas held these combined parcels of land as a single carucate from the archbishop in 1326.¹⁷⁷ Another John, presumably Thomas's son, identified as John Woodlock of Keppoke (Cappoge, bar. Castlecock), held just over a carucate of the manor of Finglas around 1360.¹⁷⁸ John was a witness, with the dean of St Patrick's and others,

¹⁷⁰ Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, iii, p. 130; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Eliz., no. 231.

¹⁷¹ RC 8/34, p. 348.

¹⁷² RC 8/43, p. 94.

¹⁷³ RC 8/40, p. 222.

¹⁷⁴ Foley, 'Sheriffs of Dublin', pp. 281-2; *CDI*, iii, no. 1148; iv, no. 264; v, no. 58; *Cal. Justiciary Rolls Ireland, 1295-1303*, pp. 8, 66, 409.

¹⁷⁵ *Ir. Exch. Payments*, pp. 133, 589.

¹⁷⁶ *Inquisitions and extents*, no. 83.

¹⁷⁷ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 126, 173-5.

¹⁷⁸ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 212-13.

to a deed of Walter de Bodenham quitclaiming lands in Lusk to Archbishop Fulk de Sandford, and with the precentor of St. Patrick's to a grant to the same Archbishop of the lands of the heiresses of Ives of Dunlavin in Ballyrothegane (possibly Roganstown in bar. Nethercross, or an unidentified member of the manor of Ballymore).¹⁷⁹ Laurence Woodlock was one of the men of the county whom the sheriff of Dublin was to summon in his own right to attend a great council in 1372.¹⁸⁰ Laurence was one of the twenty electors, 'better magnates and commons of the county' who elected Nicholas Howth and Richard White to represent the county at Westminster in 1376.¹⁸¹ While many of his fellow electors had served as sheriff of the county, but there is no evidence that Laurence held the office. John Woodlock was knight of the shire and assessor of subsidy for county Dublin in 1421.¹⁸² Another John Woodlock, described as of Blanchardstown, was sheriff of the county in c. 1475.¹⁸³

It is possible that, as suggested for the Smith family, above, they pursued careers in the archiepiscopal service as well as royal service. John Woodlock, perhaps the knight of the shire of 1421 or the sheriff of c. 1475, described as 'a pleader and one of the constables' (*narrator et unus Constabulariorum*) of Archbishop Richard Talbot was despatched by that prelate to demand delivery of the great seal of Ireland in 1442.¹⁸⁴ It has already been observed in relation to William Smith that constable, bailiff, provost and serjeant were alternative terms for the same office. This being the case it is very probable that John was a bailiff or serjeant of an archiepiscopal manor. On the evidence of the family's landholding, this was more than likely the manor of Finglas.

A hesitant identification of further elements of the Woodlock patrimony might be made by comparing the inquisitions which laid out the landed possessions of Catherine Owen (d. 1517) and her daughter Rose Woodlock.¹⁸⁵ While it is clear that the greater part of Rose's possessions came to her from her mother's side of the family,

¹⁷⁹ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 133, 139-41, 191, 194.

¹⁸⁰ CIRCLE, Cl. 46 Edw. III, no. 122.

¹⁸¹ Foley, 'Sheriffs of Dublin', p. 276.

¹⁸² Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 179-80.

¹⁸³ NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 46.

¹⁸⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 21 Hen. VI, no. 1; *Proc. King's Co. in Ireland*, appendix, pp. 298-9.

¹⁸⁵ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, nos. 4, 22.

some of her possessions, such as lands in Mitchelstown and Cappoge, and a rent from lands in Kilmartin, do not appear in her mother's inquisition and almost certainly represent her paternal inheritance. Her possession of Cappoge strongly suggests a connection to the Woodlocks of fourteenth-century Dublin. The connection is rendered the more certain by the fact that she held eight messuages and 208 acres of the archiepiscopal manor of Finglas, almost certainly containing the land that John and Thomas Woodlock had held in the manor. The Christian name of Rose's father is not provided in either inquisition, but he was probably Thomas Woodlock, who had been collector of subsidy in Castleknock in 1496 and 1498.¹⁸⁶ It is likely that Philip, the chief serjeant of 1484, was a younger son or other near relative. Catherine Owen held very significant lands in the barony of Newcastle, including lands in Rathcoole, Kilmactawley, Coolmine held of the royal manor of Newcastle Lyons and the neighbouring townland of Blundelstown held of the king in chief.¹⁸⁷

Subserjeants of Meath

Between 1399 and 1510, 17 individuals are named as subserjeant in Meath, some of whom are attested on more than one occasion. Ten baronies are represented, in addition to the cross of Meath which had its own subserjeants. The subserjeants are overwhelmingly concentrated in the east of the county. Five individual subserjeants are named for each of the two easternmost baronies, Dulleek and Skreen.¹⁸⁸ These are the only baronies for which the names of more than two subserjeants survive. No subserjeants are named for the baronies of what is now Westmeath, or for the baronies of Fore or Moyfenrath, at the northwestern and southwestern extremes of modern Co. Meath. Almost without exception the names of these officers survive because they were entered on the memoranda rolls of the exchequer. Unlike the sheriffs and escheators, the names of subserjeants were not entered on the memoranda rolls as a matter of course. The great majority of the subserjeants named feature on the memoranda rolls

¹⁸⁶ BL Royal MS 18C xiv, ff. 42, 55v; RC 8/43, p. 106; RC 8/43, pp. 100, 216; Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, vi, pp. 38-9.

¹⁸⁷ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 4; Griffith proposes that 'Renylyston' represents some or all of Coolmine – *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Index of persons and places, 'Rendweliston', p. 715; see also *Ibid.*, Eliz., no. 33

¹⁸⁸ Both figures include John Abbot Belle, subserjeant in Dulleek in 1411-12 and in Skreen the following year.

because they were accused of acts of contempt, usually in the context of wrongful empanelment.¹⁸⁹ The only example of a subserjeant named as part of the course of his duties is William Murray, subserjeant of Skreen, who received an unspecified command from Christopher Cusack, sheriff of Meath, concerning the holding of an assise of *novel disseisin* in 1510.¹⁹⁰ No mention is made of a chief serjeant intermediate between Cusack and Murray on this occasion.

As in Dublin, the evidence for Meath suggests that the subserjeants were men of comparatively humble status. Few of those named as subserjeant in the fifteenth century shared the surname of more prominent officers. Walter Tuite, subserjeant of Skreen, made fine for an unspecified act of contempt in 1420. He may have been a relative of Robert Tuite, knight of the shire for the crosslands in that year, but there is no particularly compelling evidence to believe this to be the case.¹⁹¹ Robert Tuite's principal landholdings were in the barony of Duleek. Members of the Tuite family appear at varying levels of Meath society during our period. In 1508, for example, John Tuite of Kentstown, husbandman, was a party in a suit of debt against Patrick Tuite of Mooretown, gentleman.¹⁹² No Tuites are listed among the gentry of Skreen in 1511.¹⁹³

Richard Loghan, subserjeant of Duleek in c. 1485, may have been a relation of John Loghlan, coroner of the county in 1466. Once more, there is little evidence to connect the men beyond the similarity of their surnames; which, unlike Tuite, at least have the virtue of rarity. John Loghlan is described as being of Newtown Trim, and had no known connection to Duleek. As in Dublin, the majority of those named as subserjeant in Meath were the only members of their families to hold office in the county, or come from families that held no office more prominent than that of collector of subsidies of a barony. Similarly, few subserjeants share the surname of families that appeared on Cusack's list of the gentry of Meath in 1511. Laurence Paris, subserjeant in Navan in 1410, and William Large, subserjeant of Skreen and subsequently of the cross

¹⁸⁹ Examples include Robert Mulghan and Roger Chambers, subserjeants of Duleek, in 1414, and William Large, subserjeant of Skreen in 1415 – RC 8/34, pp. 257-60; RC 8/37, pp. 157-61.

¹⁹⁰ TCD MS 594, f. 7.

¹⁹¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 138.

¹⁹² RC 8/43, p. 268.

¹⁹³ TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-26; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 171.

of Meath, were two who did; but in both cases the families are listed in different baronies to the ones in which they held office (Paris in Deece, Large in Navan).¹⁹⁴

There was a pronounced overlap between the subserjeants and collectors of subsidy. This is unsurprising given that the two were required to carry out essentially very similar tasks: the physical collection of monies due to the king and the sequestration of livestock to ensure cooperation. In Louth, the collectors appointed for the three subsidies granted to the earl of Ormond in 1420-1421 included the serjeants of the baronies in question.¹⁹⁵ Those named in Meath included John Abbot Belle, collector in Skreen, who had been subserjeant of the same barony in 1414 and may well still have been in that office in 1420. He was collector for Skreen again in 1423.¹⁹⁶ Thomas Mulghan, collector in Duleek in 1423, was almost certainly a relative of Robert Mulghan, subserjeant of the same barony in 1414 and 1416.¹⁹⁷

Irish subserjeants

A striking feature of the list of subserjeants of Meath baronies is the presence among them of men with unmistakably Irish names. In Dublin, Henry Kerran is the only man with an apparently Irish name among the known subserjeants or serjeants of Dublin, but he would appear to have come from a family that was functionally English. The same cannot be said with confidence of Gilcrist Oferroll (Giolla Chríost Ua Fearghail), subserjeant of Lune in 1417 and 1420, who had both an Irish first name and the surname of an often-hostile Irish sept that bordered the county.¹⁹⁸ Other men with Irish or potentially Irish surnames who held the office included Thomas Brennan, subserjeant of Ratoath in 1466, Richard Loghan, Robert Mulghan, and William Murray. These men, who served in the more settled eastern baronies and bore forenames that were English or at least not obviously Irish, approximate more to the model of Henry Kerran: men from families that were ultimately of Gaelic origin, but which had long been part of the English society of Meath. The Betagh family of Moynalty provide an example of such a

¹⁹⁴ TCD MS 594, f. 26v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 171-2.

¹⁹⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 134-5, 151-2, 177-8.

¹⁹⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 118.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 118.

¹⁹⁸ RC 8/38, pp. 98-100.

family at the higher levels of county office and county society.¹⁹⁹ Nonetheless, men with the Mulghan surname were paying for charters of English liberty as late as 1407; while it is perhaps reasonable to speculate whether Irish was the first language of John Gaffney, Robert Loghan's *famulus* who was assaulted while making an arrest in c. 1485.²⁰⁰ It is noteworthy also that three of the four subserjeants named for the second half of the fifteenth century bear surnames of Irish origin, which matches the evidence for increasing numbers of Gaelic surnames among the collectors of subsidies in Dublin (and to a lesser extent in Meath) in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

Terms of office

None of the known subserjeants of Dublin appear more than once in that office, nor do they appear in multiple baronies. This is not the case for Meath. The large number of fines of subserjeants of Meath that appear on the memoranda rolls from the reign of Henry V show the same men in office over the course of several years. William Large, who was subserjeant of Skreen in 1415, subsequently served as subserjeant of the cross of Meath from 1418 to 1422. Gilcrist Oferoll was subserjeant in 1417 and still in office three years later, while Roger Chambers, Robert Mulghan, and Thomas Cook were each subserjeant for at least three years. The office of subserjeant was not an elective position or one filled annually. The men who held the office were not significant landholders who could live off their rents; holding the office was, in all likelihood, their occupation and their main source of income. There is little direct evidence for the value of their lands. The lands of James Mulghan in Co. Meath (barony unspecified) were valued at the paltry sum of 3s yearly in 1444; this may provide an indication.²⁰¹ As such lengthy periods of service were likely the rule. In England the equivalent offices were the preserve of 'semi-specialised careerists', most of whom were yeomen or of very petty gentry status.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 25-8; CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, nos. 277, 280; NLI, MS 761, p. 264; BL Royal MS 18 C xiv, ff. 36, 41v; RC 8/43, p. 92; TCD MS 594, f. 27v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 92, 173.

²⁰⁰ RC 8/43, p. 33.

²⁰¹ Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings of the privy council*, v, p. 332.

²⁰² Harriss, *Shaping the nation*, p. 166; Clayton, *Administration of Chester*, p. 189.

Our subserjeants are concentrated in the years of the reign of Henry V, with a 44-year gap between the last appearance of William Large in office and the next appearance of a subserjeant in the county. If we had more evidence for the office from the reign of Henry VI it is likely that it would confirm this trend of long terms of service. Although none of the Dublin subserjeants make more than one appearance in the office, it is likely that the evidence for long terms of service in Meath are equally reflective of patterns in Dublin obscured by the paucity of records. Some Meath subserjeants held in more than one barony of the county. John Abbot Belle was subserjeant in the barony of Duleek in 1412 and in the neighbouring barony of Skreen two years later. It is possible that he held both concurrently. William Lange, as we have seen, was subserjeant in Skreen before being promoted (?) to the office of subserjeant of the crosslands. Similar patterns can be seen in Louth. John Alton was serjeant of the two baronies of Louth and Ferrard concurrently in 1421.²⁰³ In contrast, there is no evidence of subserjeants holding office in more than one barony in Dublin.

Conclusion

The evidence for the office of serjeant in fifteenth-century Dublin and Meath serves to confirm the validity of Otway-Ruthven's work on the serjeants of thirteenth-century Ireland for this period in almost all respects. The powers and role of the fifteenth-century serjeants, where they appear, are those of the serjeants of earlier centuries, and of the English hundred bailiff. No appointment of a serjeant is recorded for fifteenth-century Dublin or Meath to clarify where the power to appoint these officers lay. There is no evidence to provide a convincing link between the Cruises or the Bacons and the majority of those who served as their subserjeants. However, the fact William Cruise, subserjeant of Coolock in 1406, and John Exeter, subserjeant of the same sixty years later, were closely related to the chief serjeants strongly implies that the appointment of serjeants of baronies was vested in the chief serjeants. The relationship between Richard Delaharne and John Walsh in the barony of Newcastle supports this conclusion. Once more, this accords with Otway-Ruthven's findings from the earlier centuries of the lordship. The one regard in which the evidence differs with that

²⁰³ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 177-8.

presented by Otway-Ruthven is in the organisation of the serjeanty. It is clear that in fifteenth-century Dublin there were two, and not three, levels of serjeant: the chief serjeant and his subserjeants. In Meath a three-level hierarchy may have been in existence at least on occasion during the fifteenth century; but in this case the pyramid consisted of a (usually absentee) chief serjeant, one or more deputy chief serjeants, likely each responsible for a defined subsection of the liberty or county, and the subserjeants of the baronies.

In the fifteenth century, as in the earlier centuries of the lordship, there was a clear difference in status between the chief serjeants and their subordinates. The Cruises of Naul were among the leading gentry families of the county, prominent as landholders and as office-holders, as were the Bacon family in the liberty of Meath. In contrast, their subserjeants, with the exception of William Cruise and John Exeter, were clearly of humble estate, with most coming from families that not only did not hold other office but are difficult to trace in any regard. There is no evidence to suggest that the families of Birgham, Bartholomew and Gurveys, Delaharne, Russell or Rede were part of the Dublin gentry, nor that John Abbot Bele, William Large, John Bydyl and (especially) Gilchrist Oferoll were part of the gentry of Meath.

The most prominent member of the Gurveys family before the fifteenth century was Richard, the reeve of the royal manor of Saggart. Robert's position is very probably indicative of the general social status of the serjeants. Reeves were men of some standing in their communities, but not members of the gentry. Some or all of the subserjeants of fifteenth-century Dublin and Meath are likely to have come from this class of yeoman farmer. William Russell certainly bore the addition of yeoman. The reference to Robert Grevys 'yeoman' and the mixed social status of the urban members of the Bartholomew family – merchant, town clerk and mason – together with the inclusion of subserjeants Gurveys and Bartholomew among Thomas Field's yeoman assistants in 1444, suggest that these families were of comparatively humble status, entirely in line with Otway-Ruthven's remarks on the lesser serjeants. The place of John Gurveys among the electors of County Dublin in 1375 in no way contradicts this conclusion, as we have seen. The general association between the subserjeants and the families that provided manorial reeves is strengthened by the fact that John Long, Henry

Kissok's subserjeant in 1306, was a former reeve of Saggart, serving shortly before or shortly after Richard Gurveys.²⁰⁴ It seems certain that these men acquired their position through a connection to the chief serjeant – and a willingness to pay the farm of their office – rather than to their social position or landed possessions in the bailiwick. The archiepiscopal bailiffs appear to have been of similar status. The landholdings of the Smith family, while not apparently those of a gentry family, were sufficient for them to provide a collector of subsidy, as did the Russell family. In contrast, John Woodlock, who served as a constable of the archbishop, came from a family with undeniable gentry credentials. It should be remembered however that the archiepiscopal bailiffs – by whatever title they served – performed the duties of the (higher-status) coroners in addition to those of a serjeant. The slightly anomalous chief serjeants of Newcastle included men from families that provided higher-status officers of the county, notably the Woodlocks, who provided a sheriff and knight of the shire in the fifteenth century. Yet they too were in general rather obscure individuals. Philip Woodlock did not himself hold office and was at best the younger son of a gentry family. Thomas Denne and Robert England make no other appearance in the record. Both came from families long-present in the barony of Newcastle but which had not played a role in the government of the county. It would appear that the chief serjeanty of Newcastle was in this period generally the preserve of the lesser (or 'parish') gentry of the barony itself.

²⁰⁴ Foley, *Royal manors*, pp. 82-3; *RDKPRI*, xxxvi, p. 42.

Chapter six: The undersheriff and sheriff's staff

Concrete details concerning the size, makeup and function of the sheriff's staff in fifteenth-century Ireland are scarce. On several occasions a number of men of varying social status are named in association with a serving or former sheriff. Most commonly these references take the form of commissions to a former sheriff and his associates, often including family members of the sheriff, to levy the outstanding debts of his office.¹ A commission of 1444 to Thomas Field, former sheriff of Dublin, provides a particularly good example. Eleven others were named alongside Thomas on the commission to levy the debts of his former office.² Of these, only two, the subserjeants of Balrothery and Castleknock, are accorded a specific office.³ However it is likely that at least some of the others named were associated with Field as sheriff. Thomas Duff, clerk, is named immediately after Field in the commission. As we shall see, Thomas frequently reappears in the service of the sheriffs of Dublin, both as an attorney and on at least one occasion as undersheriff. It is highly likely that he performed at least one of these functions for Thomas Field. John Donoghry, who is also accorded the title of clerk, does not appear elsewhere in the record. His inclusion in the commission was presumably linked to the literacy and numeracy implied by his title, and men with such skills were a necessary part of the sheriff's staff. As we shall see, many of those named as undersheriff in this period bear the title of clerk.

The role of the others named to the commission is more obscure. All but one bear the title of yeoman, and most do not make any other appearance in the record. However there is some evidence that these men are representative of a class of individuals and families that served the royal government at a level that is usually invisible. William Russell, for example, reappears again in 1472, when he was subserjeant of the barony of Balrothery.⁴ He and Robert Russell, yeoman, who was also

¹ See for example CIRCLE, Cl. 2 Hen. V, nos. 3, 14; Pat. 22 Hen. VI, no. 3; NAI, m. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 58; RC 8/36, pp. 37-9; RC 8/37, pp. 13-14; RC 8/38, pp. 18-19, 23-4; RC 8/40, pp. 257-8; RC 8/41, pp. 35-9, 213-17; RC 8/43, pp. 168, 228-9, 273.

² NAI, m. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 58; CIRCLE, Pat. 22 Hen. VI, no. 3.

³ See above, pp. 207-8.

⁴ RC 8/41, pp. 337-8, 340, 343. He is almost certainly the William Russell of Lusk who owed 5s to Robert Lanysdall in 1476 – *Wills and inventories*, pp. 136-7.

appointed to the commission, came from a family that provided several collectors of subsidies in Newcastle, Castleknock, and Lusk in the late fifteenth century, and who appear to have hovered on the indistinct border between the wealthy yeoman and the poor gentleman.⁵ Robert Alger's only other appearance in the record is a pardon to him for unspecified treasons 'etc.' in 1451; but he came from a family that had provided collectors in the crosslands of Swords for the two general subsidies of 1420.⁶ Thomas Clement, too, appears again in the service of the sheriff of the county. In 1449 John Pursell, chaplain, petitioned the deputy lieutenant for a pardon of the outlawry promulgated against him for his failure to appear before the justices of the common bench when summoned. Pursell asserted that he had not been duly warned, despite the return of sheriff Christopher St Laurence that he had warned Pursell 'at Molahyde aforsaide... by John [blank], Thomas Clement, Thomas Donnoghir and Thomas Boys.'⁷ Clement thus appears in the service of two different sheriffs over the course of several years. On neither occasion is he accorded a particular office, but it is clear that he made something of a career as a servant of the sheriffs of Dublin. Thomas Donnoghir, who appeared alongside him on this occasion, was surely a near relative of John Donoghry, the clerk assigned to help levy Field's debts in 1444 – the name is far from a common one in the records of fifteenth-century Dublin. Pursell's petition provides evidence of the nature of the work carried out by the yeomen of the sheriff's staff; in this case, the physical task of summoning parties involved in a suit. Other men may have been analogous to John Gaffney, the servant (*famulus*) of Richard Loghan, subserjeant of the barony of Duleek, who arrested Teig More of Corbally to answer a plea of debt in 1486.⁸ The role and status of William Porter, gentleman, who was appointed to the 1444 commission, is more difficult to determine. He came from a family whose interests were apparently restricted to the immediate vicinity of their lands in west county Dublin. Indeed, the career of Richard Porter, likely William's son, is almost a model for the parish gentry. His most prominent position in the county was as one of the electors of Peter

⁵ See below, pp. 283-4.

⁶ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 134, 162.

⁷ NAI GO MS 192, pp. 392-3. A slightly corrupt version of the same can be found at CIRCLE, Cl. 27 Hen. VI, no. 3.

⁸ NAI, RC 8/43, p. 33.

Travers as sheriff in 1465.⁹ His closest associates were other Castleknock landholders, notably Richard Tyrell of Powerstown. Both Tyrell and Porter held their lands as tenants of the lords of Castleknock.¹⁰ They were appointed together as supervisors of the workmen building a tower for the defence of the bridge at Lucan in 1455.¹¹ Both were members of the fraternity of St Mary in the parish church of Mulhuddart (bar. Castleknock), as was Peter Fitzrery, long-time coroner of the county.¹² Porter and Tyrell were also connected by marriage. An inventory of the goods of Richard Porter and his wife, Rose Tyrell, made in December 1472, gives the impression of a wealthy farming family but not one that was living in luxury.¹³ Porter's debtors included the serving sheriff of the county, Thomas Sherlock, as well as a future sheriff, Thomas Luttrell of Luttrellstown. It is possible, but of course far from certain, that the Robert Russell who appears among Porter's debtors is the same man who appeared on the commission to levy Field's debts in 1444.¹⁴ William Porter thus came from a family that were certainly among the gentry of the county, although their interests appear to have been restricted to their immediate vicinity. He was thus clearly of higher status than the others appointed to the 1444 commission, with the exception of Field himself. There is no evidence, beyond his presence on the commission, to connect him to Field; but such a connection must have existed.

While men such as Thomas Clement and Thomas Duff appear to have served under different sheriffs, others may have had a personal connection to the men they served. John Barnewall of Drimnagh served as sheriff on several occasions between 1460 and 1470. He had commissions to levy the debts of his former office in January 1467 and December 1470.¹⁵ On both occasions the four-man commission included Barnewall and a relative (Reginald Barnewall, gentleman, in 1467, and Nicholas

⁹ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5.

¹⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. IV, no. 37; *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, nos. 6-8; Jas. I, no. 67; *Civil survey*, vii, p. 244.

¹¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 402-5.

¹² Richard Porter was master of the fraternity of St Mary in the parish church of Mulhuddart (bar. Castleknock); wardens of the fraternity included Richard Tyrell and Peter Fitzrery, longtime coroner of the county – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 676-9; 850-3; see above, pp. 119-22.

¹³ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 41-5. In 1641 there was a 'small castle', presumably a tower house, at Porterstown – *Civil survey*, vii, p. 244.

¹⁴ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 42-3.

¹⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 37-9; 214.

Barnewall, gentleman, in 1470). David Finnan, yeoman, was appointed to the 1467 commission, while Maurice Walsh, yeoman, was on that of 1470. The only man to feature on both commissions (other than John Barnewall himself) was Richard Tipper, described as a yeoman in 1467 and as a clerk in 1470. Tipper does not otherwise appear in the record; it is possible that he was related to the family of Tipperstown (bar. Salt, co. Kildare). Patrick Tipper of Tipperstown was escheator of Kildare in 1470 and coroner in 1479.¹⁶ Richard does not appear on the commission issued on the same day in January 1467 to Margaret, widow of Sir Robert Burnell, and her sons, to levy the debts of Sir Robert, late sheriff of Dublin.¹⁷ The implication is that he was in the service of John Barnewall rather than in the service of the sheriff's office.

The commission to the family of Robert Burnell to alluded to above included John and Edward Burnell and Margaret Holywood, Burnell's widow, as his executors, as well as six men accorded the title of yeoman. It seems not unlikely that these men were associated with Sir Robert in the execution of his duties, perhaps in a very informal fashion. This seems especially likely in the case of the first named, Nicholas Walsh, yeoman, 'who mainprised to account to us for Robert's debts and accounts'. Some seven years earlier Richard Ward, John Kerlan (O'Carolan?) and John Foster, all of Swords, had petitioned the Irish parliament for pardon of their indictment for taking 17 pecks of salt. They pleaded that they had taken the salt by command of Sir Robert Burnell, then sheriff, 'by [his] command and authority... and as his servants'.¹⁸ None of these men appear on the 1466 commission. As the action in question took place entirely in Swords, it is possible that their role as servants of the sheriff was restricted to their immediate locality. The implication of this is that Burnell, and perhaps every sheriff, could draw on a number of men across the county to carry out their orders. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the study of the office in Meath, as we shall see. Richard Ward and John Kerlan would appear to have been men of fairly humble status, but John Foster shares the surname of a minor gentry family from the area.¹⁹

¹⁶ RC 8/41, p. 212; Ellis (ed.), 'Plea roll of 19 Edw. IV', p. 30.

¹⁷ RC 8/41, pp. 35-7.

¹⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 608-11.

¹⁹ William Foster of Killeek (now bar. Nethercross, formerly bar. Coolock), gentleman, was an elector of Robert Bath of Lanestown and Peter Travers as sheriffs of Dublin, c. 1462 and 1465, and of Peter Fitzrery and Henry Golding as coroners in 1485; he served on a commission with powers to levy

Undersheriffs of Dublin

Seven individuals are specifically named as undersheriff or deputy sheriff of county Dublin in the period 1399 to 1513. Three of these men – John Barrett, Andrew Tyrell, and John Wallingford – are addressed as clerk at the time that they were undersheriff, while three others – Thomas Duff, Nicholas Fitzlyons and John Luttrell – are given the title elsewhere.²⁰ These men presumably owed their position at least in part to their administrative skills. The name of Michael Travers, gentleman, is preserved only by the failure of the normal machinery of justice to resolve a case of debt, resulting in its referral to the Irish parliament in 1460.²¹ There is no reason to believe that Michael Travers was literate - he was given the status title of gentleman rather than clerk – although it is not impossible; the recorders of the city of Dublin, who were of necessity literate, were accorded the title of gentleman in the second half of the century, and were apparently of higher status than clerks; while Michael came from a family that provided several members of the royal administration.²²

Michael's position as undersheriff is not the only example of the family holding office in fifteenth-century Dublin. Peter Travers, Michael's heir, was elected sheriff of the county in 1465, and was one of those appointed to raise an armed force for the protection of the county; he had legal training and served as king's serjeant-at-law.²³ Michael himself was appointed alongside many of the leading men of the county to supervise the fortification of crossing-points on the river Liffey in 1455, although he was apparently the least prominent of those appointed to this commission.²⁴ Richard Travers of Hackettstown, probably a near relation, was among Peter's electors as sheriff.²⁵ Men with the same surname also appear in office in the western baronies of county Meath,

subsidies in Dublin alongside John son of Robert Burnell and others in 1473 – RC 8/41, pp. 39-40, 61-5; RC 8/43, p. 9; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 138-9.

²⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, 120; NAI, M.2675 (Delafield MS), pp. 58, 64; RC 8/41, pp. 32, 99, 100, 109, 404-5; RC 8/43, p. 72.

²¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 704-7, 754-7.

²² CARD, i, pp. 315, 376, 380, 393; for the relative status of recorder and clerk, see CARD, i, p. 378.

²³ *Stat. Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 344-7; RC 8/41, pp. 59-65. Michael Travers of Courtlough, whose will was drawn up in October 1475, is a different individual from the same family – *Wills and inventories*, pp. 116-18; cf. *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 90-3.

²⁴ *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 314-5.

²⁵ RC 8/41, p. 119.

albeit at the comparatively humble level of collector of subsidies.²⁶ The family were descended from John Travers, a nephew of the thirteenth-century justiciar Geoffrey de Marisco.²⁷ At the end of the thirteenth century Geoffrey Travers had added to his family possessions in north county Dublin and the barony of Navan in Meath the important west Dublin manor of Ward through his marriage to Joan le Bank.²⁸ His namesake and heir, Geoffrey son of John Travers, and Geoffrey the younger's son John received wages for serving with seven and two hobelars respectively during Thomas Rokeby's campaign against Ua Briain in 1356, while Geoffrey son of John was among the leading men of the lordship who received a personal summons to a great council in 1374.²⁹ The Gilbert Travers who served as sheriff of the county in or around 1337 was presumably a relation.³⁰ The descent of the family into relative obscurity was a result of a failure in the male line in the early years of the fifteenth century.³¹

The manors of Ward and Baldongan passed from the Travers family² to the Berminghams, and through them, in the early sixteenth century, to the St Laurences of Howth.³² The Travers did not disappear as landholders in Dublin, however. Walter Travers of Ballykea (par. Lusk), Co. Dublin, appears as a mainpernor in a grant of 1421; the lands, which adjoin Baldongan, were still in the possession of this branch of the family in 1641.³³ Walter held significant lands in north county Dublin, including Ballykea, of the earl of Ormond, but he also held sixty acres in Courtlough of Michael Travers 'by fealty and service of suit of court.'³⁴ Courtlough had been a possession of the main line of the family in the late fourteenth century, so it is clear that despite the loss of Baldongan and Ward the family had managed to retain at least some portion of their north Dublin estates, presumably entailed in tail-male.³⁵ In 1641 William Travers of Ballykea was the proprietor of Courtlough, as well as Loughbarn, which had been

²⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 221, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 118.

²⁷ *Cal. Docs. Ireland*, i, p. 314 no. 2119; Eric St. John Brooks, 'The Family of Marisco', *J.R.S.A.I.*, Seventh Series, ii, No. 1 (Jun. 30, 1932), pp. 50-74, pp. 69-70.

²⁸ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Ric. II, no. 251; Ball, *History of county Dublin*, vi, pp. 50-1.

²⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 30 Edw. III, no. 4; Cl. 48 Edw. III, no. 122.

³⁰ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', p. 284.

³¹ Ball, *History of county Dublin*, vi, pp. 50-1.

³² *Ibid.*, v, p. 60.

³³ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. V, no. 3; *Civil survey*, vii, p. 59.

³⁴ *Ormond deeds*, iii, no. 165.

³⁵ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Ric. II, no. 251.

associated with the manor of Ward in a grant of custody of 1421.³⁶ Michael and Peter Travers were probably descended from a line of the family based at Hacketstown (par. Lusk).³⁷ They maintained the family's claim to Baldongan and Ward, and were able to make good their claim when Richard Bermingham opposed Richard, duke of York, in 1460, although the restoration proved temporary.³⁸ The family were clearly of some importance in Dublin and their landholdings were not insignificant. What of the other undersheriffs of Dublin?

Andrew Tyrell was apparently Michael's immediate successor. He was sworn into office as undersheriff of Thomas Field in October 1449.³⁹ He reappears two years later as deputy to sheriff Robert Bath, when he carried out an extent of the lands of Piers Coolock, forfeit for his debts to Michael Travers, late undersheriff.⁴⁰ There does not appear to be any significance attached to the varying use of undersheriff and deputy sheriff to describe Tyrell and Travers. There is no clear division between the duties carried out by Michael Travers (*southviscount* in the parliamentary French of the statute rolls), enforcing the attendance of those summoned to court, and Andrew (*depute* to the sheriff in the same source). Both were carrying out the humdrum duties of the sheriff's office. The fluidity of terms is in line with the general tenor of the office as it existed in England. Here, the undersheriff was a largely informal position, appointed by the sheriffs at their own discretion and not by the royal government.⁴¹ Niceties of title were thus unimportant.

The informal nature of the office no doubt explains the scarcity of names of undersheriffs and other members of the sheriff's staff. As they were not royal appointees, their appointments did not appear on the rolls of the Irish chancery. The only reference to an undersheriff of Dublin among the surviving chancery material from the fifteenth century is a pardon to John Barrett, undersheriff of Dublin, for 'all manner

³⁶ *Civil survey*, vii, pp. 9, 11. CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. V, no. 95.

³⁷ CIRCLE, Cl. 51 Edw. III, no. 99; Pat. 12 Ric. II, no. 169; Pat. 2 Hen. IV, no. 22; NAI, Ferguson coll., ii, f. 137; NAI, Ferguson repertory, ii, p. 50; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 90-3.

³⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 92-3, 194-7, 562-3; NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 236; see above, pp. 15, 67-9.

³⁹ NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 64.

⁴⁰ *Stat. Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 704-7.

⁴¹ M. L. Holford, 'Undersheriffs, the state and local society c. 1300-1340: A preliminary survey' in C. Given-Wilson, A. Kettle and L. Scales (eds.), *War, government and aristocracy in the British Isles, c.1150-1500: Essays in honour of Michael Prestwich* (Woodbridge, 2008) pp. 55-68.

of trespasses' in 1403; there is nothing to suggest that his office had any bearing on his unspecified crimes or on his pardon.⁴² Similarly, as they did not make proffers to the exchequer and were not directly responsible for the incomes of their office to the exchequer, they feature only very rarely in the exchequer records. John Barrett is recorded in the memoranda rolls of the exchequer as undersheriff to Walter Tyrell in 1416, but here he is explicitly sworn to account for the sheriff in a manner that suggests this was an extra duty and not the presumed role of an undersheriff. It is notable that he is also sworn in the same year to account for John Talbot, Walter's successor in office, as well as being nominated by Roger Walsh, bailiff of St. Sepulchre's, to answer to the king for the profits of that office.⁴³ These entries do no mention his role as undersheriff. John was given the title of 'clerk'. The literacy and numeracy this denoted no doubt made him useful as an undersheriff and no doubt also made him a useful representative at the exchequer for the sheriff and other officers.

It is possible that in the latter half of the fifteenth century the appointment of an undersheriff became a more formal process. Andrew Tyrell, John Wallingford and John Luttrell were sworn in as undersheriffs to Thomas Field (1449) James Blakeney (1466) and Thomas Fitzwilliam (1494) respectively.⁴⁴ Their swearing-in took place alongside that of the elected sheriffs and both were recorded together in the memoranda rolls of the exchequer. In these instances the position seems to have a more official stamp. Perhaps in the light of a well-documented reluctance to serve as sheriff on the part of the gentry of Dublin in the later fifteenth century this was a policy of spreading the load.⁴⁵ Such a suggestion can only be made cautiously. The appointments of Robert Bath of Cappoge and James Cruise of Naul in the same period are recorded in exactly the same manner but without mention of a deputy or undersheriff.⁴⁶ Robert was cited before the exchequer court because 'he had not an attorney to receive divers writs'.⁴⁷ As we shall see there was often an overlap between sheriff's attorney and

⁴² CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 120.

⁴³ RC 8/36, pp. 613, 640, 649, 654.

⁴⁴ NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 64; RC 8/41, p. 32; RC 8/43, p. 54.

⁴⁵ James Morrissey (ed.) *Statute rolls of the Parliament of Ireland: 12th & 13th to 21st & 22nd of King Edward IV*, ed. by James Morrissey (Dublin, 1939), p. 257

⁴⁶ RC 8/43, pp. 211, 224-5, 284.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

undersheriff. Robert would appear to have had neither, suggesting that the appointment of such a deputy was at the sheriff's discretion; but the fact that the exchequer might take issue with such an omission suggests perhaps that it had become standard practice.

Let us consider now the seven men who served as undersheriff or sheriff's deputy in Dublin in the fifteenth century. Michael Travers, as we have seen, was of a moderately prominent Dublin family which provided a sheriff of the county and was intermarried with other, more prominent shrieval families such as the Holywoods and Luttrells.⁴⁸ Andrew Tyrell, his successor, came from a family that had been among the most prominent landholders in the county, until they died out in the male line in the late fourteenth century. Their lordship of Castleknock was divided among the Burnells and Sargents.⁴⁹ A cadet branch based at Powerstown (par. Mulhuddart) appear to have restricted their interests to their immediate locality. There is no evidence to link Andrew Tyrell to this branch of the family. Walter Tyrell, for whom John Barrett was undersheriff in 1416, played a prominent part in county office in the first three decades of the century, serving on several occasions as sheriff and as a commissioner of the peace.⁵⁰ He does not appear to have been a member of the Powerstown branch of the family.⁵¹ He may have been a primarily urban figure. He served as a bailiff and a mayor of Dublin, and the Tyrell family that provided several mayors of the city in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries preserved a tradition of descent from him.⁵² This could certainly have been a cadet branch of Walter's progeny, but in the light of his urban role and the lack of evidence of county landholding there is no compelling reason to believe this was the case. Walter's relationship with John Barrett is striking. Like Walter, John held office in both the county and city of Dublin, serving as a bailiff of the city when Walter was mayor.⁵³ Like Walter, there is no evidence of John holding land in the county. A solitary reference is a pardon of 1420 to Walter, his wife Joan, and John Barrett for intrusion

⁴⁸ D'Alton, *History of county Dublin*, p. 569; *Stat. Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 562-3.

⁴⁹ CIRCLE, Cl. 4 Ric. II, no. 32; Smith, 'Patricians in medieval Dublin', p. 225.

⁵⁰ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 287-8; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace' pp. 12-13.

⁵¹ Powerstown was held by Gerald Tyrell in 1408, by which time Walter had already served the first of many years as sheriff – CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. IV, nos. 33, 37.

⁵² NLI, GO MS 48, f. 8; Bairéad, 'The bailiffs, provosts and sheriffs of the city of Dublin', pp. 288-9, 292-3, 296.

⁵³ Bairéad, 'The bailiffs, provosts and sheriffs of the city of Dublin', p. 289.

into lands in the north county Dublin which were Joan's dower. Barrett was clearly an administrator. As we have seen he served as attorney to account for several officers of Dublin; he also acted as seneschal of St. Mary's Abbey and of the archiepiscopal manor of St. Sepulchre, and as the king's receiver in Garristown.⁵⁴ These skills made him a valuable addition to the sheriff's staff. His personal connection to Walter Tyrell emphasizes the fact that the undersheriff was appointed at the sheriff's discretion and was thus likely to be well known to and trusted by the sheriff.

Thomas Duff was named as late undersheriff of county Dublin in 31 Hen. VI (1452-3), but his long association with the shrievalty predates this.⁵⁵ As we have seen, he was one of those appointed to a commission to levy the debts of office of Thomas Field in 1444. Before this, in 1436, Thomas had acted as attorney for Nicholas Holywood to render his account for the shrievalty at the exchequer.⁵⁶ He performed the same service for Robert Bath of Lanestown in c. 1448.⁵⁷ Thomas was clearly a career administrator whose skills made him an attractive representative for a series of sheriffs of county Dublin. He also acted as attorney to make return of writs for the coroners of county Kildare.⁵⁸ Thomas' origins are obscure. He may be identical with Thomas Dave of Dublin, plaintiff in a suit of debt sometime before June 1415.⁵⁹ Other Dublin undersheriffs from an urban background included John Barrett (certainly), Nicholas Fitzlyons (probably) and John Wallingford (possibly). Thomas was probably the founder of the family of Duffs who appear in the barony of Castleknock in late fifteenth century Dublin, one of whom would be elected sheriff of the county.⁶⁰

The next undersheriff to appear in the record is John Wallingford. Wallingford was certainly undersheriff to Peter Travers (1465) and to James Blakeney (1466). It is possible that he was also undersheriff to Sir Robert Burnell, who succeeded Travers, and whose death in office triggered the election of Blakeney.⁶¹ Wallingford was accused of

⁵⁴ CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 120; Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 17; Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 133; NAI, RC 8/34, p. 8

⁵⁵ NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 54.

⁵⁶ NLI MS 761, pp. 301-4.

⁵⁷ *Dowdall deeds*, no. 448.

⁵⁸ NAI, Ferguson collection, iii, f. 206.

⁵⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. V, nos. 29, 32.

⁶⁰ See above, pp. 82-6.

⁶¹ RC 8/41, pp. 32, 59-60. Wallingford was called 'lately undersheriff of Peter Travers' in May 1466, but it is possible that this simply indicates a change in the sheriff to whom he was accountable.

embezzling 20s of the profits of the king's court held before Travers at Newcastle in November 1465. It was further asserted that the sum appropriated by Wallingford during Peter's tenure of the office came to the total of £10.⁶² It is possible that this charge was politically motivated. It was brought by Philip Bermingham, the king's attorney, who was involved in a land dispute with Peter Travers, who would appear to have been the target of the action. After Travers' death in or shortly after December 1465 his electors were held responsible by the Irish exchequer for his debts. They were represented at the exchequer by John Wallingford.⁶³ Unusually, Wallingford was referred to as the clerk of Blakeney and the other electors, and not as their attorney. If this is not simply in error it may reflect his continued role in levying the debts of the office that now fell to the electors. As with John Barrett, Andrew Tyrell and Thomas Duff, it is likely that it was his skills as an administrator, rather than his position in the county, that made him a suitable assistant to James Blakeney. There is no evidence that he held land in the county, although in c. 1476 he paid rent for the earl of Ormond's demesne lands in Turvey.⁶⁴ His family had earlier been closely associated with the earls of Ormond. Edmund Wallingford, who was perhaps John's father, was appointed seneschal of the Ormond manors of Rush, Turvey and Balscadden in 1444 or 1445.⁶⁵ He and John Gough had been granted the office of second chamberlain of the exchequer in survivorship in January 1442 'for good service in Ireland.'⁶⁶ Wallingford and Gough were closely associated with James, fourth earl of Ormond, and it is clear that their appointment was part of Ormond's effort on his return to the chief governorship to replace men associated with the Talbot regime with his own.⁶⁷ Both men appeared among the servants of the earl in a deed concerning his manor of Aylesbury.⁶⁸ While John Gough and Thomas Abbey, another beneficiary of the Ormond regime, had earlier appeared in the service of the royal administration in Ireland, this appears to be the earliest surviving mention of Edmund Wallingford or the Wallingford family in

⁶² RC 8/41, pp. 59-60.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-5.

⁶⁴ *Ormond deeds*, iii, no. 245.

⁶⁵ NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 161.

⁶⁶ *CPR 1441-6*, pp. 145

⁶⁷ Matthew, *The governing of the Lancastrian lordship of Ireland*, p. 73; Griffith, 'Talbot-Ormond struggle', pp. 377-8.

⁶⁸ Matthew, *The governing of the Lancastrian lordship of Ireland*, p. 73, n. 65.

connection to the lordship of Ireland.⁶⁹ It seems not unlikely that service to the earl of Ormond in England was the conduit for the family's arrival in Ireland.

John Wallingford thus came from a family familiar with the machinery of the royal administration. He himself was clearly a man with legal and administrative experience. By 1480 he was serving as a clerk of the common bench, in addition to acting as an attorney in the same court.⁷⁰ Those he represented including the serving sheriff of the county, John Talbot, as well as at least one former sheriff of Louth; as we have seen there was a pronounced overlap between sheriff's attorneys and undersheriffs.⁷¹ James Blakeney and Peter Travers, the sheriffs for whom Wallingford acted as undersheriff, were also involved in the royal administration. Blakeney was the son of a chief justice of the common bench and had himself been clerk of the hanaper, chancellor of the exchequer, and escheator of Ireland.⁷² Travers was king's serjeant-at-law and also clerk of the rolls of chancery.⁷³ They may well have known Wallingford in that capacity.⁷⁴ It is also possible that Blakeney and Wallingford knew each other from the civic life of Dublin. A William Wallingford, yeoman, was one of the two toll-keepers of the city in 1460, and constable for Thomas Street in 1465.⁷⁵ Robert Burnell, for whom Wallingford may also have been undersheriff, was constable of the Quay in the latter year.⁷⁶ James Blakeney was a bailiff of the city in 1453.⁷⁷ Richard Wallingford was a freeman of the city in 1538.⁷⁸

In July 1472 the king's attorney told the exchequer court that Nicholas Fitzlyons, undersheriff of county Dublin had arrested Nicholas Weston 'by virtue of the king's mandate', providing a rare glimpse of the undersheriff in action.⁷⁹ The name of the

⁶⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. VI, no. 32; Cl. 7 Hen. VI, no. 17; Matthew, *The governing of the Lancastrian lordship of Ireland*, p. 73.

⁷⁰ Ellis (ed.), 'Plea roll 19 Edw. IV', pp. 29-59; *Christ Church deeds*, no. 1029.

⁷¹ Ellis (ed.), 'Plea roll 19 Edw. IV', pp. 40, 49, 59.

⁷² Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 174; CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. VI, no. 19; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 26; Cl. 14 Hen. VI, nos. 6, 9, 28, 44-6.

⁷³ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, pp. 181-2; CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Edw. IV, nos. 10-12; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 792-5.

⁷⁴ CIRCLE, Cl. 14 Hen. VI, no. 28.

⁷⁵ CARD, i, pp. 305, 321.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁷⁷ Bairéad, 'The bailiffs, provosts and sheriffs of the city of Dublin', p. 290.

⁷⁸ CARD, i, p. 503.

⁷⁹ RC 8/41, pp. 353-4. Weston, accused of breaking the arrest, was exonerated by the jury.

sheriff on whose behalf Fitzlyons made the arrest is not provided. Presumably Fitzlyons was undersheriff to Thomas Sherlock, sheriff at the beginning of the year, or John Burnell who succeeded him. Some months earlier Fitzlyons had acted as a pledge for William Russell, subserjeant of Balrothery, when he was accused of contempt. Russell's other pledge on this occasion was Nicholas Bath, gentleman, who would serve as sheriff of the county ten years later.⁸⁰ It is clear that Nicholas Fitzlyons was familiar with a number of the men involved in local office in Dublin. He was also familiar with the machinery of the royal administration. He was a clerk of the exchequer in 1466, when he received two payments of 20s as a reward.⁸¹ He had acted as an attorney in the exchequer court for John Field of Fieldstown, one of the electors of sheriff Robert Bath, and others.⁸² His familiarity with the workings of the exchequer, together with his clerical skills, meant he was highly qualified to serve as undersheriff. Nonetheless it is clear that his role as undersheriff was not restricted to those tasks which required administrative ability. Like John Barrett, Fitzlyons' origins appear to lie in Dublin city. Patrick Fitzlyons was mayor of Dublin in 1477, 1482 and 1494.⁸³ His business interests seem to have included money-lending.⁸⁴ Clement Fitzlyons, gentleman, was recorder of the city in 1495.⁸⁵ Like Nicholas, he pursued a career in the royal administration. He was deputy chief baron of the exchequer, king's attorney, and king's serjeant-at-law over the course of the reign of Henry VII.⁸⁶ He was served as bailiff of St Sepulchre's, the primary administrative office of the extensive lands held by the archbishops of Dublin.⁸⁷

Our final Dublin undersheriff is John Luttrell, who was appointed as Thomas Fitzwilliam's deputy in 1494.⁸⁸ The Luttrells of Luttrellstown were a prominent county Dublin family. Thomas Luttrell of Luttrellstown, esquire, was one of the electors of Robert Bath as sheriff of Dublin in 1462, and served as sheriff himself in 1484.⁸⁹ Richard

⁸⁰ RC 8/41, pp. 404-5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 17.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100 and *passim*.

⁸³ *CARD*, i, pp. 354, 362, 380.

⁸⁴ *Wills and inventories*, pp. 164-7; NAI, Ferguson repertory, iii, p. 22.

⁸⁵ *CARD*, i, p. 380.

⁸⁶ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 188; RC 8/43, pp. 171, 190-2; NLI MS 761, p. 326; CIRCLE, Pat. 15 Hen. VII, no. 3.

⁸⁷ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 252-3.

⁸⁸ RC 8/43, p. 54.

⁸⁹ RC 8/33, p. 392; RC 8/41, pp. 7-8.

Luttrell of Luttrellstown, gentleman, was escheator and clerk of the market in Dublin in 1498 and 1499 and served as sheriff in 1502.⁹⁰ As we have seen, the family was connected to the Travers by marriage. John Luttrell may have owed his position as undersheriff in part to the family's close connection to county government in the last decades of the fifteenth century. However, there is nothing definite to connect him to the main line of the family. It is more likely that he was chosen by Fitzwilliam because of his administrative skills and familiarity with the office. Luttrell was appointed as Fitzwilliam's deputy in Michaelmas term 1494. The following Easter term, Nicholas Holywood of Artane, esquire, Fitzwilliam's predecessor as sheriff, appointed John Luttrell, clerk, as his attorney to account for the issues of the county at the exchequer.⁹¹

Of the seven men whom we know to have served as undersheriff of the county in the period, six were certainly literate and numerate clerks and apparently owed their position to these skills. Michael Travers was a member of a moderately important north Dublin family, which had been involved in county governance even if it rarely held office in the county. While it is not impossible that he possessed some clerical know-how, there is no compelling evidence to believe that he did. The duties carried out by the undersheriffs, when they appear, were not apparently differentiated from those of the sheriff, nor were they particularly specialised. They simply carried out the normal duties of the sheriff on his behalf. Although a clerk, undersheriff Nicholas Fitzlyons was charged with making arrests. John Wallingford had a role to play in the county court, although the role is not specified. The accusation of embezzlement suggests that his task concerned the collection of monies levied in fines and amercements and/or recording and accounting for the same. It is likely that the everyday business of the undersheriff and the names of many of the men who held the office are generally disguised by the governmental sources, upon which we are reliant, under the recorded activity of a named sheriff with whom, as far as the exchequer was concerned, the buck stopped. While the duties of our six clerical undersheriffs are obscure, it seems reasonable to suggest that their literacy and numeracy were useful resources for the sheriff in the execution of the standard business of his office. The only duty of theirs that appears

⁹⁰ RC 8/43, pp. 98, 155, 219; NLI MS 761, p. 336.

⁹¹ RC 8/43, p. 72.

with anything approaching regularity in the exchequer records is that of accounting for the issues of the county during their sheriff's tenure. As we have seen with John Barrett, this was apparently an additional duty taken on by these men rather than an inherent part of the undersheriff's brief. Nonetheless it was very common. John Barrett and John Luttrell at the beginning and end of the fifteenth century were both sworn to provide this service not only for the sheriffs for whom they explicitly served as undersheriff but also for former sheriffs and others who were liable at the exchequer. This overlap invites question into continuity in the sheriff's staff. If John Luttrell was Thomas Fitzwilliam's undersheriff and at the same time sworn to account for Fitzwilliam's predecessor, might it be the case that he had also served as undersheriff for that predecessor? To account for him, he must have been familiar to some extent with at least the fiscal side of the shrievalty during Nicholas Holywood's tenure of the office. The clerical skills that made him a suitable deputy for Fitzwilliam surely would have been equally useful to Holywood. Indeed a man with previous experience as an undersheriff would surely have been even more suitable for the post. John Barrett, John Wallingford and Andrew Tyrell certainly served as undersheriffs of Dublin for more than one sheriff of the county, and it likely that the same was true for Thomas Duff. Clearly those with previous experience of the post could be an attractive proposition.

The consistency with which our clerical undersheriffs were appointed to account for their sheriffs leads one to consider whether the many other who were similarly appointed to account for sheriffs at the exchequer represent lost undersheriffs of the county. Again, the evidence is far from conclusive. It may be that some of these sheriff's attorneys were in fact undersheriffs. Perhaps the relative informality of the office meant it was not felt necessary for the clerks of the exchequer to record it. But it seems quite clear that in Ireland, as in England, there was no automatic link between sheriff's attorney and undersheriff.⁹² An example is provided by Barnaby Travers, who may have been a relative of Michael. Barnaby was an experienced administrator. He was a clerk of the exchequer in 1416 and was appointed chancellor of the green of the exchequer in 1420.⁹³ He served as attorney to Nicholas Taaffe, sheriff of the cross of Ulster, in 1416.

⁹² Holford, 'Undersheriffs, the state and local society', p. 57.

⁹³ RC 8/36, p. 684; CIRCLE, Pat. 8 Hen. V, no. 31.

But he also served as attorney in that year for Thomas Pensax and Richard Wellesley, who were seneschal of Meath and sheriff of Kildare.⁹⁴ It is hardly to be supposed that he was undersheriff for all of these men. Thus, while some sheriff's attorneys may have served as undersheriffs, the two were by no means synonymous.⁹⁵

It is clear then that the office of undersheriff was a comparatively informal and flexible one. Those who held the office were appointed personally by the sheriff and were responsible to him. They were selected according to the sheriff's requirements, and these clearly frequently included the ability to read, write, and hold one's own in the court of the exchequer. The social origins of the men involved varied, but were clearly of less importance than their clerical abilities. John Barrett and Nicholas Fitzlyons, and perhaps John Wallingford, appear to have come from families based in the city of Dublin. Andrew Tyrell and John Luttrell's relationship with the gentry families that bore these surnames is obscure; both would appear to owe their position to clerical skills rather than personal eminence. Of our seven undersheriffs, then, the only one of unambiguously gentry background is Michael Travers.

Undersheriffs, clerks of the seneschal, and sheriff's staff in Meath

Excluding the subserjeants, who were under the authority of the chief serjeant and thus at a slight remove from the sheriff's staff, and the sheriffs of the liberty, whom we have discussed above, sixteen individuals who served under the sheriffs, seneschals or sheriffs of the cross of Meath are named for the period 1399-1513. Seven were undersheriffs of the county, two were undersheriffs of the cross, another two were described as clerk of the sheriff, and six as clerks of the seneschal.⁹⁶ As with the shrievalty of Meath, the operation of the sheriff's staff was complicated by the existence of the liberty of Meath. However all three jurisdictions – the county, liberty and cross – required men with similar clerical and administrative abilities. The career of Maurice Avenall highlights this fact. Avenall served as undersheriff of the county in 1431 and as clerk of the seneschal in 1447. John Avenall, gentleman, who must have been a near

⁹⁴ RC 8/36, pp. 5, 585-6.

⁹⁵ RC 8/41, pp. 7-8.

⁹⁶ Maurice Avenall served as both undersheriff of the county and clerk of the seneschal.

relation, was clerk of the seneschal in 1472. Maurice is not recorded serving on the staff of the sheriffs of the cross, but he had been chief serjeant of the crosslands in 1425.⁹⁷ Other men who served in both the county and liberty administration included William Stakeboll and Stephen Palmer.

We have seen that the chief serjeants of Meath had permission to appoint deputies as an allowance for the sheer size of their bailiwick. The shrievalty of such a large area, with exposed frontiers, was surely considerably more demanding. The justiciars of the county palatine of Cheshire had a lieutenant to help them administer the liberty and the annexed county of Flintshire, in addition to his sheriff, chamberlain and escheator.⁹⁸ The liberty of Meath certainly had other offices that might be filled by leading members of the gentry or magnates. The only office for which this is known to be the case was that of treasurer, which was held for many years by Nicholas Barnewall of Crickstown, esquire.⁹⁹ The other men who held the offices of treasurer or chamberlain did so while serving as seneschal of the liberty.¹⁰⁰

Despite the size of the bailiwick, Christopher Cusack's deputies in 1510 are the first indication in Meath both of multiple undersheriffs, and of the assignment of undersheriffs to particular regions of the county.¹⁰¹ While it is entirely likely that other sheriffs and seneschals had more than a single undersheriff or clerk to aid them in administering the county, there is nothing in the surviving record to indicate that any of the other named undersheriffs shared the office, or were responsible for a particular part of the county. It should also be remembered that the men whose names have been preserved were those who dealt with the exchequer on the sheriff or seneschal's behalf. These men were likely the more highly-skilled members of the staff, but there is no reason to assume they constituted the entirety of the staff.

Various terms were applied to the men who served the chief officers of Meath. It is worth considering whether these titles reflect differing roles. The clerk of the sheriff

⁹⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 86.

⁹⁸ Booth, *Financial administration of Chester*, pp. 51-2.

⁹⁹ See appendix. In addition, Thomas Cusack was apparently justice of the liberty in 1421 - Dryburgh and Smith (eds.) *Handbook and select calendar of Irish material in the National Archives of the United Kingdom* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 179-80.

¹⁰⁰ See appendix.

¹⁰¹ TCD MS 594, ff. 7, 25v.

– as an official, recognised position – is unknown in Dublin, Louth or Kildare, where the only titles used for members of the sheriff’s staff are undersheriff and sheriff’s deputy. Many of the men who served as undersheriff or sheriff’s deputy (the terms were apparently interchangeable, as we have seen) in the other counties were described as clerks; but as we have seen that was a personal description denoting their administrative and clerical skills and not a description of the office. The use of the title in Meath may perhaps have been due to influence from the organisation of the liberty. The men who served the seneschals were described as clerks of the seneschal.¹⁰² The office was recognised by the Irish exchequer, with clerks being sworn into office at the Irish exchequer.¹⁰³ At least one clerk of the sheriff, Matthew English, was sworn into office in the same manner.¹⁰⁴ English swore to serve the ‘king ... and the loyal people of the king in all things touching the said office of sheriff, both in return of writs of this exchequer and otherwise’.¹⁰⁵

The oath sworn by English is unusually – indeed uniquely – specific in its insistence on his duty of returning writs. It would appear to suggest that the duties of the sheriff’s clerk were more specifically those administrative duties suggested by the title of the office, in contrast to the miscellaneous duties undertaken by the undersheriffs. In Dublin and the other counties, the return of writs was in many cases the duty of attorneys appointed for the purpose by the sheriff.¹⁰⁶ However, there was a strong correlation between the men who served as sheriff’s attorney and those who served as undersheriff, so the distinction may be more apparent than real. It may well be the case that the emphasis placed on returning writs reflects the preoccupations of the exchequer more than the realities of the duties of the office. The only other individual named as clerk of the sheriff in the fifteenth century was John White. White

¹⁰² Oliver Plunkett was deputy seneschal to Henry Grey in 1478; as Grey was the chief governor of Ireland, it seems probable that Plunkett was effectively seneschal of Meath. He is described as former seneschal, not deputy seneschal, in 1479 when the liberty was dissolved – NAI, Ferguson repertory, iv, p. 25; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 732-3. Thomas, earl of Desmond, is described as deputy seneschal of Meath in 1463, but the source is questionable as other claims are demonstrably false – NLI MS 13, p. 151.

¹⁰³ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 159, 206v.

¹⁰⁴ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 32.

¹⁰⁵ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 32.

¹⁰⁶ RC 8/39, pp. 258, 260; 8/40, pp. 21, 29; RC 8/43, pp. 221, 224-5. Coroners also appointed attorneys to receive and return writs at the exchequer - NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 206; RC 8/41, p. 106-7.

appears in the record in 1465 when he had a run-in with William Starkey of Inch (a family who did not apparently hold office at any time during our period, but were nonetheless numbered among the gentry of Duleek in 1511).¹⁰⁷ Starkey attacked White and 'did not permit the execution of the king's [writ?] against Adam Chart' of Laytown and John Osborne of the same'.¹⁰⁸ The duties of the sheriff's clerk, in this instance, clearly involved the physical duty of serving writs. As sheriffs of Meath are also known to have appointed attorneys for the purpose of receiving, amending and returning writs, there is little reason to believe this duty set the clerks of the sheriff apart from the undersheriffs of the other counties.¹⁰⁹ The employment of Maurice Avenell as both clerk of the seneschal and as undersheriff of the county is further evidence that there was little real difference between the clerks of the sheriff/seneschal and the undersheriffs.

In Meath, as in Dublin, there is little evidence for specialization among the men who served on the staff of the sheriffs and seneschals. Clerks of the sheriff, undersheriffs and subserjeants might all serve writs and make arrests, sheriff's clerks and undersheriffs might double as the sheriff's attorney at the exchequer, and both undersheriffs and subserjeants might be charged with empanelling a jury.¹¹⁰ Men like Stephen Palmer and Maurice Avenall, who served as undersheriffs, had similar backgrounds and administrative abilities as those who served as clerks of the sheriff or of the seneschal, although in this regard they apparently differed from the subserjeants. The men who served as undersheriff or as sheriff's clerk include many who made long careers in local or royal administration, but very few from prominent county families. Stephen Philpot came from a family that gave their name to Philpotstown (bar. Skreen); Michael Philpot, who was probably tenant of the same, was collector of subsidy in Skreen in 1420 and 1421. Stephen was perhaps a younger son of this family. William Stakeboll and Maurice Avenall had similar careers, but perhaps even more obscure origins. Matthew English was probably from the family that supplied collectors of subsidies in Deece in 1401, 1420, and 1423. The families' landholdings do not appear, and they were not among the gentry families listed for Deece in 1511.¹¹¹ John Lawless,

¹⁰⁷ RC 8/41, pp. 152-3; TCD MS 594, f. 25v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 152-3.

¹⁰⁹ RC 8/39, p. 258.

¹¹⁰ RC 8/36, pp. 55-8, 200-1; RC 8/41, pp. 152-3; RC 8/41, pp. 343-4; TCD MS 594, ff. 7, 25v.

¹¹¹ TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 170-4.

clerk of the seneschal in 1420, was the only member of his family to appear in office in Meath, although the surname was not unknown in the county.¹¹²

The exceptions to this general rule are some of the men who served towards the close of our period. John Avenell is one of the few men who is accorded a status title, in this case that of gentleman. He was presumably a near relative if not the son of Maurice Avenall, and was clerk of the seneschal in 1472. The Avenall family, whatever their origins, were clearly long associated with the government of Meath. As the family do not appear to have extensive landholdings, it is possible that John's status title marks him as a lawyer.¹¹³

Another exception even more striking than Avenell, was John Field of Fieldstown, gentleman, who was sworn in as deputy to John Fleming of Derrypatrick, esquire, sheriff of Meath, in April 1491.¹¹⁴ Field's appointment is unique in two respects. The first is that he was the head of a leading gentry family, and thus of considerably higher status than any other man recorded as an undersheriff or otherwise on a sheriff's staff in our period (with the possible exception of Richard Cusack, as we shall see). The second is that he was the head of a family that had its primary landholdings and had traditionally held office in Co. Dublin. There was a degree of overlap between the gentry of north Co. Dublin and east Co. Meath. The Caddell family of Naul, for example, held office in both counties. Members of the Field family had served in office in county Meath, as collectors in the baronies of Dunboyne and Duleek; but some of these, at least, were from other branches of the family based in Meath, which may have been fairly humble, such as that of Priest Town (bar. Duboyne).¹¹⁵ The lands held by John's elder brother's widow as her dower in 1515 do not apparently include any lands in Co. Meath.¹¹⁶ The family certainly had marriage connections with leading Meath families, but those that are known were with the Barnewalls, who would succeed to Fieldstown

¹¹² CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, nos. 43, 285.

¹¹³ Wright, *Derbyshire gentry*, p. 2; Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, p. 19; Gentleman was the title routinely accorded to the recorders and legal counsel of the city of Dublin in the later fifteenth century – *CARD*, i, pp. 315, 372, 376, 393.

¹¹⁴ NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 74.

¹¹⁵ Pat. 24 Hen. VI, no. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Cal. Inquis. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 1.

after John's death, and not with the Flemings.¹¹⁷ It is possible that such a connection existed but has been lost; but it is worth noting that the Fields are unusually well documented by the standards of the period, thanks to notes compiled for a family history from the Irish records before 1922.¹¹⁸

John Field served as Fleming's attorney at the exchequer, and also acted in the same capacity for Christopher Barnewall, Lord Trimleston.¹¹⁹ Field's legal knowledge would appear key to his appointment; it may well be the case that his role as Fleming's attorney was the more important one.¹²⁰ There is no record of Field actively undertaking the duties of the undersheriff, but this of course does not set him apart from the great majority of the other men who held the office.

Exceptions to this latter rule can be found at the very end of our period. Three men were named by sheriff Christopher Cusack as his deputies in two orders preserved among the entries in his commonplace book.¹²¹ The first was addressed to William Murray, subserjeant of Skreen, Nicholas Cusack, and Richard Cusack, 'my deputies in that part', apparently referring to the barony of Skreen or a region including that barony. The specific task required of the men does not appear but it concerned the holding of an assise of *novel disseisin*.¹²² The second was to Meiler Walsh and Richard Cusack, again addressed as 'my deputies in that part', which once more appears to refer to Skreen.¹²³ The tasks required of the deputies – the preparations for an assise, the return of a draught horse – are those which might be undertaken by any of a sheriff's underlings; indeed, when Nicholas and Richard Cusack are addressed alongside the subserjeant of the barony, the subserjeant's name is put first.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Hen. VIII, no. 106.

¹¹⁸ NAI, M. 2675 (Delafield MS).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹²⁰ Field does not appear to have attended Lincoln's Inn, unlike several contemporaries from Meath – *Lincoln's Inn admissions*, pp. 18-28.

¹²¹ One is in fact from Thomas Cusack, sheriff; this would appear to have been in error – TCD MS 594, f. 25v.

¹²² TCD MS 594, f. 7.

¹²³ Cusack and Walsh were ordered to return an affer wrongly taken by the prioress of Lismullen from Thomas Fisher of Termonfeckin. As Termonfeckin is not in Meath, and as Lismullen is in the barony of Skreen it is likely that their bailiwick was Skreen or at least included Skreen - TCD MS 594, f. 25v.

It is striking that two of the sheriff's deputies shared his surname, although he does not address them as kinsmen. It is possible that they were from a cadet line of the family. If, as would appear, they were his deputies for Skreen or a subsection of the county including Skreen, it is possible that they were members of the cadet line at Ballymolghan (bar. Skreen). Richard Cusack of Ballymolghan had been escheator of the county in 1494 and 1505; he was among the gentry of Skreen named in his relative's commonplace book.¹²⁴ It is surely at least possible that he is the Richard Cusack who was deputy to Christopher of Gerrardstown in 1510.

It would appear that Christopher Cusack when sheriff could call on a network of relatives and servants in different parts of the county. Men like Meiler Walsh may have been men who had made careers in the service of county government; equally, they may have had some now-invisible link to the Cusack family, perhaps as tenants. Such a network might have been quite informal. It bears direct comparison with the men of Swords who served Robert Burnell, sheriff of Dublin, as his agents in that town in the middle of the fifteenth century. These men apparently held no official office but acted 'by [Burnell's] command and authority... and as his servants'.¹²⁵ It is likely that this was equally true for the other sheriffs and seneschals of Dublin and Meath, who each had their own networks of kinsmen and kinsmen by marriage throughout the county. None leave any record of their time in county office comparable to the Cusack commonplace book.

¹²⁴ TCD MS 594, f. 25v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 171.

¹²⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 608-11.

Chapter seven: Collectors, assessors and receivers of subsidies

The parliamentary subsidy in the fifteenth century

The parliamentary subsidy was the principle form of taxation in late medieval Ireland. Its origins and evolution have been discussed in detail by M. V. Clarke and D. B. Quinn.¹ Clarke traced the rise of the subsidy over the course of the fourteenth century, in the face of much opposition from the inhabitants of the lordship, and concluded that by the end of the century the parliamentary subsidy had largely replaced the local or regional subsidies from which it first took shape. Quinn continued the study of the subsidy into the early sixteenth century, by which time the subsidy was effectively a permanent annual tax. Where in the late fifteenth century each subsidy had been granted individually by the Irish parliament for the year in which the parliament had been held, under Henry VII parliament was persuaded to assent to longer-term grants (five or ten years) during which fixed sums were to be raised annually, without the need for further parliamentary approval.² In contrast to other forms of revenue, the subsidy was increasing in value in the last decades of the fifteenth century, apparently as a result of increasing tillage as more land was brought under the plough.³

By the late fifteenth century the general subsidy was the most important source of crown revenue in Ireland. Other, related forms of revenue included local grants of subsidies, while the collection of scutage continued to be levied into the reign of Edward IV.⁴ The forum and the means for the grant of local subsidies (which had been the normal

¹ Clarke, 'William of Windsor'; D. B. Quinn, 'The Irish parliamentary subsidy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries', *PRIA*, C, xlii (1934/1935), pp. 219-246.

² Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', p. 226; Steven Ellis, 'Parliament and community in Yorkist and Tudor Ireland' in Art Cosgrove and J. I. McGuire (eds) *Parliament and community: Historical Studies XIV* (Belfast, 1983), 43-68, p. 54.

³ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 45-51.

⁴ Ellis, 'Parliament and community in Yorkist and Tudor Ireland', pp. 47, 53-4; *idem*, 'Taxation and defence in late medieval Ireland: the survival of scutage' in *JRSAI*, cvii, (1977), 5-28, pp. 17-18. Even combined they were far from sufficient to fund the royal government, hence the need to provide English-born chief governors with a stipend from the English treasury – Richardson and Sayles, *Ir. Parl.*, p. 228-33.

form of subsidy in the fourteenth century) are not clear, but what evidence there is suggests that the grant was made by the leading men of the county in the county court, as was the case in the counties outside the Pale maghery in the mid-sixteenth century.⁵ These local grants increasingly encountered resistance in the fifteenth century. Where the fourteenth century had seen county landholders defend the principle of local grants of subsidies, by local assent and for local needs, against demands by chief governors (notably William of Windsor) for universal subsidies by assent of parliament, the fifteenth century saw something of a role reversal. The rolls of the Irish parliament for the reign of Edward IV make frequent reference to the 'statute of assent and disassent'.⁶ This statute was apparently identical with that of the parliament of 1430 forbidding the issuing of writs of 'assentyng' which were used to bind those who had not consented to grants of local subsidy, presumably in the county court.⁷ These writs were necessary to invest collectors of local subsidies with the power of the royal government, which in turn must have been a response to the refusal of at least some local taxpayers to consider a grant by the county community to be binding on those who had not personally assented to the grant.⁸

The 1430 act represents the acceptance of the general, parliamentary subsidy as the proper means of levying a subsidy. And yet the references to the statute in the later rolls, uniformly in the context of the grant of a local subsidy 'the statute of assent and disassent or any other statute... notwithstanding' or that of the retrospective legitimization of subsidies granted 'against the form and tenor of any statute, act or ordinance' make it clear that it was honoured in the breach as much as the observance.⁹ Repeated attempts were made to establish semi-permanent bodies of leading magnates and prelates in the counties with the authority to levy subsidies as they need might arise. As with the general subsidy, these were often linked to specific military needs – as in 1465 when groups of the leading ecclesiastics, magnates, gentry and royal officials were appointed for each of the

⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament*, p. 158; Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', p. 220; *State Papers Hen. VIII*, iii, pp. 114, 117.

⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 344-7, 468-9; ii, pp. 464-5, 548-53, 760-5.

⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 28-31; *Edw. IV*, i, p. 469; ii, pp. 460-5, 548-53, 760-5

⁸ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament*, pp. 238-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 321-3.

four obedient shires to 'call before them or the greater part of them at any time that they think necessary, all the gentry of the said county... and appoint such company of men-at-arms as the aforesaid persons or the greater part of them, by the advice of the said gentry or the greater part of them, deem necessary; and assess sums of money for their wages, to be levied and paid in manner and form of other subsidies.' They were to have this power 'the statute of assent or dissent or any other acts or statutes to the contrary notwithstanding.'¹⁰ Another example, from early 1468, hints at resistance to these tax-raising bodies when it begins by acknowledging that 'it is ordained by statute that assent and disassent is treason.' Nonetheless the statute gave the chief governor (John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester) and the greater part of the Irish council power to call before them 'the six the most honourable gentlemen (*lez plus honorablez Gentils hommes*)' for each county, who were to be given power to levy subsidies on the lords and commons of the county 'the said charge to be as good and effectual as if it had been made by authority of the parliament or great council of the king'.¹¹ There is no evidence that this particular commission ever took effect, but there is no reason to believe that similar commissions, such as that of 1480, were not carried out.¹² These commissions were to be of limited duration – typically 'from this parliament to the commencement of the next and no longer.'¹³ Closely related to these were commissions, often to very similar groups of leading landholders, to oversee particular works of fortification (or, on one occasion, in support of a mining project), with power to levy workmen, building materials, and/or money as they saw fit.¹⁴

Like scutage, the general subsidy was intrinsically linked to the defensive requirements of the lordship. It was in most cases specifically granted by parliament for the purpose of hiring and maintaining soldiers.¹⁵ A specific number of soldiers to be raised might be specified, as in 1473 when 160 marks were to be levied on Dublin, Meath, Kildare

¹⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 344-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 468-9.

¹² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 760-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 764-5.

¹⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 284-5, 299, 314-15, 756-9.

¹⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Ir. Parl. Middle Ages*, p. 233-4

and Louth to pay for a retinue of 160 archers and 63 spearmen.¹⁶ Local subsidies might be raised for a variety of purposes, though almost all were at least tangentially connected to defence. Examples include a subsidy to raise the reward for capture of an outlaw, the ransom of tenants abducted by the Irish, or the maintenance of watchmen in border areas.¹⁷ Other local contributions included the payment of 'O'Connor's wages' (protection money paid by the county of Meath) and similar 'black rents'.¹⁸ The collection and payment of O'Connor's wages was apparently the responsibility of the sheriff, but was presumably collected as an addition to the general subsidy in that county.¹⁹ Less frequently, subsidies might be raised for more quotidian purposes that were held to be for the common good – such as the construction of a harbour at Rush by the earl of Ormond's tenants there.²⁰

By far the greatest number of local subsidies for which record survives were granted for the construction (or reconstruction) of tower houses at strategic locations.²¹ Similar to these were grants of subsidies (usually more substantial) and/or of labour for the fortification of towns on the march. Generally, these castle subsidies were granted at the request of the individual building or intending to build the tower house. The usual sum to be levied from the county concerned in support of construction was £10 (although there were exemptions), according neatly with the well-known acts of parliament of 1428 and 1430 which granted that sum to anyone undertaking to construct a tower house of specified dimensions in Co. Louth and in the four obedient shires respectively.²² Others had grants of a particular sum on every ploughland. These ranged from 8d on every ploughland in Meath in 1447 (in line with an act of that year promising that sum for construction of castles in the county) up to 4s 4d on every ploughland in Rathdown thirty years later.²³ The higher sums,

¹⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 130-7.

¹⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 610-13; *Ric. III-Hen. VIII*, pp. 72-5; *Register of Primate John Swayne*, p. 184.

¹⁸ Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', p. 220; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 64.

¹⁹ BL, Royal MS 18 C xiv, ff. 62v, 174

²⁰ Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', p. 220.

²¹ See for example *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 284-7; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 6-7, 22-3, 64-5 and *passim*; ii, pp. 122-3, 286-7, 516-19 and *passim*.

²² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 16-17, 32-5, 284-7, *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 64-5, 146-7, 148-9, 368-9, 396-9, 742-3; ii, pp. 122-3, 710-11, 714-17; cf. *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 22-3 (£40), 608-11 (£20).

²³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 106-9, 126-9; *Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 516-19.

such as the Rathdown subsidy in 1477, the 40d subsidy on each carucate in Meath in the same year to 'whatever person will take on him to make... a tower or peel' in Keshbaigne 'in the extreme frontier of the march, not only in resistance of O'Conghir [and] ... punishment of the Bermynghames' in 1480, or the £40 granted in 1462 to Lord Gormanston and Thomas Preston to build a tower on the ford at Kinnafad would appear to be cases where defensive needs were particularly pressing.²⁴ Other grants included building materials and labour, as in 1461 when Thomas Plunkett was given permission to fell trees in the park of Trim for fuel and timber for the construction of a tower house at Corranford, or in 1480 when Robert Preston, lord Gormanston, was to have a cart from every ploughland within three miles of Ballymadan to help him draw stones and sand for the construction of a tower there.²⁵

Subsidies for the construction of tower houses were less common in Dublin than in Meath, Louth and Kildare. Grants in the other three counties tended to be in the nature of what modern political jargon terms a 'public-private partnership'. The process typically involved the landowner building or intending to build a tower petitioning parliament, which then granted a subsidy to be levied on the county in support of construction. In Dublin, only two grants follow this pattern. The first was the subsidy on Rathdown in 1477, mentioned above, in aid of the reconstruction of the Walsh castle at Jamestown (par. Kilgobbin), which had been taken and partially destroyed by the O'Byrnes and O'Tooles.²⁶ The second was the grant to Robert Preston of labour services in aid of the construction of a tower at Ballymadan. Both these grants were to be levied on a small area – the first on the barony of Rathdown, and the second on the immediate neighbourhood of Ballymadan. A not dissimilar grant was made to John Bennet, citizen (later mayor) of Dublin, in the 1460s when he was granted the town of Baltire for 60 years, on condition of building a tower there.²⁷

²⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 22-3; ii, pp. 516-19, 764-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; ii, pp. 852-3.

²⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 516-19.

²⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 320-1.

The area was stated to be 'a common place for the Byrnes and Toolles to lie in and [from which] they would sally forth to Clondalkin and all the country round'.²⁸

The grant to Preston was unusual for a number of reasons. It was limited to a very small area, it granted only labour (in this case cartage) in aid of construction, and not least because the construction of a castle in Ballymadan, located in northern Fingal, the most secure part of the lordship, can have had little strategic importance. Preston was a prominent member of the Irish council, who had previously served as deputy treasurer and had had a brief stint as deputy lieutenant of Ireland in the months before this grant was made. It seems likely that this grant was made for political and not strategic reasons. It may have been part of his reward for dropping his opposition to the dominance of Gerald, the eighth earl of Kildare, in late 1479.²⁹ Political concerns and networks of patronage are likely to have been behind many grants of local subsidy. Roland FitzEustace, lord Portlester, Kildare's father-in-law, was a recipient of several grants of subsidy for the construction of tower houses or the fortification of towns.³⁰ The fact that Preston did not receive a monetary subsidy likely reflects the fact that the castle was of little benefit to the security of the county.

In contrast, Jamestown castle was right on the frontier, located on the main pass from Dublin southeast into the Wicklow mountains. It was thus a key part of the defensive system of the south Dublin marches. Even so, the commons of the county of Dublin appear to have been reluctant to offer anything beyond the minimum support necessary for its reconstruction. Only those left most exposed by the destruction of the castle - the commons of Rathdown, together with the religious foundations holding extensive lands there - were to contribute to the subsidy. The commons of Dublin appear to have been unwilling to contribute to castle subsidies that were not of the most pressing defensive urgency. In 1459, they agreed to a subsidy on the county as a whole to raise £10 for the

²⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 444-7.

²⁹ Emmett O'Byrne. 'Preston, Robert 1st Viscount Gormanston' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a7490>].

³⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 457; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 608-11; ii, pp. 492-5, 612-15, 711.

construction of a castle at Cork 'on the *boher* of Bray' (Cork Great and Cork Little, bar. Rathdown) to control 'the most common road for the O'Byrnes... coming from day to day into the marches of the said county'.³¹ This of course bears direct comparison with Jamestown. Similar to this grant was a rather larger project of fortification begun in 1455. In that year the commons agreed to a subsidy of 140 marks on the county to fortify the bridges at Kilmainham and Lucan, and to construct a tower to control 'the ford by the pier of Saint Mary's Abbey' by which 'sundry Irish enemies and English rebels' had entered Fingal by night. Those overseeing the subsidy and the subsequent works included the greater part of the leading gentry of Dublin.³² The works were still not completed eight years later, when the baronies of Castleknock, Balrothery and Coolock were ordered to provide cartloads of stone for the construction of the tower 'begun at the bridge of Kilmainham... in resistance of thieves prowling by night'.³³ It is likely that the relative security of Fingal lessened the incentive for a large part of the commons of Dublin to contribute to castle-building in the county. The comparative security of Fingal – almost certainly the most populous half of the county – was reflected in other acts made for the defence of the four counties. The retinue of archers and spearmen raised in 1473 was to be quartered on Kildare, Meath and Louth but not on Dublin 'except only at such times that as the sheriff of the county shall bring them, under his survey, for the prosperity of the said county'.³⁴

The method by which local subsidies were collected varied. Some were independent subsidies to be assessed on the area in question. In such cases responsibility generally lay with the sheriff of the county, whether he was to assess and levy the subsidy himself or was instructed to appoint collectors.³⁵ In the case of more substantial grants, the grantees might

³¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 632-5.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 402-5. Christopher St Laurence, kt., lord of Howth, was one of the assessors of the subsidy, while the surveyors of the workmen included former, serving, and future sheriffs Richard Mareward, kt., Robert St Laurence, esq., Reginald Talbot, esq., John Woodlock esq. and Thomas Field, esq. In addition Robert Burnell, kt., served as one of the auditors to hear the account of the subsidy.

³³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 262-5. On this occasion James Blakeney, gentleman, future sheriff of the county, and John Field, former justice of the peace, had power to levy carts to draw stones, while Blakeney and Robert St Laurence were to hear the account of the master of works.

³⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 130-7.

³⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 17, 34-5, 284-7; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 65, 149, 397-9; ii, p. 159.

be given license to appoint collectors themselves, as in 1462 when Lord Gormanston and Sir Thomas Plunkett were to appoint collectors of the £40 granted to them to construct a castle at the ford of Kinnafad (bar. Carbury, Kildare) 'the most convenient road that O'Connor has to the destruction of Meath'.³⁶ Other local subsidies were to be overseen by commissions of prominent lay and ecclesiastical landowners that resembled commissions of the peace. In 1468 the bishop of Kildare, prior of Connell, sheriff of Kildare and Roland FitzEustace, lord Portlester, had a commission to levy £20 annually for ten years in Kildare for the construction of walls at Naas. They were to appoint assessors and collectors and direct the construction of the wall.³⁷ In many cases collectors were to be appointed by the knights of the shire for the county in question.³⁸ As the general subsidy became a normal feature of the meeting of the Irish parliament, and as the parliament increasingly met each year, it became standard practice for subsidies granted for a particular local purpose to be collected alongside the general subsidy, with the sum simply added to the burden of the county in question and paid by the hands of the collectors of the general subsidy.³⁹

The tax base

The question of who actually paid the subsidies, and in what form, is difficult to answer from the surviving evidence. The subsidy was a land-tax and as such might reasonably have been expected to fall on the landowner. The frequent petitions of landowners to have their lands assessed at a lower rate preserved in the statute rolls support such a conclusion.⁴⁰ But other petitions make it clear that the burden was shared, at least in part, by their tenants. In 1475 both Roland FitzEustace and Christopher Barnewall had reductions in the assessment of their lands; Roland because the greater part of his tenants at Rathcarran had left and the remainder proposed to leave 'through fear of the payment of the money for each ploughland to be granted now in the said Parliament', and Christopher because the rate of subsidy for which his lands at Assey (bar. Deece) were liable

³⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 22-5. Kinnafad may be in error for Kinnegad in modern Co. Westmeath, as the subsidy was to be levied on Meath, not Kildare.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 606-9.

³⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 456-7; *Edw. IV*, i, p. 743; ii, pp. 130-7; 516-19, 672-3, 764-5.

³⁹ For examples see *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 368-9, 700-3; ii, pp. 122-3, 710-11.

⁴⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 194-7, 203; ii, pp. 150-5, 345.

meant that he could not find any tenants to occupy them.⁴¹ Other petitions make the liability of the tenants clear.⁴² Grants of subsidy are usually said to be upon the county or counties concerned, without further detail. Occasionally a longer version is given: ‘upon the commons’ ‘upon the lords and commons’ or ‘upon the gentry (*gentilx*) and commons’ of the county (or counties).⁴³ In 1467 parliament made arrangements for auditors to hear the account of a 360 mark subsidy on the freeholders, gavellers and chattellers (*de lez franktenautes gauillers et catallers*) of Meath.⁴⁴ A similar formula had been used in 1450, when a subsidy for the construction of a castle in Kildare was to be paid by ‘all manner of men, freeholders, gavellers, exempted and not exempted, within the said county’.⁴⁵ In 1484 the Meath baronies of Ratoath and Dunboyne and the barony of Castleknock in Dublin were to provide 80 workmen each to help fortify the Fitzgerald manor of Kildare. The wages of the workmen were to be levied on ‘the residents of the said baronies, artificers as well as gavellers and chattellers’ (*sibien artificers [comme] gavillers et catallers*).⁴⁶ The inclusion of *artificers* among those liable to contribute is apparently unique among the surviving subsidies, both local and general, on the statute rolls. The clear inference is that the men paying the workmen’s wages were their neighbours and peers, and that they were making a payment in lieu of service in person, a well-established principle of medieval taxation. The *artificers* and possibly the *gavillers* and *chattellers* were thus men of a class that might be expected to perform physical labour. The fact that this levy was to be assessed ‘by discretion of two men of each parish’ is further evidence that it was to be paid by men further down the social scale than those liable for the general subsidy, which was usually assessed by men appointed at county or barony level.

Although *artificers* do not appear in other grants of subsidy, *gavellers* and *chattellers* (or *catallers*) occur frequently. They almost always occur together in grants of subsidy which

⁴¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 274-7, 282-3.

⁴² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 378-81

⁴³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 16-17; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 176-9; 468-9.

⁴⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 430-3. Berry translates *catallers* here, uniquely, as ‘graziers’. Elsewhere he prefers to leave the word untranslated. There is nothing to indicate why graziers should be preferred.

⁴⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 284-7.

⁴⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 4-5.

specifically included contributions by those 'exempt and non-exempt'. The former included the order of St. John and the Cistercians of Mellifont, as well as royal lands.⁴⁷ A good example is the subsidy granted to Robert Preston, Lord Gormanston, in 1477, which specified that 'exempt and non-exempt hospitallers, gavellers and chattellers shall concur and be contributory with the said lords and commons' in payment of the subsidy.⁴⁸ It would appear that their inclusion among those liable to contribute to the subsidy was the exception rather than the rule. This is likely a reflection of the principle that taxation should be linked to consent. The gavellers and chattellers are clearly distinguished from the lords, gentlemen and commons who granted the subsidy (and elsewhere were clearly distinguished from the freeholders).⁴⁹ They were not among the electors of knights of the shire and consequently they were not represented by the parliamentary commons which consented to grants of taxation.

Gavellers were tenants who held either at will or by copyhold.⁵⁰ In 1326 28 gavellers held 203 acres of land in 'divers places' in and around the town of Swords of the archbishop of Dublin, while parcels of land listed as *terre Gavelariorum* in the 1333 extent of the manor of Lisronagh range from 3 up to 54 acres in extent.⁵¹ The dower assigned to Anastacia, widow of David Wogan, knight, in 1418 included several parcels of land held by gavellers ranging in size from just over two acres up to 27 acres, at rents of roughly one shilling per acre.⁵² Chattellers (*Catallers* in the parliamentary French of the statutes) are a more difficult class to identify. It is possible that they should be identified with the cottiers, the poorest class of peasant tenants in Lisronagh in 1333, but *cataller* is a poor match for the Latin *cotarii* or *coterelli* (used for the tenants of Lisronagh in 1333 and Dowth in 1253

⁴⁷ See for example *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 610-13; ii, pp. 106-9, 464-5, 548-53; 'Documents concerning the administration of the earl of Ormond' in Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 131-91.

⁴⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, p. 548-53.

⁴⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 430-3.

⁵⁰ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 176, 179.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176; Edmund Curtis, 'Rental of the manor of Lisronagh, 1333, and notes on 'Betagh' tenure in medieval Ireland' *PRIA*, C, xliii (1935 - 1937), 41-76, pp. 43, 75-6. See also *Inquisitions and extents*, np. 62 and *passim*.

⁵² CIRCLE, Cl. 1 Hen. VI, no. 3. Here 'gavel-land' is used as a translation for *gavelar'*. This should probably read as denoting a section of the rental pertaining to this form of tenure, rather than an individual parcel of land.

respectively), while *cottier* is used in the parliamentary French of an act of 1465 concerning a bounty on thieves killed in County Meath in which the *cottier* ‘having a house and smoke’ was the furthest down the social scale contributory to the bounty, paying half the contribution of men possessing goods worth 40s.⁵³ *Catallarii* is the term used in a 1404 grant of a subsidy of James, earl of Ormond, where it is once again paired with *gavellarii*, both being classes of church tenants who were to contribute to the subsidy.⁵⁴ In addition, cotters typically rendered labour services rather than monetary rents, and thus would be of little interest to the collectors of subsidies.⁵⁵ The chattellers of the statute rolls may instead have been leasehold tenants.⁵⁶ It is important to note that these terms are not used as personal additions. No one is referred to in the rolls of parliament, chancery or exchequer as ‘x’, gaveler’ or ‘x’, chatteller’. It is likely that men holding as gavellers or chattellers were among those given the title of ‘husbandman’, though the question of title and status, especially at the lower levels of society, requires further investigation.

The account of William Darcy, undertreasurer of Ireland, for the year ending 18 October 1502, includes his account for the 13s 4d subsidy on each ploughland in Louth, Kildare, Dublin and Meath, with a breakdown of the sums collected.⁵⁷ From the payments received it is clear that most of the parcels of land contributory to the subsidy in Dublin were (or were assessed as being) a ploughland or half a ploughland in extent, but some contributions were consistent with a quarter or even a sixth of a ploughland. These smaller payments cannot however be taken as evidence of contribution to the subsidy by the lower orders. Only two such payments feature among the account for the subsidy of county Dublin. One was for the *mons* of Howth, a possession of the noble St Laurence family, while the other was for Dardistown (par. Santry), which appears to have been in the possession of Patrick Bermingham, who was just beginning his career in the royal administration and

⁵³ Curtis, ‘Rental of Lisronagh’, p. 48; *Cal. Docs. Ire, 1252-84*, no. 179; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 288-91.

⁵⁴ *Proc. King’s Council Ireland*, pp. 269-72; CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 131, where ‘chattels’ is a mistranslation.

⁵⁵ Curtis, ‘Rental of Lisronagh’, p. 51.

⁵⁶ ‘Chattel-interest’ in *Oxford English Dictionary* [<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30963?redirectedFrom=chattel-interest#eid9634975>]; ‘Cat/allarius’ in R. E. Latham (ed.) *Revised medieval Latin word-list* (London, 1965), p. 75.

⁵⁷ NLI MS 761, pp. 328-32; Ellis, ‘Sir William Darcy of Platten’, pp. 31-2.

judiciary at this time.⁵⁸ Darcy's account includes payments for 37 parcels of land in the county in Dublin, and a 38th for 'James Cruise of the Naul'. Many of these, including several parcels assessed at half a carucate, are known to have been in the possession of leading gentry families. In addition to Naul, James Cruise, sheriff in 1509, held Flacketstown and Mallahow (bar. Balrothery), two ploughlands for which he paid £1 in total.⁵⁹ Darcy accounted for 6s 8d of subsidy from Cappoge (bar. Castleknock) which was the estate of Robert Bath, sheriff of Dublin in 1507. Oldcamysh (now Kimmage) was a possession of the Barnewalls of Drimnagh, and rendered 6s 8d, as did Drimnagh itself.⁶⁰ Contributions were also received from Belgard, Rathcreedan and Balgriffin, estates of the Talbot, Sherlock and Burnell shrieval families respectively. The lands contributing to the subsidy in Co. Dublin were thus the estates of the gentry of the county, although it is impossible to determine what portion of the payment was made by the landowners and what portion by their tenants.

In 1463 the Irish parliament gave a group of prominent landholders and royal servants, including Lord Gormanston and Richard Nugent, permission to levy 100 marks which had been promised to them by the earl of Kildare and 'divers gentlemen of county Meath' for their expenses in arranging a prisoner-swap to mollify O'Conner and protect Meath from invasion, but which had not been forthcoming. The money was to be levied upon the gentlemen and freeholders (*gentilix et frankez tenants*) of Meath 'and from their possessions' by the collectors of the general subsidy 'in like form and manner as other subsidies are levied'. The grant continued by adding that 'the tenants and farmers of all the said gentry of Meath [were to] be allowed for the payment of the said subsidy against their lords, upon the commencement of their rent next term'.⁶¹ It is clear that in this case that the men physically handing over the money for the subsidy were the tenants and not the landowners, and that the tenants were not intended to suffer financially for the

⁵⁸ Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 193; NLI MS 761, p. 326. Dardistown was certainly in his possession by 1516 – *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 67.

⁵⁹ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 26.

⁶⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 486-9.

⁶¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 176-9.

commitment of their landlords (although one wonders how many tenants struggled to secure the allowance on their rent). It is very likely that this was a standard means of collecting the subsidy. In 1485 a subsidy of £100 was to be raised from the four shires for their defence during plague-time. The subsidy was to be levied upon 'the ploughlands, rents and possessions of the lords spiritual and temporal, knights, esquires gentlemen and freeholders... exempt and not exempt'. No mention is made of the gavellers and chattellers. The lords, gentlemen and freeholders were 'to make allowance to each of their tenants of so much of the said sum as each of them pays in discharge of each of their said lords... at the next term in payment of their rent' on pain of forfeiture of £10.⁶² This method of collecting subsidies had the advantage that tenants were likely less reluctant to part with their landlord's money than the landlords themselves would have been; provided he could be sure of securing the allowance on his rent. In cases where land was subject to several layers of ownership and subletting, liability for contribution to the subsidy was divided among the occupier and the landowner. The subsidy granted to Robert Preston in 1477 specified that the lords of each ploughland 'mediate and immediate' were to contribute half of the sum for which the ploughland was liable 'according to the rate of the issues and profits which they receive from the ploughland'.⁶³ The usual practice seems to have been for the occupier and the landowner to each pay half of the contribution due for the ploughland.⁶⁴ In this case a distinction must be drawn between the more substantial tenants who might be expected to contribute to the subsidy and peasant tenants – the gavellers and chattellers – who were normally exempt. The subsidy was thus a tax that fell most heavily on the landowners represented in the commons; but it was nonetheless much more broadly based than scutage.⁶⁵

The burden on the leading gentry was lessened by the evolving practice of granting their demesne lands exemption from the subsidy. The clearest statement of this principle is a petition by Richard Verdon of Termonfeckin, esq., in 1471. Richard claimed that in

⁶² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 68-71.

⁶³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 548-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 286-7.

⁶⁵ Richardson and Sayles, *Irish parliament in the middle ages*, pp. 233-4.

accordance with 'the custom and usage of the county of Louth... beyond the time of memory' every gentleman (*gentile homme*) within the county 'living upon their own possessions there, have had their demesnes which they themselves occupy, free, without any charge or payment of the King's subsidy', and that he had enjoyed this right on his ploughland called Parrisland in Termonfeckin until the time of the deputyship of the Earl of Worcester. Parliament decreed that Richard enjoy his demesne lands at Parrisland free of subsidy 'as of right it should be, according to the said custom'.⁶⁶ It is clear that this had no basis beyond the admittedly powerful one of custom. There appears to have been no agreed rule with regard to demesne lands. Roland FitzEustace, among many favourable grants, was granted permission to have his lands at Harristown 'where he intends to dwell' free from subsidy, on the basis that 'there are divers towns and gentlemen's demesnes (*demaines dez Gentilx gentz*) in the said county [which] are free from all subsidies [including] Castlemartin, Cotlandstown and other places.'⁶⁷ Some years later he received a similar grant of freedom from subsidy for his new town at Galmorestown on the Kildare frontier 'where he has a household and purposes to dwell'; clearly for those close to the Kildare regime the definition of demesne might be stretched somewhat.⁶⁸ Thus in Kildare several members of the gentry had their demesnes free of subsidy, but FitzEustace did not feel confident enough to claim, as Verdon had in Louth, that this was a universal custom. The picture in Meath was similar to that in Kildare. In 1472 Robert Rochford, esq., secured an exemption for lands which he occupied 'by his own tillage and manurance' in County Meath, on the basis that he of his willingness and ability 'from day to day to do... his faithful service to our sovereign lord the King... like as other gentlemen of good disposition of the county of Meath do' and because 'the demesnes of divers gentlemen of the said county... are quit and free at all times'.⁶⁹ Four years earlier, John Cornwallsh had secured an exemption for his sixty acre demesne at Dardistown asserting that 'by the extent of Lutterburgh, and every other extent heretofore made in the county of Meath and divers

⁶⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 794-7

⁶⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 54-5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 492-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-7.

other counties of the land of Ireland, it has been used and accustomed that the manor or lordship of every lord and honorable man wherein he was resident... were freed, acquitted and discharged, of all manner of subsidies', a more expansive claim than that made by Rochford.⁷⁰ Even he felt the need to bolster his petition by pointing out the communal benefits of the castle he had constructed on the manor. It may be significant that in each case the demesne allowed was one 120-acre ploughland (or exactly half this amount, in the case of Dardistown) in extent – even where these 120 acres had to be assembled from different parcels of land, as in the case of Rochford, whose demesne was made up of three-quarters of a ploughland (notionally 90 acres) in Kilbride, Kellystown (?) and Robertstown (par. Donaghmore) and 30 acres in Fillianstown (Fleenstown, par. Donaghmore).⁷¹ There are no examples from Dublin. Walter Eustace secured a reduction in the assessment of his demesne lands at Corrstown in 1480; but this was on the basis that their assessment was too high. He did not secure or apparently seek that they be entirely free from subsidy. He however does not appear to have dwelt at Corrstown but rather in Dublin city, and was in the process of travelling to England to study law.⁷² William Darcy's account of monies of the subsidy received by him in 1501-1502 include payments for the *demaynes* of Belgard, Rathcreedan, and Drimnagh, as well as estates like Naul and Balgriffin which appear to have been the main estates of leading Dublin families; although it is possible that these estates were charged at a lower rate.⁷³

Other grants of subsidies reflect this custom, which must have eased the process of securing the consent of the commons. An act of the parliament held by John, earl of Worcester, gave the lieutenant or his deputy, together with the 'greater part' of the king's Irish council, and the six 'most honourable gentlemen (*Gentils hommes*)' of a county power to grant a subsidy on behalf of the lords and commons of the county, with the proviso that 'no lord, spiritual or temporal, be charged by force of this act for the demesnes which they or any of them hold for their own wannage and tillage.' There is no evidence that any

⁷⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 576-9.

⁷¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 74-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 830-3.

⁷³ NLI MS 761, pp. 328-30.

subsidy resulted from this ordinance, but the formula used, including the proviso excluding the demesne lands of the gentry, was presumably intended to apply equally in Dublin as in any other shire.⁷⁴ Similarly, in 1476 William, Bishop of Meath, had a grant of a double subsidy on the four shires, with 13s 4d levied on each ploughland in the county of Dublin. Again, the act was 'not to extend or be prejudicial to any lord spiritual or temporal for their demesnes which they occupy for their own cultivation and tillage.'⁷⁵ Some castle subsidies also include exemptions for 'any ploughland which any lord, spiritual or temporal, holds or occupies for his own culture and tillage'.⁷⁶ It is clear that the exemptions recorded in the statute rolls of parliament represent only a small portion of those which were in effect. The Cusack common-place book records nine gentlemen with manors free from subsidy in the barony of Deece, alongside other lands free from subsidy 'growin by prescripten by what mean we doe not know'.⁷⁷ The importance of patronage is highlighted by the lands 'fre by (con)cordatum with the Erle of kildare from horse (sou)ldior & charged with plowlands in all othe(r) (ex)accions'.⁷⁸

While the exemption of gentlemen's demesne was never a formal feature of the parliamentary subsidy, it is clear that it was a widespread custom. While it no doubt facilitated the process of securing the commons' consent to taxation, the reasoning behind, like that of the scutage, was the principle that taxation was to be paid in lieu of personal military service. This can be seen in Robert Rochford's petition in which he stressed his willingness to serve the chief governor in person. It is made very clear in the act of subsidy passed by the Irish parliament in 1536, which specified that the demesne lands of lords, knights, esquires, and gentlemen who 'goo or sende by reason of their landes and possessions to ostynges roodes or journeys to serve oure souveraigne lorde the king' were to be free from the subsidy. Judgement on which lands were to be so exempted was to be the responsibility of special commissioners, specifically a member of the council and two

⁷⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, p. 469.

⁷⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 460-5.

⁷⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 700-5.

⁷⁷ TCD MS 594, ff. 39v-40v; Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', pp. 237-9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

men from each county.⁷⁹ These commissions can be seen in operation in 1541, when John Bealing of Balscadden, gentleman, was allowed to have 120 acres of his demesne lands in Whitestown (par. Balscadden) free of all subsidy, having demonstrated to William Brabazon, under-treasurer of Ireland, Thomas Talbot of Malahide, knight, and James Cusack of Portraine, knight, king's commissioners appointed for that purpose in Co. Dublin, that he was liable to serve on hostings with the king's lieutenant upon his own costs.⁸⁰

Few references to the actual process of collecting the subsidy survive. The memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer include a handful of complaints by collectors who had met opposition from landowners. In each case the collector or collectors claimed to have been deforced of livestock (usually a single affer or draught horse) which they had seized.⁸¹ In every case where the value of the livestock is given, the animal was worth more than the contribution due from the landowner. The obvious implication is that the animals were seized with the intention that they would be released upon payment of the subsidy due, and not taken in lieu of payment.

Reference has already been made to the assessment of subsidy by 'Ludburgh' and by William Darcy. These assessments appear to have been extents of the number of ploughlands in each barony of the four obedient shires. The duty of determining exactly which lands constituted these ploughlands appears to have been fallen to the assessors.⁸² Many grants of subsidy, especially in the earlier period, include the names of those appointed as assessors, and it is clear that the practice was to appoint assessors for each subsidy granted. However, there is some evidence that the extents and assessments used for one subsidy might be reused. This is hardly surprising given the frequency of the subsidies, the infrequency with which major changes in landholding occurred, and the consistency with which the same individuals were appointed as assessors. In 1463 Peter

⁷⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 181-3.

⁸⁰ Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', pp. 245-6.

⁸¹ RC 8/41, pp. 328-9, 417; RC 8/43, pp. 106-11.

⁸² See for example the subsidy granted by the commons of Meath to the earl of Ormond in October 1421 'according to the extent of Robert Lutteburgh, following the assessment of Christopher Preston, kt., Christopher Plunkett and other assessors'. A group of assessors was then appointed which contained neither Preston nor Plunkett – Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 171-2.

Travers petitioned parliament that his manors of Baldongan and Courtlough which had been considered as a single ploughland 'in all past subsidies which were granted to the lieutenants of this land', until Sir Robert Burnell and other assessors appointed in Dublin had 'lately within these eight years... negligently and unadvisedly' assessed Baldongan as constituting a single ploughland in itself 'and the assessors of the county of Dublin have ever since followed the same extent'.⁸³ The Dublin extent that Travers refers to may well be that which the Irish parliament had commissioned in 1453-1454.⁸⁴ John Delahide petitioned (also in 1463) to have his lands in Co. Louth assessed at a two ploughlands as they had been 'from a time of which there in no memory' until recently 'such gentlemen as were assessors of the subsidies, from enmity and ill will which they bore the said John' had raised the assessment to two and a half ploughlands.⁸⁵ These assessments naturally tended to gather the force of custom, although John Delahide's experience shows that the choices of those appointed as assessors could still have an impact.

As the later decades of the fifteenth century progressed these extents appear to have been invested with more than just customary authority. In 1477 John Barnewall of Drimnagh, esquire, petitioned parliament that his lands at Terenure and 'Newcamysshe formerly called the Oldcamysshe' (Kimmage) were extended at one ploughland until a new extent was made in the county which assessed Terenure, Newcamysshe and Oldcamysshe at 60 acres each, despite the fact that the 60 acres at Oldcamysshe 'are the very same lands and tenements' as the 60 acres at Newcamysshe. Thus far the petition does not differ greatly from the earlier examples discussed above. The response to the petitions however suggests changes in the method of assessment. Travers and Delahide were granted parliamentary ordinances decreeing that their lands henceforth be assessed at the lower rate. In contrast, parliament's response to Barnewall's petition was to order Thomas Dowdall, clerk and keeper of the rolls of chancery, to 'withdraw and put out of the said new extent the said Oldcamysshe and three score acres that are named therein.... Terenure and

⁸³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV, i*, pp. 194-7.

⁸⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, p. 293.

⁸⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV, i*, pp. 202-3.

three score acres in the Newcamysshe to remain in the said extent as truth and conscience have required'.⁸⁶ Here we have clear evidence of the existence of a detailed extent of lands in county Dublin overseen by the officials of the royal government and to change which required parliamentary sanction. Presumably copies of this assessment might be made available to those appointed to collect subsidies in Dublin. Among William Darcy's services to the royal government was the drawing up of a new extent of Meath to replace an extent drawn up by Robert Lutteburgh or Lightburgh (Ludborough?), escheator of Ireland in 1377, which was in use in 1423 and was still in use at the turn of the sixteenth century.⁸⁷ The commonplace book of the Cusack family of Gerrardstown (bar. Skreen), who provided at least two sheriffs of Meath in the early sixteenth century, includes both the Lutteburgh and Darcy assessments. In addition, the manuscript also contains more detailed assessments of individual baronies, giving the acreage of individual parcels of land (ranging from 30 up to 180 acres) in each parish of the barony in question.⁸⁸

This evidence is bolstered by a similar case involving Cabra. In response to the petition of Thomas Bermingham, the Irish parliament had ordained in 1486 that Cabra was to be considered part of the city of Dublin and free from any subsidy of the county of Dublin.⁸⁹ Despite this grant the collectors of subsidy were still seizing Thomas' livestock for 6s 8d of subsidy of Cabra twelve years later. In contrast William Darcy's account for monies of subsidy received in 1501-2 includes a charge of 6s 8d on Cabra with the note *exonerat(us) quia infra franchisesiam civitatis Dubliniae*.⁹⁰ It seems likely that the collectors of Castleknock in 1498 were drawing on an assessment that predated the 1486 act; and that Darcy had access to an updated version of the same assessment. Apparently no extent was made of

⁸⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 486-9.

⁸⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 124; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 576-9; ii, pp. 74-7; TCD MS 594, ff. 19, 21v; Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', pp. 227, 236; Richardson and Sayles, *Administration of Ireland*, p. 130; *idem*, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 171-2; *Cal. Carew MSS*, v, p. 444, *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1377-83*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ TCD MS 594, ff. 2-3v, 11, 14-15, 20v-21v, 38-40v.

⁸⁹ Quinn, (ed.) 'Bills and statutes of parliaments of Hen. VII and Hen. VIII', p. 78; RC 8/43, pp. 106-11.

⁹⁰ RC 8/43, pp. 106-11; NLI MS 761, p. 330.

Kildare until at least 1479, when Roland FitzEustace and the prior of Connell were charged with its creation.⁹¹

The case for the existence of detailed extents, at least before the closing decades of the fifteenth century, is weakened by the surprising variety of the area of land held to constitute a ploughland. The variability of the medieval acre is well known, it being a measure more of productivity than of area; but in theory each ploughland should have contained 120 of the local acres. The subsidy assessments suggest that this was not always so, at least when it came to taxation. We have already seen that there was room for disagreement between landowners and assessors over the extent of their lands. In 1474 Robert Preston, lord Gormanston, petitioned parliament, complaining that his manor of Athboy was assessed at four ploughlands 'so that every 70 acres in the said Barony are charged and assessed as an entire ploughland', whereas every ploughland elsewhere in the county contains 20 score (400) acres. The latter figure is clearly in error, but the end result was to halve Athboy's assessment – meaning that each ploughland there was now 140 acres.⁹² Very similar to this was Christopher Barnewall's petition to the Irish parliament of the following year, in which he complained that his 120 acres in Assey were extended at an entire ploughland 'contrary to the common custom of the land'.⁹³ Barnewall's grievance may have been the failure of the collectors to take into consideration the recent plundering of these lands by 'divers English rebels'; while Assey's subsidy contribution was reduced by half, this was a temporary measure, after which the lands were to be assessed as before.⁹⁴ In 1480 Walter Eustace of Dublin, gentleman, had his 198 acres in and around Corrstown (bar. Balrothery) reduced from an assessment of two ploughlands (notionally 240 acres) to a single ploughland.⁹⁵ In 1477 a group of leading prelates and gentry of Louth had a commission to draw up a new extent of Co. Louth, reducing its assessment from 360 ploughlands to 240 ploughlands, the commons of Louth having complained that the larger

⁹¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 464-5, 532-3, 672-3, 682-5

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 250-1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 810-13.

figure meant that each of these 360 ploughlands ‘contains only 5 score acres and some others less’ in comparison to other counties where the same figure was paid for ‘ploughlands which contain in themselves double as much’.⁹⁶ It is clear the 120 acre ploughland – or rather, the ploughland for subsidy-raising purposes - was an ideal that was subject to negotiation.

The process of securing assent to a subsidy and of securing men to collect it was no doubt eased by the policy of giving the knights of the shire and the collectors a financial interest in the subsidy. In 1472 the collectors of Dublin were ordered to account to Philip Bermingham for ‘all manner of receipts by them received of the common people above 4s 8d’.⁹⁷ The fate of the other 4s8d is not specified, but it seems likely that it was a recompense to the collectors for their efforts. In Meath some, but not all, baronies assigned a portion of the sum collected to the collectors, while in the reign of Henry VIII some collectors received small sums directly from the exchequer.⁹⁸ In 1463 the Irish parliament granted the sheriff of Cork permission to levy 8d on each ploughland in the county to pay the expenses of the men elected to represent Cork at that parliament ‘as the county of Dublin and other counties pay their knights for their residence in foreign counties.’⁹⁹ The subsidy so raised appears to have been independent of the general subsidy. It would appear however that the knights of the shire might expect a cut of any subsidy to which they gave their assent. In 1478 a grant of a 10s subsidy on each ploughland specified that ‘the knights of the counties have their dues of the subsidies according to ancient customs... to be received of the collectors of the same counties by their own hands’.¹⁰⁰ This no doubt helped soften the opposition of the parliamentary commons to the subsidy. It was also tied to the real responsibility which the knights of the shire had for the collection of the subsidy, as it was they who were increasingly charged with assessing and appointing collectors of the subsidy.¹⁰¹ In 1485, for example, the knights, burgesses and clerical proctors were to

⁹⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 484-7.

⁹⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 806-9.

⁹⁸ TCD MS 594, ff. 19, 21v-22; Quinn, ‘Irish parliamentary subsidy’, pp. 227-8, 236-7.

⁹⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 262-3.

¹⁰⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 672-3.

¹⁰¹ See for example *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 456-7; *Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 130-7, 672-3, 682-5, 730-1.

ordered to send in the names of sufficient collectors to the clerk of the rolls or clerk of parliament. Those departing parliament without doing so were to forfeit £20.¹⁰²

Payments to the collectors must be balanced against the inconvenience of the task, including dealing with heavily taxed landowners who were not above physically liberating animals seized 'in name of subsidy'.¹⁰³ Indeed grants of exemption usually empowered the landowner involved to deforce intransigent collectors of goods seized.¹⁰⁴ In border regions aggrieved landlords might go one further and seize the collector's own livestock in revenge, or worse.¹⁰⁵ In 1470 the commons of the barony of Newcastle in Dublin petitioned parliament seeking to have the collectors of the baronies discharged of the subsidy due for 'Harold's country', the southernmost part of the barony, which lay in the upland marches of the county 'which Harold's country is in rebellion, and no man dares to go there to distrain for any subsidy... for fear of their lives or of being made prisoners and delivered to the Irishmen'.¹⁰⁶ Dealing with the exchequer brought with it the danger of lengthy wrangles over debts. This no doubt explains in large part the preference to account before specially appointed auditors and not the exchequer, which in turn may possibly explain the few references to collectors in the memoranda rolls before the reign of Henry VII.¹⁰⁷ In 1472 the collectors had to balance their 4s 8d fee against the danger of being committed to custody by Bermingham for their defaults.¹⁰⁸

There are several instances during the fifteenth century of the appointment of extraordinary commissions with power to levy subsidies on a particular county or counties for their defence. There is a very pronounced overlap between the men who were appointed to these commissions and those who served on commissions of the peace. Sometimes indeed the two might be combined, as in 1401 when Christopher Holywood,

¹⁰² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 74-7.

¹⁰³ RC 8/41, pp. 328-9, 417; RC 8/43, pp. 106-11; NAI Ferguson Coll. 3, ff. 210-210v, 221v.

¹⁰⁴ See for example *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 378-81, 794-7; ii, pp. 54-5, 250-1, 810-13.

¹⁰⁵ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 766-9.

¹⁰⁶ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 666-9.

¹⁰⁷ 'Documents concerning the administration of the earl of Ormond' in Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 131-91; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 430-3; ii, pp. 830-3.

¹⁰⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 806-9.

William Tynbegh, Thomas Serjeant and Robert White were appointed justices and supervisors of the peace in Dublin, with power to summon assemblies of the 'prelates, magnates, peers and commons for the safety and defence of same, whenever seems expedient to them; to assess the subsidies granted by them; and to appoint collectors for those subsidies.'¹⁰⁹ There does not seem to have been a consistent policy of granting peace commissions subsidy-raising powers. Holywood and Serjeant appeared on another commission of the peace in Dublin in 1403, alongside Thomas son of Simon Cruise and Walter Tyrell.¹¹⁰ On this occasion they did not apparently have the power to levy subsidies, with their only fiscal resource being amercements for infringements of the Statute of Westminster. The 1401 commission was likely the exception. It is significant that the commission specified that William Tynbegh, a veteran of the exchequer and future treasurer of Ireland, must be present for the commission to have legal force.¹¹¹ Nonetheless the overlap in personnel between the commission of the peace and that of the (much rarer) commissions with power to raise subsidies is very pronounced. Seven days after their appointment to the commission of the peace in November 1403, Christopher Holywood and Thomas Serjeant joined John Cruise, Thomas Howth, Robert White and John Owen on a commission to 'ordain for assemblies of the magnates, peers and commons of that county when necessary... to ordain in the best manner [for] the governance of that county'.¹¹² All but Thomas Howth had previously served on a commission of the peace in the county.¹¹³ The unstated purpose of summoning such an assembly was to secure consent to a subsidy.

Similar commissions later in the century provide a similar overlap. In 1465 commissions were issued to the leading landholders, lay and ecclesiastical, in the four shires, with power 'to call before them... at any time that they think necessary, all the gentry of the said county... and appoint such company of men-at-arms as the aforesaid persons or the greater part of them, by the advice of the said gentry or the greater part of

¹⁰⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 2 Hen. IV, no. 19.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 82.

¹¹¹ Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 170.

¹¹² CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 94.

¹¹³ Fame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 11-12.

them, deem necessary' and to assess and levy subsidies for their maintenance 'the statute of assent or dissent or any other acts or statutes to the contrary notwithstanding'.¹¹⁴ The commissioners appointed in Dublin were the archbishop, the prior of Kilmainham, the abbot of St Thomas' Abbey, the abbot of St Mary's, Robert St Laurence, lord of Howth, Sir Robert Burnell, Peter Travers, John Barnewall, John Field, John Woodlock and James Blakeney. Of these, the prior of Kilmainham and the abbot of St Mary's, together with Burnell, St Laurence, John Barnewall, and John Field, had all served on the most recent commission of the peace in Dublin, two years earlier.¹¹⁵ Of the rest, Peter Travers was the serving sheriff of the county, James Blakeney would serve as sheriff of the county in the following year, and John Woodlock (sheriff c. 1475) was almost certainly a close relation of John Woodlock who had been knight of the shire and assessor of subsidy in Dublin in 1421.¹¹⁶ Similarly, a commission in 1473 to assess subsidies for the maintenance of soldiers to defend Dublin from 'the great mischiefs which are daily done by the Geraldines and others' included Robert St Laurence, Robert Dowdall, knight (chief justice of the common bench), and John Barnewall, each of whom had been on the 1461 commission of the peace, while John Burnell, gentleman, was the son of Sir Robert Burnell, JP in 1461.¹¹⁷ Walter, abbot of St Mary's, was also appointed to the 1473 commission; his predecessor John had been a justice of the peace in 1461. All but one of the remaining members of the 1473 commission were either prominent members of the judiciary or royal administration – Philip Bermingham and Thomas Dowdall (son of Sir Robert) – or churchmen (including the archbishop), both categories familiar from commissions of the peace. The exception was William Foster, gentleman, who did not himself apparently hold office in the county but had been among the electors both of Robert Bath and Peter Travers as sheriff in the early years of the reign of Edward IV.¹¹⁸ All of the lay landholders appointed to the commission, with the exception of Foster, had served as sheriff of the county. It is clear then that the men appointed to these extraordinary commissions represented the lay and ecclesiastical

¹¹⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 344-7.

¹¹⁵ Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 13.

¹¹⁶ RC 8/41, pp. 32, 59-60, 95.

¹¹⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 138-41; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 13.

¹¹⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 39-40, 61-5.

landholding elite of the county, together with prominent representatives of the royal administration, who could be expected to command the obedience of the rest of the county landowners. Even so their powers were strictly limited. The 1473 commission was to last only for a single year, while that of 1465 was to last 'no longer than until the next parliament'.

Assessors of subsidy in Dublin

An office that would certainly have been sought after was that of assessor of subsidies, touching as it did the material interests of the landholders and their tenants. Comparatively few names of assessors have been recorded, a reflection both of the sources (the memoranda rolls of the reign of Henry VII that contain so many names of collectors omit the names of the assessors) and of the fact that more men were needed to collect than to assess a subsidy. Full lists of assessors are extant for four Dublin subsidies – one in 1404 and the three subsidies granted to the earl of Ormond in 1420-1421. To these may be added two assessors of Castleknock in 1434 and the name of a single assessor from the mid-1450s. The fact that our assessors are concentrated in the first half of the century, while our collectors are concentrated in the second, makes comparison difficult. But it is clear that the assessors are consistently from the county elite. The men who served as assessors were often the same men who served on the extraordinary commissions with subsidy-raising powers (and by extension the men who served on commissions of the peace). In 1402 Thomas Mareward, sheriff of Dublin, Christopher Holywood, Thomas Serjeant, Thomas Howth and John Owen were appointed to assess a 40 mark subsidy granted by the commons of Dublin.¹¹⁹ This was much the same group of leading Dublin landowners as the subsidy-raising and peace commissions of 1401 and 1403 discussed above. Robert Burnell, the only member of a group of assessors from c. 1455 whose name has survived, was similarly a veteran of county government. He was appointed to the peace commission of 1461, and to the subsidy-raising commission of 1465.

¹¹⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 249.

The survival of the indentures made by the various parties contributory to the subsidies granted to the Earl of Ormond in June 1420, December 1420 and October 1421 provide a unique level of detail on the arrangements for the collection of a subsidy.¹²⁰ John Owen, Robert White, Stephen Howth and Richard Tyrell were appointed to assess the first subsidy and subsequently the same team was appointed to assess the second subsidy. The third subsidy was to be assessed by John Owen, Richard Bermingham, John Woodlock and John Walsh of Suralstown (par. Killossery). John Owen served as assessor of the county in 1402 and with Robert White was one of those appointed to the extraordinary commission of November 1403. Stephen Howth was a close relative and eventual heir of Thomas Howth, who had served alongside Owen and White on that commission.¹²¹ Richard Bermingham was a veteran of the Irish exchequer who had previously served on a commission of the peace in Dublin alongside Richard Tyrell and Robert White.¹²² Neither John Walsh nor John Woodlock appear to have served on commissions of the peace or otherwise in County Dublin. But they were clearly of some significance in the county. They were the knights of the shire for Dublin who approved the subsidy for which they were assessors.¹²³ Similarly, Stephen Howth and Robert White had been knights of the shire when parliament approved the two subsidies for which they were assessors.¹²⁴ In later grants of subsidies the responsibility for appointing assessors and collectors was generally given to the knights of the shire and clerical proctors attending parliament, while in some cases the knights of the shire were specifically given the role of assessors.¹²⁵ It may well be that the service of the knights of the shire as assessors of the subsidy to which they had assented (as in the subsidies of 1420 and 1421) was the standard practice.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 141-2, 158-9, 179-80.

¹²¹ RC 8/40, p. 52.

¹²² Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 12; RC 8/38, pp. 16, 26-8, 102; RC 8/39, pp. 117-18, 221-2; Ball, *Judges in Ireland*, i, p. 174.

¹²³ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 179-80.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2, 158-9.

¹²⁵ For example, *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 456-7; *Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 130-7, 672-3; *Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 74-7.

¹²⁶ Thomas Bacon, knight of the shire for the liberty of Meath in 1421, was not among the assessors of the subsidy granted at that parliament; but he is the exception among the knights for the liberty and cross of Meath 1420-1 – Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 137-8, 171-4.

The marked preference for the appointment of men with previous experience as assessors can be seen from the examples mentioned above. It is to be seen again in 1434, the next year for which assessors are named in Dublin, when John Walsh of Suralstown reappears.¹²⁷ The record is ambiguous and it is unclear whether Walsh was assessor of the county or simply of the barony of Castleknock. The former however is likely, as assessors of single baronies are otherwise unknown from Dublin in the fifteenth century (and the fact that Suralstown was in the barony of Coolock, not Castleknock). John's fellow assessor was William Field, who was very likely a relative of Walter Field, appointed to receive the October 1421 Dublin subsidy. The collectors named for the barony of Castleknock in 1434 were Nicholas Woodlock and John Luttrell. John had been appointed as one of the collectors in County Dublin in October 1421, while Nicholas was almost certainly a close relation of John Woodlock, who had represented Dublin in parliament in that year alongside John Walsh.¹²⁸ The role of a small number of individuals and families in these early fifteenth-century subsidies is thus very pronounced.

Assessors and receivers of subsidy in Meath

Those appointed as receivers of subsidy in Meath were generally men with experience of county government and/or of the royal administration. Thus in 1467 the three men appointed to receive a subsidy levied on the freeholders, gavellers and chattellers of Meath were Edward Plunkett, then sheriff of the county, Richard White and John Hore, both described as of Trim.¹²⁹ The surname White was extremely common in fifteenth-century English Ireland, but a family with that name based in Trim had previously served the crown in Meath and in the central administration. James White of Trim was deputy of William Walton, chief remembrancer of the exchequer, and acted as an attorney in the exchequer court in c. 1406; in 1414 he had a grant of custody of 20 acres in Roestown, Co. Louth, when his mainpernors included William Stakeboll, then clerk of the seneschal of Meath and

¹²⁷ NAI, m. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 55.

¹²⁸ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 179-80.

¹²⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 430-3.

subsequently assessor of the subsidy of October 1421.¹³⁰ James was also a receiver of the royal service of Meath for the army of New Ross in 1409.¹³¹ In May 1420 James was appointed with Stephen Palmer to levy all issues of the liberty of Meath lately resumed into the king's hand.¹³² We have noted the importance of men from Trim and Newtown Trim, including Stakeboll, in the administrative work of the county. John Brown of Newtown was appointed a receiver of one of the subsidies granted to the earl of Ormond 1420-22; in Easter 1422 the sheriff of Meath was ordered to distrain him and his fellow receiver, Stephen Palmer.¹³³ Palmer was also from Trim, and acquired grants of custody of properties in the town.¹³⁴ Brown served as sheriff of the cross of Meath, while Palmer was sheriff of the liberty and subsequently undersheriff of the county of Meath.¹³⁵ The assessors of subsidy included men from a similar background. William Stakeboll, as we have seen, was an assessor for the subsidy granted by the commons of Meath to the earl of Ormond in October 1421. His fellow assessors on that occasion included Richard Lynham, lately sheriff of the cross of Meath, and John Dillon, who is probably the man who was York's serjeant-at-law in his liberty court three decades later.¹³⁶ As sheriff of the cross Richard Lynham had been represented at the exchequer by John Brown of Trim, who was also one of his successors in that office.¹³⁷ The careers of these men demonstrate the importance of a small, closely-connected group of men from Trim and Newtown Trim in the administration of county Meath.

The other men appointed as assessors in October 1421 were John Cardiff, Walter Exeter and William Sarsfield, men from families that were undoubtedly among the county gentry although none were especially prominent in county office. The Exeters of Carrickdexter habitually served as collectors of subsidies and keepers of the peace in the

¹³⁰ RC 8/33, p. 389; RC 8/34, pp. 8-9, 172-3; RC 8/36, pp. 95-99, 200-1, 502-3, 591, 682-3; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 172.

¹³¹ RC 8/36, pp. 707-9.

¹³² RC 8/38, p. 7.

¹³³ RC 8/39, pp. 292, 303.

¹³⁴ RC 8/34, p. 6; RC 8/36, pp. 207-12; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 574.

¹³⁵ CIRCLE, Cl. 5 Hen. VI, no. 67; *Ir. Exch. Payments*, p. 558.

¹³⁶ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, ff. 193-6.

¹³⁷ RC 8/39, p. 63.

barony of Slane but did not hold any county office after 1421. The Sarsfields next appear in office in 1495, when Richard Sarsfield was collector in Duleek. John Cardiff was the only member of his family to appear in office in our period, although they were present in Ratoath throughout the fifteenth century and were counted among the gentry of the barony in 1511.¹³⁸ Anne, daughter of Sir John Cardiff, was married to Robert Cusack of Cushinstown, who escheator and clerk of the market in the crosslands of Meath in 1455 and sheriff of Co. Meath eleven years later. Walter Cardiff of Dowth, esquire, and Robert Cardiff, joined Cusack, Bishop William Sherwood, then deputy lieutenant of Ireland, and others, to found a chantry in the parish church of Piercetown Laundey in 1475. The chantry was to pray for the souls of the founders, their relatives and friends; special mention was made of Sir John and Anne.¹³⁹ Sir John's only recorded interactions with the royal government after 1421 were in c. 1440, when a weir he had illegally constructed on the Boyne was seized into the king's hand, and in 1444, when he was one of the 'knights, esquires and peers' of the liberty and crosslands of Meath who endorsed the rule of the earl of Ormond.¹⁴⁰ Although the Cardiffs and the Cusacks of Cushinstown were clearly men of similar status, they displayed very different patterns of office. The active participation of the Cusacks in office and the apparent absence from office of the Cardiffs do not seem to have had a bearing on their relative prominence or status; a reminder the office was not the preoccupation or primary concern of every gentleman or gentry family.

In general, those appointed as assessors of subsidy in Meath as in Dublin were the magnates and greater gentry, with a strong correlation between service as a justice of the peace and as an assessor. As in Dublin, the knights of the shire who consented to a subsidy were usually appointed among the assessors of the same. Thus in 1420 John Bellew of Bellewston, knight, and Robert Tuite, knight, were knights of the shire for the liberty and cross of Meath respectively. They were appointed assessors of the subsidy on June 1420 alongside Walter Delahide, knight, and Thomas Cusack, knight.¹⁴¹ Delahide was sheriff of

¹³⁸ CIRCLE, Cl. 16 Ric. II, no. 19; RC 8/36, p. 557; TCD MS 594, f. 26.

¹³⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 326-33.

¹⁴⁰ CIRCLE, Pat. 22 Hen. IV, no. 7

¹⁴¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 138-9.

the county two years later, while Cusack was a justice of the liberty.¹⁴² In 1473 a commission was issued to six Meath landholders, two ecclesiastical and four lay, who had power to assess subsidies on the county whenever they felt the defence of the county demanded it; the commission was to last for two years.¹⁴³ Those appointed were the abbot of Navan, the bishop of Meath, and four men from prominent gentry families, including two future sheriffs of the county and one former coroner and escheator.

Collectors of subsidy in Dublin

In both Dublin and Meath, the office of collector of subsidies was the means by which by far the greatest number of individuals played their part in 'self-government at the king's command.' It has been possible to recover the names of 210 individuals who served as collectors in the county or cross of Dublin between 1399 and 1513. Between them they served 259 times. To these can be added the names of the collectors for the clergy of the diocese of Dublin, which have been preserved for the three subsidies of 1420-1 and for the years 1495-6, 1498, 1499, 1500 and 1508.¹⁴⁴ Without exception these men are themselves clerics and thus they have been excluded from the present study.

In the first decades of the fifteenth century most of the men appointed as collectors of subsidy for county Dublin were from relatively prominent county families. They included Robert Luttrell, appointed to collect each of the three subsidies granted to the earl of Ormond in 1420-1421 and his close relation John Luttrell, appointed to collect the last of these subsidies. John Tyrell, who served alongside them in June 1420, was presumably a close relation of Walter Tyrell, then sheriff of the county, and Richard Tyrell, assessor of both 1420 subsidies.¹⁴⁵ Others however were from much less prominent families. Simon Coolock was one of three men elected collectors of 9d upon every carucate in Dublin to pay

¹⁴² Dryburgh and Smith (eds.) *Handbook and select calendar*, pp. 179-80.

¹⁴³ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw IV*, i, pp. 766-7

¹⁴⁴ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 137, 155-6, 173-4; RC 8/43, pp. 95-6, 137, 189-90; BL, Royal MS 18 C xiv, ff. 9, 43v-44v.

¹⁴⁵ RC 8/38, p. 3; CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 45; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 141-2, 159.

the wages of footsoldiers heading north to reclaim Ulster from the Scots and Irish in August 1404.¹⁴⁶ He had been appointed the previous year alongside John Derpatrick, Henry Fitzwilliam, and John Talbot of Mayne to inquire into the misdeeds of purveyors of the household in Dublin.¹⁴⁷ Derpatrick was then sheriff of the county, while Fitzwilliam and Talbot were close relations of sheriffs. In contrast Coolock was apparently the only member of his family to hold office. A probable ancestor, Nicholas Coolock, had been among the comparatively humble electors of Nicholas Howth and William Fitzwilliam in 1375.¹⁴⁸ A probable descendent, Piers Coolock, was found by the sheriff of Dublin to hold lands worth just under £6 annually in 1450.¹⁴⁹ It would appear then that Simon was from a gentry family, but one that was at the lower end of the social hierarchy. He appeared on a jury alongside John Walsh of Surgalstown, who as we have seen was knight of the shire for Dublin and assessor of subsidies there.¹⁵⁰ The two men elected with him, William Bossard and John Montgomery, were similarly the only members of their families to be appointed to office in Dublin in the fifteenth century. Of the four men appointed to collect a subsidy of 40 crannocks of wheat and 40 crannocks of oats granted by the commons of Dublin to the chief governor in 1401, only one, Walter Field, shared the surname of a prominent Dublin family; although here the nature of the subsidy to be collected – fodder, not money – may have meant the task was considered less fitting for men of leading county families.¹⁵¹

The subsidy of October 1421 is the last to have collectors appointed for the county as a whole. Each subsidy thereafter apparently had collectors appointed for each barony. Some of these men were leading members of the county elite. James Cruise, collector in Balrothery in 1495 and 1498, was sheriff of the county eleven years later.¹⁵² Robert Talbot of Belgard, then sheriff of the county, was collector in Newcastle in the same year.¹⁵³ Robert Barnewall of Drimnagh, who had been sheriff of Dublin in or before 1495, was collector in

¹⁴⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 5 Hen. IV, no. 84.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Pat. 4 Hen. IV, no. 276.

¹⁴⁸ Clarke, 'William of Windsor', pp. 238-40. See above, pp. 203-206. 'Serjeants and chief serjeants'.

¹⁴⁹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 704-7.

¹⁵⁰ *Christ church deeds*, no. 275.

¹⁵¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 61.

¹⁵² RC 8/43, pp. 93, 284, 286; CIRCLE, Pat. 24 Hen. VII, no. 8.

¹⁵³ RC 8/43, pp. 93, 97, 156.

Newcastle in 1499.¹⁵⁴ Yet these men were the exception. Robert Talbot was the only member of his family to serve as a collector, despite the fact that the Talbots of Feltrim and Belgard were heavily involved in county government throughout the fifteenth century. The same is true for James Cruise, while the only other member of the Barnewall family to serve as a collector of subsidy in the fifteenth century was Nicholas Barnewall, collector for the archiepiscopal lordship of St Sepulchre in 1420. He was not certainly not the head of his family.¹⁵⁵ No member of the Burnell family served as a collector, despite their prominence as sheriffs, justices of the peace, and indeed assessors of subsidies. Neither of the members of the Fitzwilliam family who served as collectors of subsidy in our period were heads of that family; although one, John Fitzwilliam of Jobstown, was head of a cadet branch. Walter Howth, the only member of the St Laurence family to serve as a collector, was a younger brother who had made a career in the royal administration.¹⁵⁶ Although Robert White of Killester was appointed several times as an assessor of subsidy in the early fifteenth century, no member of his family served as a collector, although several men from families that may have been cadet branches were appointed.¹⁵⁷ There is thus a clear distinction between the county elite and the great majority of the men who served as collectors of subsidies. In all, only five of the 210 individuals who served as collectors of subsidies also served as sheriff in the county, and of these five only two, Robert Barnewall and Robert Talbot, served as collector during or after their service as sheriff. James Cruise was collector in 1495 and 1498 but did not serve as sheriff until 1509. Roger Duff was collector in 1500 but not sheriff for another four years. Christopher Holywood was collector in 1495 and sheriff twelve years later. No individuals who served on commissions of the peace in Dublin are recorded as having served as collectors of subsidies, although the concentration of the commissions of the peace in the first decades of the fifteenth century and the subsidies in the closing decades of the century rule out any firm conclusions on this score. Among the

¹⁵⁴ *Letters and papers Ric. III & Hen. VII*, ii, p. 307.

¹⁵⁵ See above, pp. 114-17.

¹⁵⁶ Ball, *Judges*, i, p. 190; *idem*, *History of county Dublin*, v, pp. 52, 59; BL Royal MS 18 C xiv, f. 68v

¹⁵⁷ John White of Parnelstown, collector in the crosslands north of the Liffey in 1402, Thomas White of Corbally, in the barony of Balrothery, and Simon White of Correston (on the Howth peninsula) in Coolock, both in 1472, and William White of Courtlough in Balrothery in 1499.

remaining collectors, one, Walter Bermingham, collector in Balrothery in 1495, went on to serve as escheator and clerk of the market in Dublin some years later.

So who were the men who served as collectors? Many came from families that, while not prominent, were clearly part of the gentry of the county. Such families often provided several collectors over the course of our period. The Woodlock family have already been mentioned. They provided collectors of subsidy in Castleknock in 1434 and again in 1498. We have already seen that John Woodlock was a knight of the shire and assessor of subsidy for the county in 1421. His namesake was on the subsidy-raising commission of 1465 and was sheriff of the county c. 1475. A Nicholas Woodlock, who may have been the collector in Newcastle in 1434, was among the electors of Peter Travers as sheriff of Dublin 1465.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps slightly further down the social scale, but still recognizably part of the gentry, were men like John Pippard of Balrothery, who was collector for Balrothery in 1499. John, or his namesake, was among the electors of the coroners of Dublin in 1485.¹⁵⁹ Other families that provided both electors of officers and collectors of subsidies, without apparently holding county office themselves, included the Chamberlain family of Finglas who provided collectors for Finglas in both 1421 and 1498, as well as an elector of sheriff Peter Travers in 1465.¹⁶⁰

Others who do not appear among the few surviving records of election of officers also appear to have been from families of at least local importance. Many of our collectors come from families that appear frequently on the inquisitions held in the county during the reign of Henry VIII, on which they sat alongside leading members of the county gentry. Richard English of Baldwinstown (par. Garristown), collector of subsidy in Balrothery in 1500, was presumably a close relation of James English of Baldwinstown, juror at the inquisition post mortem of Thomas Mareward at Dublin in November 1515.¹⁶¹ William Nott of Baldwinstown who sat on the same jury was presumably a close relative of Robert Nott

¹⁵⁸ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5.

¹⁵⁹ RC 8/43, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5.

¹⁶¹ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 3.

of Garristown, collector in Balrothery in 1495 and 1499, and of Thomas Nott, one of the electors of Peter Travers in 1465. The family gave their name to Nutstown in the parish of Ballymadan. As electors of sheriffs, they should in theory have been comfortably within the gentry community of the county. And yet in January 1499 Robert Nott of Garristown ‘merchant’, who was presumably identical with our collector, was fined for contempt for infringing rules controlling the purchase and sale of hides.¹⁶² William Nott and James English of Baldwinstown were jurors for the inquisition post mortem of Robert Talbot of Belgard in May 1525, when their fellow jurors included Christopher Holywood of Artane.¹⁶³ Collectors from similar families included Richard Lock of Colmanstown (par. Newcastle), collector of subsidy for Clondalkin in the cross of Dublin in 1499 and 1508, who was a fellow juror of English, Nott and Holywood at the May 1525 inquisition. These families were thus men of some local importance, who could expect to have their judgement called on in matters touching landholding in the county. They were members of what has been called the parish, in contrast to the county, gentry.

The line separating the poor gentleman from the prosperous peasant could be quite blurred and it seems certain our collectors included both. The sheer number of families that provided collectors of subsidies – over 160 – makes this practically certain, especially given that the great majority of those whose appointment has survived served in one of a handful of years in the reign of Henry VII. In 1508 Thomas Rath of Athgoe, husbandman, William Lock of Colmanstown, husbandman, and John Donyll of Saggart husbandman entered into a recognition with the king for £40.¹⁶⁴ John Donyll of Saggart, with his Irish surname, was collector in Newcastle that year. Thus John and William, who was presumably a close relation of Richard Lock who was appointed collector of subsidies in that year, were considered to be of less than gentry status. John Donyll’s fellow collector in Newcastle was Richard Russell ‘the elder’, who had served in the same capacity in 1499. He also entered into a recognition with the king in that term, when he was also given the addition of

¹⁶² RC 8/43, p. 113.

¹⁶³ *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 24.

¹⁶⁴ RC 8/43, pp. 263-4.

husbandman.¹⁶⁵ The recognitions appear to have been related to a dispute between Russell and Rath.¹⁶⁶ The most prominent officer from the Russell family in the fifteenth century was William Russell, subserjeant of Balrothery in 1472.¹⁶⁷ As we have seen previously such a position is by no means indicative of gentry status.¹⁶⁸ William Russell, then described as yeoman, had been appointed alongside the serving subserjeant of Balrothery to a commission to levy the debts of Thomas Field, former sheriff of Dublin, in 1444.¹⁶⁹ The Russell family, then, were a family that approached, but generally fell short, of the line separating the gentry from the wealthier peasantry. Apart from Richard, two other members of the family served as collectors of subsidy at the close of the fifteenth century. John Russell was collector in Newcastle in 1498, while Stephen Russell of Goddamendy (par. Mulhuddart) was collector in Castleknock in the same year. It is likely that the great majority of our collectors, whose families are otherwise invisible in the record, were of similar status to the Russell family.

It would appear that the collectors in the cross of Dublin were of humbler status than the collectors of the county baronies. None of those who also served as sheriff or in other county office appear as collectors in the crosslands. Many of the collectors in the crosslands were described as being of the archiepiscopal manor in which they were collectors, such as Jenkin Horsley of Swords, collector in Swords and Thomas Finn of Tallaght, collector in Tallaght, both in 1508. Although these families did not hold more prominent offices in the fifteenth century, the consistency with which the same individuals or multiple individuals from the same family were appointed as collectors suggests that these men are likely to have comparatively wealthy and prominent by the standards of their immediate community. John and William Bailey, for example, served as collectors of the crosslands of Finglas in 1496, and John served again in the same office two years later. An earlier John Bailey, who was presumably a servant of the archbishop, was collector for the

¹⁶⁵ RC 8/43, pp. 264.

¹⁶⁶ RC 8/43, pp. 269-70.

¹⁶⁷ RC 8/41, p. 337.

¹⁶⁸ See above, pp. 226-7.

¹⁶⁹ CIRCLE, Pat. 22 Hen. VI, no. 3; a more complete version of this record can be found in NAI m. 2675 (Delafield MS), p. 58.

archiepiscopal lordships of Swords and St Sepulchre's in 1420 and 1421. Walter Frankum was collector in Swords alongside John Bailey in 1421. His family were established in Swords throughout the fifteenth century without ever holding office. William Frankum of Swords was a juror in a case between Sir Richard Eustace and John Fowling of Drogheda in c. 1470, while Alice Frankum of Swords was party to a suit of trespass there in c. 1480.¹⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that of the five surnames shared by Alice's opponents in that suit (who are all described as of Swords or of Hilltown), three - Hayward, Comyn, and Jordan - are surnames that also appear among the collectors of subsidy for Swords in the fifteenth century. Thus the collectors of subsidy, especially in the crosslands, included a very broad section of local society. It is likely that these men were of the class that provided manorial officials. Andrew Smith of Balheary, collector in Swords in 1508, has an (admittedly very common) surname that was long associated with the archiepiscopal manor of Swords. It is very possible that he was a relative of William Smith, serjeant of the lordship of Swords when it was in the king's hand following the death of Archbishop Richard Talbot.¹⁷¹

Some of our collectors came from a group of families otherwise not well-represented among Dublin officeholders but who were nonetheless an important part of the political and military equilibrium in the region. These were the Archbold, Harold, Lawless and Walsh families, the English marcher lineages of the south Dublin marches, who have been discussed in some detail by Christopher Maginn.¹⁷² Occupying land in the foothills of the Dublin mountains, they were in direct contact and perennial conflict with the Gaelic Irish of Leinster. Weakening royal authority, the challenges of pastoral agriculture and march warfare, and interaction with the Irish contributed to the evolution of a distinct society whose distinctive unit was the lineage - a broad group united by a common surname, although comprising individuals differing greatly in status, held (by the outside world at least) to share common interests and, to a certain extent, a common legal identity or at least shared responsibility for the crimes of individual members. A similar

¹⁷⁰ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 870-3; Ellis, 'Plea roll of 19 Edw. IV', p. 49.

¹⁷¹ See above, pp. 198, 209-11.

¹⁷² Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', pp. 113-136.

process of evolution can be seen in other parts of the lordship of Ireland and in the 'surnames' of the Anglo-Scottish borders.¹⁷³ Questions of the existence or extent of a process of 'gaelicisation' among these marcher lineages do not here concern us. The result of this process of evolution, regardless of its causes, was that these marcher families had in important respects diverged from the more recognisably 'English' society of the lowlands. In the fourteenth century Thomas Rokeby, the justiciar, oversaw the election of Walter Harold as *capitane(us) progeniei [sic] des Harolds*.¹⁷⁴ Similar elections were held of Matthew Archbold as *capitaneus de Archbolds* and, significantly, of *Iohannes* (John, or Eoghan?) O'Byrne as captain of the O'Byrnes.¹⁷⁵ As with the Irish, hostages were taken from the marcher lineages to ensure their good behaviour.¹⁷⁶ They were not above plundering their lowland neighbours when the opportunity arose. A particularly spectacular raid occurred in August 1463, when William Harold, esquire, 'a fugitive [who] keeps no certain residence in any place' raided Balally, Dundrum, Mulchanstown and Leopardstown in south Dublin, killing eight of the king's subjects and stealing 200 head of cattle, 40 affers and 100 sheep.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless the 'Englishness' of the marcher lineages was not forgotten, and they would eventually be rehabilitated as respectable English subjects of Tudor state.¹⁷⁸ In the sixteenth century (and possibly earlier) the Walshes were heavily intermarried with both with the leading gentry families of the southern part of the Pale maghery and the Irish of the Wicklow mountains, as were the Lawlesses and Archbolds.¹⁷⁹

The march family that had progressed least far along the route of 'gaelicisation' was the Walsh family of Carrickmines, who might expect to be accepted as members of the county elite and to play an occasional role in the governance of the county – certainly when

¹⁷³ Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', pp. 113-14; Ciarán Parker, 'Paterfamilias and *parentela*: the le Poer lineage in fourteenth-century Waterford' *PRIA*, C, lxxxv, no. 2 (1995), 93-117; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 31, 40-1; Frame, *English lordship in Ireland*, pp. 27-9.

¹⁷⁴ Edmund Curtis, 'The clan system among English settlers in Ireland' *EHR*, xxv, no. 97 (Jan., 1910), 116-120, pp. 116-17; Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. 142.

¹⁷⁵ Curtis, 'Clan system', pp. 117-17; Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', p. 123.

¹⁷⁶ Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, p. 142.

¹⁷⁷ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 66-9.

¹⁷⁸ Maginn, 'English marcher lineages', pp. 134-6.

¹⁷⁹ NLI, GO MS 48, ff. 91, 98-101, 109-10; *Cal. Inq. Dublin*, Hen. VIII, no. 116.

it concerned their *patria* in the south of the county.¹⁸⁰ Maurice son of Adam Walsh was a justice and keeper of the peace in Dublin in 1425, while Henry Walsh of Carrickmines was one of those given a commission to summon and organise labourers from the southern baronies of Newcastle and Rathdown and the crosslands adjoining to throw up earthworks for the defence of the county's southern march in 1460.¹⁸¹ No members of the Archbold, Harold or Lawless families appear on commissions of the peace or in other county offices during the fifteenth century, but they did each provide collectors of subsidy. Thomas *carraghe* [?] Lawless was collector for the crosslands of Shankill for each of the three subsidies of 1420-1421. His descendant John (sometimes rendered as Shane) Lawless was the sole collector for Shankill for the subsidies of 1496, 1498, 1499 and 1500; he also served as collector in the neighbouring crosslands of Dalkey in 1499. Richard *more* Archbold was collector in Rathdown in 1498, 1499 and 1508, while Maurice Walsh of Kilgobbin (head of a cadet branch of the family of Carrickmines and himself the beneficiary of a castle subsidy in 1477) was collector there in 1500. The only member of the Harold family to be named as a collector was John Harold of Tallaght, collector in the crosslands there in 1500. He would appear to have been a tenant of the archiepiscopal manor of Tallaght and is unlikely to have been a prominent member of the Harold lineage. Tallaght lay just to the north of 'Harold's country', which extended 'from Saggart (bar. Newcastle) to Kilmashogue (par. Whitechurch, bar. Rathdown)'.¹⁸² The petition of the commons of Newcastle to the Irish parliament in 1470 concerning Harold's country has already been noted; parliament ordained that the collectors of Newcastle were to be discharged of the subsidy due for Harold's country and two collectors were to be specifically appointed to collect the same.¹⁸³ While no names of collectors for Harold's country have survived, it is likely that any collectors so appointed (if the ordinance actually ever had effect) would have been members of the Harold marcher lineage.

¹⁸⁰ For examples of the use of *patria* or *pays* for the lands of the marcher families see *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, p. 666 ('*pais de harrold*'); BL, Royal MS 18 C xiv, f. 223v ('*in patriam Theolbaldi Walsh*').

¹⁸¹ CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. VI, no. 128; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', p. 13; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 756-9.

¹⁸² *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 666-9.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Although the 1470 petition does not name the individuals in Harold's country who were inclined to kill collectors or sell them to the Irish, it is difficult to imagine that the culprits were any other than the members of the Harold lineage. The petition sheds light on the role of the marcher lineages in the collection of subsidies. As Englishmen and the leading men of their localities, they were the sort of men who might expect and be expected to exercise a role in the levying of the subsidy on their families, tenants and neighbours; but perhaps more importantly they were also the only men who could exercise such a role. They could, if they so chose, make the collection of the subsidy difficult or impossible. Ten years before the petition concerning the collection of subsidies in Harold's country, the Irish parliament heard that Henry Walsh of Carrickmines, gentleman, who 'from day to day oppresses the liege people of the king' had stolen the cattle of an unnamed collector who had had the temerity to distraint one of his tenants.¹⁸⁴ It seems likely that the cooperation of the marcher lineages in the collection of the subsidy would have had to be bought, perhaps at the cost of a portion of the subsidy collected, as was the case for the knights of the shire. It would appear that their appointment as collectors was effective and not merely notional. John Lawless is recorded as paying a mark (13s 4d) for the subsidy of Shankill in February 1496, while Thomas Walsh paid in nearly three times that sum for the crosslands of Clondalkin.¹⁸⁵

Collectors of subsidy in Meath

In Meath 200 men from 185 families served as collector of subsidies on a total of 417 occasions between 1399 and 1513.¹⁸⁶ These bare numbers if anything belie the extent of participation in the office, as the great majority of the known collectors of subsidies survive for two concentrated periods: the subsidies voted to the earl of Ormond between 1420 and 1423, accounting for 197 of the 417 known appointments of collectors, and the general subsidies preserved in the memoranda rolls and undertreasurer's reports from the

¹⁸⁴ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 766-9.

¹⁸⁵ BL, Royal MS 18 C xiv, f. 44.

¹⁸⁶ This assumes that John Bellagh, appointed collector in Delvin in 1421, was in fact John White of Bellagh, collector in the same in 1420 and 1423 – CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 53; Pat. 1 Hen. VI, no. 118; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 139.

period 1495-1508, accounting for a further 158. Only four collectors are named in the interim period, despite the subsidy being a standard feature of the annual holding of parliament in the later decades of the fifteenth century. A further 25 men are named as collectors of a subsidy granted by the commons of Meath in early 1400, while thirty men were appointed to collect wheat and oats from the baronies of Meath to the use of the chief governor.¹⁸⁷

No members of the magnate families of Meath served as collectors of subsidies. The cadet branches of the magnate families were, however, well represented, particularly in the later period. Three of the four collectors named for the barony of Delvin between 1495 and 1508 were members of Nugent cadet branches, while four other Nugent men were collectors in the neighbouring baronies of Moyashel and Corkaree. In contrast no members of Fleming cadet branches held the office in the barony of Slane in the later period. Christopher Fleming, collector there in 1421, was from a cadet branch. The Plunkett cadet branches are well represented, with five individuals from four cadet branches serving in the baronies of Fore and Kells. The Plunketts of Clone (one of whom, Christopher, was sheriff 1501-3) served in every year for which collectors are named (1495, 1498, 1499, 1500, and 1508). The only member of a magnate family to serve was William Preston, collector in Lune in 1495. He had not yet acceded to the title, and was unusually active in office in the county, serving as sheriff in the same year.¹⁸⁸ Like the shrievalty, the office was clearly one that was below the magnates, but not one over which they were willing to cede all control.

It is clear that the great majority of the men who served as collectors of subsidies in Meath were members of gentry families, whether greater or lesser.¹⁸⁹ There is a pronounced overlap between the leading men of the county named by Christopher Cusack in 1511 and those who served as collectors in the baronies.¹⁹⁰ Often these were families

¹⁸⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 1 Hen. IV, nos. 121-2; 145-6; Pat. 3 Hen. IV, nos. 61-2. John son of Nicholas Barnewall was appointed to collect the subsidy in both Skreen and Ratoath in 1400, while John Comyn was collector of the crop subsidy in Delvin, Farbill, and Moygoish, Corkaree and Moyashel (the latter three baronies being grouped under a single team of collectors).

¹⁸⁸ BL Royal MS 18C xiv, f. 24, 30v, 56, 151v.

¹⁸⁹ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 95-6

¹⁹⁰ TCD MS 594, ff. 25v-28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 170-4.

that make no other appearance in office, but appear consistently in this role in their immediate localities. These were families like the Lynch family of the Knock (now Summerhill, *Cnoc an Linsigh*, bar. Moyfenrath). The Lynch family appear in no county office in our period, but were content to serve as collectors in the barony. Members of the family were collectors in Moyfenrath for the subsidies of 1421, 1423, and each of the subsidies known between 1495 and 1508. They were clearly among the county gentry, and provided a sheriff of the county in 1531.¹⁹¹ Others, like the Berfords of Kilrue, might serve on commissions of the peace in their barony, but did not serve in county office. Others named by Cusack do not even feature as collectors of subsidies, such as William Starkey of Ninch (Laytown, bar. Duleek). Starkey may have been a fairly insignificant individual – his ancestor and namesake is not given a status title when he is recorded making fine for contempt at the exchequer.¹⁹² And yet another man from the same family (the surname is not a common one) was accorded the fairly elevated status title of esquire in 1447, when he and William Nugent esquire were the target of an assise of *novel disseisin* by John, earl of Shrewsbury, in the liberty court.¹⁹³

There is a great deal of overlap between the keepers of the peace of the baronies of Meath and the men and families that served as collectors of subsidies in those baronies. Edward Dowdall, for example, was one of the justices of the peace appointed for Slane in 1499; he was collector of subsidies in the same barony in 1498 and again in 1499.¹⁹⁴ Walter Exeter, keeper of the peace in the same barony in 1403, was collector there in 1421.¹⁹⁵ Other members of the same family were collectors of subsidies in Slane in 1401 and 1420 and justice of the peace in Slane in 1432.¹⁹⁶ Certain gentry families fulfilled these roles in their baronies throughout the century and beyond. George Drake, who was collector of subsidies in Morgallion in 1421 and 1423, was presumably a close relative and probably the

¹⁹¹ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 179.

¹⁹² RC 8/41, pp. 152-3.

¹⁹³ NAI, Lodge MS 1, p. 55

¹⁹⁴ RC 8/43, pp. 91, 134, 165.

¹⁹⁵ CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 53.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pat. 3 Hen. IV, no. 62; Pat. 10 Hen. VI, no. 134; Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, p. 138.

son of John Drake, who had been keeper of the peace there in 1403 and 1405. Another George Drake was collector in the same barony in 1508 and was listed among the gentry of the neighbouring barony of Kells, in which he also held land, in 1511.¹⁹⁷ In contrast to the commissions of the peace, however, none of the magnates of Meath served as collectors of subsidies, although many from cadet branches of their families did.

Let us examine the collectors of one of the baronies in detail. Duleek was the most sheltered barony in Meath. According to the Lughtburgh's extent of the county, as preserved in the Cusack commonplace book, it was the second largest barony, at 36 ploughlands (Navan was the largest, at 40 ploughlands; most of the eastern baronies of the county were held to contain between 25-35 ploughlands, while the western baronies were extended at less than ten ploughlands).¹⁹⁸ Duleek had to supply more carts to military expeditions than the other baronies, reflective of the greater wealth of its inhabitants or perhaps recognition of their privileged position far from the frontier.¹⁹⁹ Christopher Cusack lists eighteen leading landholders in the barony, including the Prestons, viscounts Gormanston, and the Barnewalls, lords Trimleston (although here named by their manor of Moymurdry).²⁰⁰ Of these, four had served recently as collector of subsidy in the barony: Edmund Golding of Piercetown Laundey, collector 1498 and 1499; Richard Sarsfield in 1495;²⁰¹ Thomas Hamlin, also in 1495; and Christopher Bellew, also in 1495. They account for half the individuals named as collectors in the barony between 1490 and 1513. Laurence Serle, of Shallon, was collector in 1508. He was certainly a member of a gentry family, admittedly a minor one. He is not named on Cusack's list.

¹⁹⁷ RC 8/43, p. 274; TCD MS 594, f. 173; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 173. Drakerath (bar. Kells) directly abuts Drakestown (bar. Morgallion) – *Civil survey*, v, pp. 310, 332.

¹⁹⁸ TCD MS 594, f. 5v.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 9.

²⁰⁰ Moymurdry (now Mosney) was in the possession of the Barnewall lords Trimleston in 1493 and in 1641, so there is no reason to believe that this was a cadet branch of the family – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 136-9; *Civil survey*, v, p. 7.

²⁰¹ Two branches of the family are listed in Duleek in 1511; he is probably Richard Sarsfield of Moorechurch – TCD MS 594, f. 25v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 170.

William Darcy, named by Cusack as a leading man of Duleek and of Farbill, was collector in the latter barony in 1495, 1496, and 1498.²⁰² Darcy is the only man named for Farbill on Cusack's list.²⁰³ He was sheriff of the county in 1496 and served the royal administration as receiver-general, undertreasurer, and deputy treasurer. A committed servant of the crown, Darcy presumably felt that he was needed more in Farbill, on the western frontier, than in Duleek, where the crown had plenty of other potential collectors to choose from.²⁰⁴ William Preston, serving sheriff and future viscount Gormanston, did not serve as collector in Duleek, but in 1495 he was collector for Lune, where the family had considerable landed interests.²⁰⁵ John Barnewall served twice, in 1495 and 1499; but he was from a cadet line based at Claristown (par. Moorechurch).²⁰⁶ Moymurdry was in the same parish, so the relationship may have been a close one.

The Hamlin family of Smithstown (par. Julianstown) were the only family to supply a collector of subsidy in Duleek in both the period 1420-1423 and the period 1495-1513. These are the family's only appearances in office during our period. They did not provide any county officers, nor were they deemed of sufficient importance in Duleek to serve as keepers of the peace there. And yet they apparently retained the same lands and social status throughout the fifteenth century, only emerging clearly as part of the local gentry at the end of our period. In 1422 Richard Hamlin of Co. Meath was mainpernor to John Tuite when he had a grant of a messuage and 160 acres in Cloghran in the barony of Delvin. Hamlin's fellow mainpernor was Richard Nugent, baron of Delvin.²⁰⁷ They may have made a conscious effort to avoid the duties of office. William Hamlin of Smithstown, gentleman, had a grant of exemption from being placed on assizes 'etc.' in September 1467.²⁰⁸ There

²⁰² On the latter occasion he was joined by Edward Darcy.

²⁰³ TCD MS 594, f. 28v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 174.

²⁰⁴ Ellis, 'Darcy, Sir William'; *idem*, 'Sir William Darcy of Platten', pp. 30-31.

²⁰⁵ *Gormanston register*, pp. 4-5 and *passim*; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 207-10.

²⁰⁶ RC 8/43, p. 165. No Barnewall of Claristown features on Cusack's list, while Claristown had left the family's possession by 1641 – *Civil survey*, v, p. 8.

²⁰⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 9 Hen. V, no. 78.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Pat. 7 Edw. IV, no. 9; RC 8/41, pp. 246-7.

are very few collectors of subsidies who served in Meath that we can confidently state were not of at least the same social status as the Hamlins.

Other very minor families that provided collectors of subsidies included the Brown family of Clonmore (bar. Lune). Thomas Brown of Clonmore was collector in Lune in 1498, 1499, and 1508.²⁰⁹ Thomas appears to have been from a cadet branch of the family of Kilpatrick, a family that were themselves only middling gentry. The highest office obtained by the latter family was that of sheriff of the cross, not, as we have seen, the preserve of the leading gentry. They are not recorded holding the office of collector of subsidy, though they held lands in Lune. While the Browns of Kilpatrick are numbered among the gentry of Delvin by Christopher Cusack, the Browns of Clonmore do not feature among the gentry of Lune.²¹⁰ Cusack's list includes Map of Maprath, another family whose only appearance in office was as collector in Kells in 1423.²¹¹ Cusack omits the first name of the head of both families, a possible indication of a relative lack of prestige; while of course it is always possible that the gaps in the record mean their lack of engagement is more apparent than real.²¹²

Gaelic Irishmen as collectors

One fact that is immediately striking upon reading the names of the collectors of subsidy in Co. Dublin is the presence of a number of men of unambiguously Gaelic Irish origin, in sharp contrast to all the other offices of royal government in the county (including the assessors and receivers of the subsidy in the county). Fully thirty-five of the collectors can be assigned with confidence to this category. Another collector, William Mac Thomas *og* of Dalkey, would appear to have been of English descent but clearly came from an Irish-

²⁰⁹ Clonmore was the property of Edward Sherlock of Frane in 1641, though Thomas Brown of Athboy, Richard Brown of the same, and William Brown of Kilpatrick were among the landholders in the barony of Lune; William Brown held a castle in the town of Athboy, while Thomas held two – *Civil survey*, v, pp. 205, 207, 210.

²¹⁰ TCD MS 594, ff. 26v, 28; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 172, 174.

²¹¹ Another branch of the family were collectors in four of the baronies of the western frontier in 1421 – CIRCLE, Cl. 9 Hen. V, no. 53.

²¹² TCD MS 594, f. 27v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 173.

speaking *milieu*. The same may have been true of collectors from the English marcher lineages such as Thomas *carragh* Lawless and Richard *more* Archbold. Against these must be balanced men like Jenkin ('Little John') Horsley of Swords, whose first name suggests he came from an area where English was the main language. Equally striking is the fact that of these thirty-five collectors, all but seven were collectors for the crosslands of Dublin. Gaelic Irishmen were well represented among the clerical collectors of Dublin, so it would appear that the clergy were comparatively relaxed about the appointment of Irishmen to the office.²¹³ This, together with the comparatively humble status of the collectors in the crosslands which has already been noted, no doubt explain the difference between the crosslands and the county in this regard.

Most of the Irish collectors have English first names (the great majority being John, William and Patrick). Eight however do not – Dermot Corviser of Santry, collector in the barony of Coolock in 1472, Dermot Mannyn, collector in the lordship of St Sepulchre's, Donal Curran of Diswellstown, collector in the barony of Castleknock, Donal *gromagh* (*gruaimeach*, gloomy?) O'Kelly and Donal Omoren' (O'Moran?) of Clondalkin, collectors in the crosslands of Clondalkin, Donal Carpenter of Finglas, collector in the crosslands of Finglas, and Donal O'Nolan of Shankill in the crosslands of Shankill, all in 1499, and Dermot Bay (*Buidhe*?) of Rathcoole, collector in Rathcoole in 1500. It will be observed that these instance all occur very late in the century. It may be the case that Latin of the records makes men like John Kenane of Mabestown, collector in the barony of Coolock in 1499, appear more anglicised than they were. For example, John Lawless is named as collector in the crosslands of Shankill in 1499 and again in 1500. It is very likely that he is identical with the Shane Lawless named as collector there in 1498. The exchequer records may well mask many other cases of Johns who should more correctly be Shanes. Others may be hidden more thoroughly. It is striking that only two unambiguously Irish names – Diarmuid and Domnall – are borne by our collectors. It seems likely that a wider variety of Irish names are hidden by the John, Patrick and William of the exchequer Latin.

²¹³ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 137, 155-6, 173-4; RC 8/43, pp. 95-6, 137, 189-90; BL, Royal MS 18 C xiv, ff. 9, 43v-44v.

Two examples that call for further attention are Dermot Corviser of Santry, collector in the barony of Coolock in 1472, and Patrick White of Finnstown, collector in the barony of Newcastle in 1500. Dermot's surname is occupational. He, or his immediate ancestors, are likely to have been corvisers or cordwainers, that is, shoemakers or leatherworkers.²¹⁴ This was a trade in which Irishmen were particularly prominent, even in the Pale, by the late fifteenth century. Furthermore Dermot may possibly have been actively trading in Dublin. In 1472 (the same year Dermot was collector in Coolock) a Dermot Cornell, 'tanner', was admitted to the franchise of Dublin.²¹⁵ Cornell is not a Gaelic name, but its combination with an unmistakably Gaelic first name here strongly suggests that Cornell is a misreading – or perhaps a deliberate misrepresentation, on the family's part – of Dermot's surname. This Dermot was admitted to the franchise having served his apprenticeship, and so was probably a young man. It is tempting to suggest that he was the son of our collector. Although this is simple conjecture, his involvement in the leather trade makes a connection to Dermot Corviser very possible. Only seven years earlier, in 1465, the Irish parliament had ordered Irishmen dwelling among the English to take on a suitably English surname. Among the surnames suggested by the Act were colours, such as White, town names, such as Sutton, and trade names. It appears likely that Dermot Corviser was among those who had obeyed this ordinance. Dermot *Corvisarium* of Santry appears again in 1479, when was involved in a plea of debt against Thomas Byrsall of Howth.²¹⁶ Howth is in the barony of Coolock, and it is at least possible that this suit was connected to Dermot's role as collector of subsidies, in which case he may have been collector over a period of years rather than in 1472 alone. Here *Corvisarium* is very obviously a trade name and not a true surname. Donal Carpenter of Finglas, collector of Finglas in 1499, is another example of an Irishman bearing an English trade name. It is possible to suggest Dermot's 'real' surname. In 1508 the collectors in Coolock included William 'Morg'h' of Santry. His surname should probably be read as a version of Murchadh. William is the only other man described as of Santry among

²¹⁴ Dermot is in fact called 'Cornicer' (horn-worker?), but this is almost certainly a misreading on the part of the record commissioners – RC 8/43, pp. 328-9.

²¹⁵ *CARD*, i, p. 348.

²¹⁶ Ellis (ed.) 'Plea roll of 19 Edw. IV', p. 40. My thanks to Dr. Sparky Booker for drawing this and the previous reference to my attention.

the collectors of the barony. It seems at least possible that Dermot and William represent the same comparatively prominent family of Irish origins in Santry (as we shall see, the collectors in the county baronies were on the whole men of less humble status than the collectors in the crosslands). So Dermot Corviser may just possibly have been Diarmuid Ua Murchadha.

Three members of the Finn family are named as collectors in Tallaght between 1498 and 1500 – Geoffrey in 1498, David Finn of Tallaght in 1499, and Richard Finn of Tallaght in 1500. Thomas Finn of Tallaght was collector there eight years later. Another member of the family, Patrick Finn ‘of Meurath’ [?] was collector in the lordship of St Sepulchre’s in 1499, while earlier in the century Patrick Finn was appointed collector in Shankill of the subsidies granted to the James Butler, earl of Ormond, in June and December 1420. The family were clearly well established in Tallaght at the close of the fifteenth century, with at least three contemporary family members being of sufficient local prominence to be appointed collector. There is little evidence of the family’s presence or activity in Tallaght earlier in the century. However, the family’s roots in the area may have been very deep. A list of the Archbishop of Dublin’s feoffees in south county Dublin dating from the mid-thirteenth century includes a number of clearly Gaelic Irish figures holding land of the archbishop in the foothills of the Dublin mountains, such as ‘Duciessa, daughter of Othothelan (O’Toole)’. A William *Albus* of *Sililkyuin* (Síol Caomhín?) is listed as holding all the land which Osbert of Crumlin held in the manor of Tallaght.²¹⁷ William could certainly have been a member of the English family with the surname White, who were common in Dublin (notably the family of Killester, who were among the leading families of the county and provided assessors of subsidies among other officers). But fluidity between White, Finn and Albus must be considered a possibility. Such fluidity may have lasted well into the fifteenth century. It could only have been encouraged by the parliamentary statute of 1465, mentioned above, which specifically suggested ‘White’ as a suitable name for an Irishman living among the English.²¹⁸ An inquisition in Co. Louth in the early fifteenth century had felt the need to

²¹⁷ *Alen’s reg.*, p. 121.

²¹⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, i, pp. 291-3.

stress that Robert White, his father John White, his grandfather Laurence and his great grandfather 'were and are mere English and begotten of the English nation'.²¹⁹

Three pieces of evidence may be advanced in support of this theory. The first is the presence of men given the descriptive surname *Albus* among early tenants or jurors in the archiepiscopal manors of Tallaght (as we have seen) and Shankill.²²⁰ These are two of the three places that the Finn family appear as collectors of subsidies in the fifteenth century, the third being the archiepiscopal liberty of St Sepulchre. No men with the surname White appear in Tallaght or Shankill in the fifteenth century. The second piece of evidence is the placename Whitestown in the parish of Tallaght, given the presence of many Finns and few or no Whites in the area in the fifteenth century. It is possible that this represents the land held of the archbishop by William White in the mid-thirteenth century, although Ballymorefinn in the same parish (rather further into the mountains) is an equally good candidate. The third and perhaps strongest piece of evidence in support of the fluidity of the surnames White and Finn comes from another of our collectors. One of the two collectors in the barony of Newcastle in 1500 was Patrick White. He is described as 'of Fynnyston' (Finnstown, par. Esker). It seems probable that Patrick has a good claim to be a seventh member of the Finn family named among the collectors of subsidy in fifteenth century Dublin, albeit that his family (or his branch of the family), further from the march, had conformed more closely to the parliamentary ordinance on acceptable surnames. It is clear that the family were long established settled in English areas – even if on the march – and thus they cannot be considered as straightforwardly 'Irish' collectors. They had close links with the church – William Finn was vicar of Rathmore in 1500, when he was collector of the clerical subsidy in the deaconry of Ballymore, while Thomas Finn of Rathkenny, administrator of the goods of John Coleman, chaplain, in 1472 may also have been in holy orders.²²¹ Nonetheless it is noteworthy that they do not feature elsewhere in royal service as officers. The Finn family, together with Dermot Bay (*Buidhe?*), reflect the use of colour

²¹⁹ *Christ church deeds*, no. 1076.

²²⁰ *Alen's reg.*, pp. 121, 194.

²²¹ RC 8/43, p. 190; *Wills and inventories*, pp. 48-9.

names in Irish that may have prompted the Irish parliament to suggest English colour names as an alternative to Gaelic names in the Pale maghery. No collectors are named for Tallaght in the subsidy indentures of 1420-1, with the collection of the subsidy there apparently being the responsibility of the collectors named for Clondalkin and Rathcoole.²²² Had Tallaght been assigned its own collectors, it seems reasonably possible that a member of the Finn family might have been among them. An Irish surname would not have been an impediment, as John Dermot was appointed as one of the collectors in Clondalkin and Rathcoole for each of the three subsidies granted to Ormond.

We have seen that in Dublin that in the late fifteenth century a number of men with unambiguously Gaelic names served as collectors of subsidies, the only office in Dublin for which this is the case. In Meath sixteen men with surnames that were clearly or probably of Gaelic origin served as collector of subsidies. These ranged from Magonius (*Mathgamhain*) son of Taidgh, collector in Magheradernon in 1508, to John McKeane, collector in Fore in 1420 and in Delvin, Fore, Farbill and Moyashel in 1423. The Betagh family, despite the apparent Irish origins of their surname, were ranked among the leading men of Meath by the mid-fourteenth century at the latest, and so it is unlikely that they or their peers considered them as Irishmen.²²³

Unsurprisingly, the Irish collectors, especially those with Irish first names, are concentrated in the frontier baronies, such as Moygoish and Magheradernon; although the great majority of men appointed collectors in these baronies were members of the English border lineages such as the Pettits, the Tuites, and the Tyrells of Portloman, or were members of cadet branches of the Nugents of Delvin.²²⁴ The barony of Slane, which was divided between the frontier and the comparatively sheltered maghery, accounts for two of the Irish collectors, who were appointed together in 1500. William Halpin appears to

²²² Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 133-4, 161-2, 181-2.

²²³ Simon Betagh was appointed as keeper of the peace in the county in 1346, alongside William Teeling and Simon Fleming, baron of Slane. Henry Betagh was one of the Meath landholders summoned by name to the great council of 1372, when he was described as Betagh of Moynalty, still in the family's possession in 1511 and 1641 - CIRCLE, Pat. 20 Edw. III, no. 89; Cl. 46 Edw. III, no. 123; TCD MS 594, f. 27v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 92-3, 173; *Civil survey*, v, pp. 299-302.

²²⁴ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 93-4.

have come from a family that had been established in the barony of Slane for some time and apparently was on good terms with the barons. Two clerics with this surname were appointed by to the church of Killary by the barons of Slane in the fifteenth century, despite being ‘Irishman of *lez Ohalpynez*’.²²⁵ Gilgrome O Halpenny, one of a very large body of men summoned for unspecified crimes by the Irish parliament in 1493, may have been a relative.²²⁶ It is tempting to link the family’s presence in the barony to the 1416 grant of licence to Thomas Fleming knight, baron of Slane, ‘to inhabit his lands both with Irish rebels, outlaws and indicted persons’ because his lands in the marches of Meath were despoiled by Irish enemies, although this doubtless was more a recognition of realities rather than a new policy.²²⁷

The reason for the perhaps counterintuitive fact that there were more Irish collectors in Dublin than in Meath is probably due to a number of factors, including the greater number of members of the Meath gentry available or willing to serve as collectors in their baronies. It may also have been due in large part to the way the counties were assessed for the purpose of subsidies. The great majority of the collectors of subsidy in Dublin, as we have seen, were appointed collectors in the crosslands. The tenants of the crosslands of Meath were assessed as part of the entire county of Meath, even when the liberty was in existence. In Dublin the very extensive lands and liberties of the archbishop and the two cathedrals were treated as a separate unit, with the collectors nominated by the cathedral chapters.²²⁸

Conclusion

The general subsidy, which was the primary source of royal income in Ireland by the late fifteenth century, was also the means by which a very large number of individuals and families had experience of and took part in the process of local government. Much more so

²²⁵ NAI, Ferguson coll., iii, f. 213; RC 8/43, pp. 168-9.

²²⁶ There is no particular geographic logic to this list, but it may be significant that Halpenny was immediately followed by Patrick Bacach Mc Caffrey of Siddan, tailor; others summoned included members of the Teeling family – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Ric. III to Hen. VIII*, pp. 120-5; Linda Clare, *On the edge of the Pale: The rise and decline of an Anglo-Irish community in County Meath, 1170–1530* (Dublin, 2006), p. 50.

²²⁷ CIRCLE, Pat. 4 Hen. V, no. 10.

²²⁸ Richardson and Sayles, *Parliaments and councils*, pp. 133-4, 138-9.

than other comparatively humble offices, such as that of subserjeant of a barony, it drew on a wide body of men whose importance is unlikely to have extended beyond their immediate locality. These men might be members of lesser gentry families, who might on occasion take part in the higher level of local government as electors of knights of the shire, sheriffs, and coroners. However, in Dublin at least, they might equally belong to yeoman families like the Russells of Newcastle. In many cases the distinction is difficult to draw and is in any case of limited usefulness. While a few men served as both collectors in their baronies and as sheriff of the county, there is in general a very pronounced division between the individuals and families that provided collectors and the county elite who supplied the assessors of subsidies and might expect a position on commissions with subsidy-raising powers. The comparatively humble social status of the collectors is highlighted by the large number of collectors with Irish surnames (and occasionally with Irish first names), which sets this office apart.

In contrast to Dublin, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of those who served as collectors of subsidies in Meath came from families that can be definitively identified as part of the gentry or have a strong case to be so identified. The magnates did not serve in this office, though they were keen to serve as assessors and on commissions with subsidy-raising powers (positions also open to the most prominent members of the gentry). Their absence from the ranks of the subsidy collectors is in contrast to their willingness to serve in that other barony office, that of keeper of the peace. There can be little doubt that the military and leadership aspects of the commission of the peace were felt to be more in line with the standing of the magnate families than the business of collecting money and seizing livestock. In Dublin as in Meath those members of the most prominent families that served as collectors of subsidies were generally those who played a more active role in county and/or royal office, such as James Cruise of Naul (in Dublin) and William Darcy and William Preston (in Meath). Nonetheless many men who served in county office also served as collectors of subsidies; if it was felt to be beneath the dignity of the peers, it was clearly not beneath the dignity of many of the prominent and middling gentry, including many cadet branches of the noble families.

Conclusion

Although the records of county office for fifteenth-century English Ireland leave much to be desired, it has proven possible to reconstruct them to such an extent that, if they are far from complete, they at least represent a respectable percentage of all those who were appointed. The extent to which they may be said to be complete varies from office to office. For officers like the sheriff and the escheator, who were expected to make their proffers biannually at the exchequer, more can be identified than not. I have been unable to add more than a handful of names to the commissioners of the peace compiled by Robin Frame. They represent perhaps the most damaging lacuna in the records of county office, staffed as they were by the very elite of landed society, and given their importance for the direction of military activity, a major concern in fifteenth-century Ireland. The Dublin commission for 1461 and the references to the justices of the peace in later statutes of the Irish parliament show that commissions of the peace continued to be appointed.¹

The coroners are another office for which the record remains very patchy. It might be noted, however, that in this regard English Ireland was not so much poorer than England. Acheson could only identify eight coroners in Leicestershire for the period 1422 to 1485, of whom three were likely coroners of the borough of Leicester; Dublin and Meath in fact compare quite favourably.² The chief serjeants and subserjeants, together with the undersheriffs and other staff of the counties and liberty, are similar to the coroners, in that these officers did not feature in the memoranda rolls as a matter of course. Thus the survival of the names of these officers has been considerably more haphazard. Nonetheless sufficient numbers of each are named to provide insight into the status of the men who occupied such offices.

The known collectors of subsidy, while they are by far the most numerous of the officers whose names have survived, certainly represent a very small fraction of those who

¹ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 750-3; *Edw. IV*, i, pp. 564-5; ii, pp. 442-5.

² Acheson, *A gentry community*, p. 114.

actual served in this office. We know the names of the collectors only for a handful of years in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century when the parliamentary subsidy was an annual occurrence.³ While many individuals were appointed to successive commissions, there is sufficient turnover in the names of those appointed, even within a short period, and a sufficient number of men who only served on one occasion, to demonstrate that the number of men involved over the course of our period must have been considerably larger than the number of those whose names we can now discover. Nonetheless, the sheer size of the sample and the number of subsidies for which a complete list of collectors survives allow us to draw conclusions concerning the status of the office and the men who held it, without fearing grave error.

So what do our reconstructed lists of officers, and the study of the men who make up the lists, enable us to say about Dublin and Meath in the fifteenth century? Above all, it is clear that the fifteenth century saw very broad participation in 'self-government at the king's command' by the landed families of Dublin and Meath. A very large number of individuals and families – 210 individuals in Co. Dublin and 200 in Meath – varying greatly in prestige and wealth, played a part in the government of their localities as collectors of subsidies. The great majority of the men named as county officers can be shown to be from gentry families. Nonetheless participation in local government was not limited to the gentry. Individuals with humbler origins made careers for themselves as subserjeants of baronies, while men with administrative skills or legal training could find employment as undersheriffs, seneschal's clerks, and attorneys for the men who held office. Often these men came from an urban background, whether that was Dublin, in the case of John Barrett, or Trim, in the case of Stephen Palmer. Often their careers in local government preceded or coincided with careers in the service of the central administration or in the private service of individuals such as the archbishop of Dublin.⁴

³ Ellis, 'Parliament and community', pp. 53-4; Quinn, 'Irish parliamentary subsidy', pp. 225-6.

⁴ Barrett was seneschal of St Mary's Abbey in 1415 and bailiff of the archiepiscopal lordship of St Sepulchre in 1420 – CIRCLE, Pat. 3 Hen. V, no. 17; RC 8/39, p. 16.

In Dublin, county office was dominated more or less exclusively by the county's landholders, with the shrievalty, coronership and (from 1454) the escheatorship all filled by election from among their number. The existence of the liberty of Meath meant that outsiders were appointed to office there, which was not the case for Dublin. These outsiders can all be demonstrated to have had a close relationship with the lord of the liberty or the serving chief governor of Ireland. Nonetheless the overwhelming majority of those who took part in the government of Meath were men from Meath county families; exclusively so after the liberty's demise. The records of county government also reveal clear hierarchies of status between the different offices. In Meath, the magnates were happy to sit on the commissions of the peace and to serve as seneschals of the liberty, but were increasingly unwilling to serve as sheriff. In their absence the office was occupied by the leading gentry and to a great extent by cadet branches of the magnate houses. Below this was the escheatorship, while the coronership was beneath that again. All the men who held these offices, with the possible exception of some of the coroners, were members of gentry families of the county. None of these divisions were rigid. Christopher Barnewall of Crickstown, head of the senior line of the Barnewall family, served as both escheator and sheriff of the county over the course of his lifetime. Walter Cusack of Gerrardstown was from a moderately prominent gentry family; he served as coroner and as escheator, while his grandson served as sheriff of the county.⁵ Edmund Golding, again from a moderately prominent family, was coroner of the county in 1485 and knight of the shire for the county ten years later; a combination of offices that was very rare in contemporary England; the coroner there being consistently from the lowest ranks of the gentry, but the knights of the shire from the highest.⁶ A very large number of families, including families that held county office and prominent families that rarely held office, served in the offices of keeper of the peace and collector of subsidy in their baronies; a symbiotic relationship that enabled the

⁵ TCD MS 594, ff. 35-35v.

⁶ CIRCLE, Pat. 23 Hen. VII, no. 12; Acheson, *A gentry community*, pp. 111-13; Carpenter, *Locality and polity*, p. 266; Chris Given-Wilson, *The English nobility in the late middle ages: the fourteenth century political community* (London, 1987; repr. 1996), p. 73.

royal administration to harness their power and status in their *pais* and boosted their authority by giving it the stamp of royal approval.⁷

The families that served as collectors or keepers of the peace in their baronies, but never held county office, were mostly of gentry status, but cannot be considered among the more prominent families in the county. Those who served as collectors of subsidies, but not in any more prominent office, can be fairly labeled 'parish' gentry.⁸ Similar hierarchies of office have been identified in many English shires.⁹ The true divide between gentle and non-gentle occurs when we move to the officers who did much of the actual work of county government: the subserjeants, undersheriffs and seneschal's clerks. The subserjeants were not of gentry rank, while those who served in the sheriff's staff were generally men with origins in very minor county families or, more often, were men from Trim and other towns of the county with administrative experience. These officers, like their English equivalents, and in contrast to the sheriffs and other gentry officers, were generally professional or semi-professional, often reappearing over the course of several years in the administration of the county or liberty.¹⁰

In Dublin a similar gradation of office existed, but it was perhaps a simpler hierarchy than that of Meath, with its very large number of noble and gentry families varying greatly in prestige and wealth. In Dublin the overlap in personnel between the sheriffs and escheators was very pronounced, with many of the most prominent shrieval families serving as escheator, including at least two of the Burnell sheriffs and members of the Talbot families of both Malahide and Feltrim/Belgard. While the escheators included comparatively obscure figures like Thomas Serle and John Walsh of Garristown, all would appear to have been members of at least lesser gentry families, and the majority were from the families that provided sheriffs. In Dublin as in Meath the commissions of the peace were

⁷ Christopher Nugent, baron of Delvin, referred to the tax burden on the barony of Delvin 'when the *pais* was good', i.e., before it was ravaged by the Irish – *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, 514-17.

⁸ Ellis, *Defending English ground*, pp. 95-6.

⁹ Payling, *Political society*, p. 108; Given-Wilson, *English nobility*, p. 73; *idem*, 'The king and the gentry in fourteenth-century England' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, xxxvii (1987), 87-102, pp. 99-100.; Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, pp. 30-110;

¹⁰ Harriss, *Shaping the nation*, p. 166.

the preserve of the county elite. Unlike in Meath, few of the families that supplied commissioners of the peace appear to have shirked the other county offices. The exception was the St Laurence family, lords of Howth, who were the only noble family in the county. In Dublin the divide was between the county offices and those of the baronies. While members of leading gentry families served as collectors of subsidy on occasion, the great majority of those appointed as collectors appear to have been chosen from among the yeomen and on occasion the husbandmen (for example, Richard Russell of Newcastle, collector in the barony of Newcastle in 1499). These men were doubtless held to be reliable agents of the royal government in their immediate locality, but were not men who were prominent on a county level in Dublin. Many of the subserjeants of the baronies appear to have come from a similar stratum of society; likely that of the manorial reeves and other prosperous peasantry. The study of office thus reveals complex but clear hierarchies of status in Dublin and Meath in the fifteenth century. As in England, patterns of office-holding reflected social hierarchies. By extension, it is possible to make a considered judgement of the status of an individual or family based on the office(s) that they held.

This study of officeholding also reveals that these hierarchies were not static. In Dublin, close links between the landed elite of the county and the patricians of Dublin city allowed a series of families – the Sargents, Marewards, Burnells and Blakeneyes – to enter county society in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century through a combination of fortuitous marriages, legal practice and service to the crown. While some appear to have effectively abandoned their civic role for county life, others, especially the Burnells, married urban and county interests to a degree unmatched in contemporary England. In other cases it can be more difficult to trace changes in status based on patterns of office. The sudden appearance of the Luttrell family in the office of sheriff of Dublin in c. 1484, for example, did not represent the rise of a new gentry family: the Luttrells had been sheriffs of the county in the early thirteenth century.¹¹ In contrast, the rise of the Duff family of Kilcoskan from sheriff's staff to the shrievalty appears to reflect a very real change in the

¹¹ Foley, 'The sheriff of Dublin', pp. 279-88; RC 8/33, p. 392.

family's status, as they established themselves in west county Dublin and crested the divide between the wealthy yeoman and the county gentleman. In this case at least service to county government not only reflected changes in status but was one of the factors enabling such change.

The patterns of officeholding in Meath present less evidence of the rise of new men. The more numerous and more stratified gentry of the county ensured that the leading gentry families maintained a monopoly on the shrievalty, while the expansion of the leading families exerted pressure on the land market. Nonetheless Meath too remained an open society to those with the right resources. Two of the most active non-native seneschals of Meath, William Welles and Robert Bold, married members of prominent Meath gentry families and acquired lands and, in Bold's case, a title.¹² Both clearly attempted to establish their family among the landed society of Meath. That both attempts proved ephemeral does not take away from the fact that the acquisition of land in Ireland could still be an attractive proposition for the younger sons of English gentry families, and that entry into Meath landed society was a possibility for those with the right connections. In Meath too there were close connections between the gentry and the leading men of the towns, though they were less pronounced than in Dublin. Thomas Kent, citizen of Drogheda and kinsman of William Darcy of Platin, and Robert Sherlock, provost of Athboy and sheriff of Meath, provide two striking, but rare, examples.

If office reveals a great deal about the structure and dynamics of county society, however, there is also a danger that it may equally conceal much that was fundamental. It is clear that our officers represent only a small subset of the gentry of fifteenth-century Meath and Dublin. While a very large number of families served in office in some form, they might not serve very often. In Meath, minor families like Map of Maprath might only surface once or twice in a century, and that at a very low level of office, and yet still be counted as members of the gentry of Meath. Others, like Lynch of the Knock, served frequently, but only as collectors of subsidies in their barony. John Cardiff was the only member of his

¹² Thomas Pensax, seneschal in 1416, acquired land in Louth and Meath, but his presence in Meath seems to have been fleeting – CIRCLE, Pat. 6 Hen. V, nos. 11-12.

family to appear in office in Meath in the fifteenth century, and yet it is clear from his associations and the fact that he was a knight that he was a prominent member of the local gentry community. The Cusacks of Cushinstown, to whom he was connected by marriage, provide a striking contrast, as at least three generations of the family held county office, as sheriff of the cross, sheriff of the county, and escheator. Office-holding in Meath, as in Warwickshire, as in Kent, was clearly a matter of personal inclination as well as status.¹³ County government was only one potential field for activity among many, including the service of lay or ecclesiastical lords, the cultivation of landed or even of trading incomes,¹⁴ warfare (especially) and even sport¹⁵ (none of which were of course mutually exclusive).

In Dublin, there is less evidence for the existence of important gentry families that did not hold county office at least once in the century. The county's only noble family, the lords of Howth, had played a prominent role in county office in the first half of the century, but after 1460 they ceased to hold the office of sheriff, like their fellow peers in Meath. Some prominent families played less of a role in county society than might have been expected. The Talbots of Malahide, for example, were perhaps the leading gentry family in the county; in the sixteenth century their income in fact outstripped that of the lords of Howth.¹⁶ They were far outdone in terms of officeholding by their cadet branch of Feltrim. Yet even they supplied two sheriffs of the county and an escheator.

However in Dublin too the consistency with which the same group of c. 30 families provided the county officers, combined with the role of men from the peasant or artisanal classes in the collection of subsidies, risks concealing an important part of county society: the parish gentry. These were men like Richard Porter, John Pippard of Balrothery, and Robert Nott of Garristown, some of them on the very margins of gentility, who appear in office only as collectors of subsidies, alongside men from leading county families as well as men who were clearly not members of gentry families. Their absence of county office might

¹³ RC 8/41, pp. 39-40, 61-5; RC 8/43, p. 9; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 1

¹⁴ See above, p. 283.

¹⁵ Saul, *Scenes from provincial life*, p. 187; *Cal. Inquis. Dub.*, Eliz., no. 126. 38-9.

lead us to count men like Pippard among the latter category, but deeper examination (and the chance survival of a handful of lists of electors) makes it clear that this would be a mistake. Though they were not significant on a county level, they were clearly important men in their localities, and might expect to feature on commissions touching upon that locality's interests, as when Richard Porter (whose family's only known connection to family office was the probable position of Richard's father William on the staff of sheriff Thomas Field)¹⁷ and Richard Tyrell of Powerstown were appointed together as supervisors of the workmen building a tower for the defence of the bridge at Lucan in 1455.¹⁸ Similarly they might expect to be appointed to inquisitions touching the landed estates of their peers and superiors. It is probable that the focus of these men's interests was restricted to their immediate neighbourhoods. And yet even these members of the parish gentry might expect to play a role in the government of their county as electors of sheriffs, escheators and coroners.¹⁹ Perhaps slightly further up the social scale, William Foster of Killeek (now bar. Nethercross, formerly bar. Coolock), gentleman, came from a family that did not hold county office. Nonetheless he took part in the government of the county. He was an elector of Robert Bath of Lanestown and Peter Travers as sheriffs of Dublin, c. 1462 and 1465, and of Peter Fitzrery and Henry Golding as coroners in 1485; furthermore, he served on a commission with powers to levy subsidies in Dublin alongside John son of Robert Burnell and others in 1473.²⁰ William Foster's career demonstrates the high degree of engagement in county government by the gentry of county Dublin, regardless of whether they held county office. If more lists of such electors had survived, it is likely that the picture of a rather tight and cohesive county gentry depicted by the succession of county officers in Dublin would be revealed in its proper context as merely the most prominent part of a broader and more complex gentry society.

A very noticeable aspect of the lists of Meath office-holders is the prominent role of the cadet branches of the magnate families, a trend which became most pronounced in the

¹⁷ See above, pp. 229-30.

¹⁸ *Stat. Rolls Ire. Hen. VI*, pp. 402-5.

¹⁹ RC 8/41, pp. 61-5; RC 8/43, p. 9.

²⁰ RC 8/41, pp. 39-40, 61-5; RC 8/43, p. 9; *Stat. Rolls Ire. Edw. IV*, ii, pp. 138-9.

closing decades of the fifteenth century. They came largely to dominate the office of sheriff. The proliferation of cadet branches of leading families that is such a prominent feature of Meath landed society in the fifteenth century is not to be found in Dublin. Just two branches of the Talbots accounted for all the many Talbot officers in fifteenth-century Dublin; both were well established in county life before the end of the fourteenth century. All the Burnell officers of the county were from the main line of the family. John Caddell of Garristown, gentleman, who was escheator and clerk of the market in 1466, would appear to have been from a cadet branch of the family that provided sheriffs of both Dublin and Meath in our period. But he is a rare example. Walter Howth, who was a younger brother of the St Laurence lord of Howth, served as a collector of subsidies in Coolock (the barony in which Howth lay) in 1495.²¹ Walter was then king's attorney and later served as chief baron of the exchequer.²² His service as a collector of subsidy appears to have been linked to his experience as a servant of the exchequer rather than as a member of a local family – though doubtless that was a consideration. Certainly Walter benefited financially from the subsidy collected.²³ Several younger sons of the Barnewall family served in office, notably as coroners of Dublin; but none appears in the record as the head of a cadet branch of the family, in stark contrast to the proliferation of Barnewall families in fifteenth-century Meath, at least three of which held office in the county.²⁴ The best candidate is probably the Fitzwilliam family of Merrion. While William Fitzwilliam, head of the family, had been sheriff on at least two occasions in the early part of the century, all the members of the family who held office thereafter appear to have been from cadet lines, such as John Fitzwilliam of Jobstown, collector in the crosslands of Tallaght in 1508, or Thomas Fitzwilliam of Westpalstown, esquire, sheriff of the county in 1494.

²¹ BL Royal MS 18 C. xiv, f. 85.

²² Ball, *History of the county Dublin*, v, p. 52; BL Royal MS 18 C. xiv, ff. 68v.

²³ BL Royal MS 18 C. xiv, ff. 68v, 137v.

²⁴ Christopher and Edward Barnewall of Crickstown, both sheriff; John Barnewall of Claristown, collector in Duleek, 1495 and 1499; and the Barnewalls of Frankstown/Kilbrue, who provided a sheriff of the cross, a coroner of the county, and a collector in Duleek. In addition, it is highly likely that Henry Barnewall, collector in Slane in 1495, and Richard Barnewall, justice of the peace in Slane in 1499, represent one or more of the four Barnewall families listed among the gentry of that barony in Cusack's commonplace book – TCD MS 594, f. 27; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 172.

How such a disparity could have arisen between the two counties is unclear. Patterns of office-holding identify the trend, but do little or nothing to explain it. Two possibilities suggest themselves. The first is that the comparative security of most of Co. Dublin made for a more competitive land market, while the relative insecurity of Meath allowed the magnate families to exert pressure on the lesser landholders, making room for cadet branches to establish themselves. Another possible explanation is provided by the close association between the gentry of Co. Dublin and the patrician elite of the city. As we have seen, several leading gentry families in Dublin were descended from leading burgesses who made good marriages; while Walter Tyrell, sheriff of the county and mayor of the city, may have been an example of movement in the opposite direction. These families, especially the Burnells, continued to have close links with the civic life of Dublin well into the fifteenth century. There is some reason to believe that in their case the city was the destination for younger sons. John Burnell, recorder of the city in 1459 and bailiff in 1467, and his son Patrick, seem to represent a cadet branch of the Burnell family.²⁵ Another family with similar ties, but at a lower level of county society, were the Fosters of Killeek (bar. Nethercross). In 1500 the mayor of the city was Robert Forster, while a Richard Forster was a member of the council of the forty-eight in the same year.²⁶ That these men were near relations of the gentry family of Killeek is strongly suggested by an entry in a Dublin chronicle for the year 1536 in which it was reported that a prominent merchant had landed himself in trouble by 'hittinge of forster of kyllegh is sone wiche wase is prentes'.²⁷

Nonetheless this was not an option restricted to Dublin gentry families alone. Burgesses in 1568 included Henry Plunkett, of Dublin, merchant, who was the son of Richard Plunkett, the illegitimate son of Sir Alexander Plunkett of Rathmore in Meath.²⁸ Similarly, Nicholas Penteney was the baseborn son of Richard Penteney, who had six

²⁵ *CARD*, i, pp. 302, 326, 340.

²⁶ *CARD*, i, pp. 385-6.

²⁷ Alan J. Fletcher, (ed.) 'The earliest extant recension of the Dublin Chronicle: an edition, with commentary' in John Bradley, Alan J. Fletcher and Anngret Simms (eds.), *Dublin in the Medieval World: Studies in honour of Howard B. Clarke* (Dublin, 2009), pp. 390-409, p. 404

²⁸ NLI, GO. MS. 47, p. 4.

legitimate sons with his wife, a daughter of one Flatisbury, a gentleman of Kildare.²⁹ Richard Penteney of Cabragh and John Penteney of Tara had been collectors in Skreen in 1400 and 1401 respectively. Richard Penteney of Cabragh, perhaps Nicholas' father, was among the gentry of Skreen in 1511, while both Cabragh and Tara were in the hands of Matthew Penteney in 1641.³⁰ The Penteneys thus appear to have been a solidly-established lesser gentry family. The Flatisburys were one of the leading families of Co. Kildare, providing sheriffs, justices of the peace, escheators and coroners of the county.³¹

Another striking development that can be seen in the lists of officers was the increasing presence of Gaelic Irishmen in office in these counties, albeit from a very low base. This was especially pronounced in Dublin in the later part of the century. It is less so in Meath, where there was an Irish presence in office in the early decades of the century. Gilcrist OFerroll, for example, served as subserjeant of Lune during the reign of Henry V. The presence of Irishmen in office in Meath did not notably increase over the course of the century; whereas in Dublin there is a very pronounced increase. Nonetheless Irishmen remained very much a minority, accounting for a total of 35 men of the 210 who served as collectors of subsidies for Dublin during our period. The figure for Meath is 16 men of 200 named collectors. The Irish who held office always did so at a low level. This is in marked contrast to Wales, where the Tudor reform of the principality's government merely served to copperfasten the place of the native Welsh gentry in the government of their localities, a trend that was well underway by the beginning of the fifteenth century.³²

Thus the study of office-holding – and especially the study of the collectors of subsidies – adds to the evidence for the increasing presence of Gaelic Irishmen in the Pale

²⁹ NLI, GO. MS. 48, p. 3.

³⁰ TCD MS 594, f. 25v; Ellis, *Defending English ground*, p. 171; *Civil survey*, v, p. 72.

³¹ NAI Ferguson Coll. 3, ff. 176, 206; RC 8/41, p. 160; Frame, 'Commissions of the peace', pp. 15-17.

³² W. R. B. Robinson, 'The Tudor revolution in Welsh government 1536-1543: its effects on gentry participation' *EHR*, ciii, no. 406 (Jan., 1988), pp. 1-20; A.D. Carr, 'The wealth of the medieval Welsh gentry: the case of Gwilym ap Gruffydd of Penrhyn' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, xx/xxi (2000/2001), pp. 222-231; Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Principality of Wales in the later Middle Ages: the structure and personnel of government: I, South Wales, 1277-1536* (Cardiff, 1972), pp. 267-77; *Lists of sheriffs of England and Wales*, pp. 236-76; Robin Frame, 'Exporting state and nation: being English in medieval Ireland' in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds.) *Power and the nation in European history* (Cambridge, 2005), 143-65, p. 149.

at the close of the fifteenth century.³³ The presence of the Irish in office – albeit at the lowest level – reveals that these men, particularly the wealthier among them, were capable of playing a role in the government of their countries. Nonetheless this study makes clear that officeholding remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the English of Ireland, and indeed the preserve largely of the settler elite, the ‘gentlemen amateurs’ whose efforts enabled ‘the panoply of English ‘self-government at the king’s command’ to continue to define the ‘obedient shires’ into the Tudor era.³⁴

Service in county office was not a prerequisite for gentry status or the focus of every gentleman’s energies any more than was the case in contemporary England.³⁵ The study of the men behind the offices reveals their connection to a much wider population of gentry families that did not actively seek out office, but were willing to play their part in the government of their counties (especially as electors), and above all their baronies. Nonetheless participation in county office was extremely widespread and office-holding remains a vital key to the study of county society in late medieval English Ireland.

³³ Sparky Booker, *Gaelicisation and identity in the ‘four obedient shires’ of Ireland, 1399-1534* (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2011), pp. 47-54.

³⁴ Frame, ‘Exporting state and nation: being English in medieval Ireland’, p. 145.

³⁵ Carpenter, ‘Gentry and Community’ p. 345; Coss, ‘Formation of the English Gentry’, p. 43.

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Appendix: Officers of Dublin and Meath, 1399-1513