

WILLIAM TAILBOYS AND LORD CROMWELL : CRIME AND POLITICS IN LANCASTRIAN ENGLAND

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IN November 1449 the seventeenth parliament of the reign of Henry VI opened against a background of military crisis in Normandy and domestic discontent. While it sat and in the wake of its dissolution early in June 1450 there occurred a series of disasters at home and abroad which ushered in a decade of crisis for the Lancastrian régime. The development during the preceding years of a powerful court group was halted. This group had used personal influence over the king to destroy his uncle, Gloucester, to emasculate the council appointed in 1437 and thus to weaken the position of the great magnates in government, to monopolize Crown patronage, and to commit England to a policy of peace with France. Its power was now temporarily broken, its leader, Suffolk, impeached and murdered, and others of its ablest members also done to death. At the same time most of France was finally lost and magnate faction came increasingly to focus on the control of a feeble monarch.¹

During this parliament a wealthy Lincolnshire squire, William Tailboys, played a minor but important rôle. But the significance of his activities does not begin or end then. In the 1440s he played a crucial part in local faction and disorder and the document printed below shows that in the years after 1449 he remained a centre of conspiracy; because the object of his animosity was one of the great men of the land this has considerable interest for the political history of the period which, had his plots been more successful, he might have seriously affected.²

¹ The best recent account of the period is by R. L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster* (London, 1966). For the fall of Suffolk see C. L. Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in Fifteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1925), pp. 146-76; and R. Virgoe, "The Death of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk", *BULLETIN*, xlvii (1964-65), 489-502.

² Tailboys's role in local and national politics is referred to by R. L. Storey in "Lincolnshire and the Wars of the Roses", *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xiv (1970), 64-82. There are short biographies of him in J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Biographies* (1936), pp. 835-6 and in *Dictionary National Biography*, lv. 342.

The Tailboys family was settled in the North of England from soon after the Conquest. By the fourteenth century it held land in Durham, Northumberland and Lincolnshire but its estates were greatly increased by the marriage in 1337 of Sir Henry Tailboys to Eleanor, daughter and heir of Sir Gilbert de Boroughden by Elizabeth, sister and eventual heir of Gilbert de Umfraville, earl of Angus and lord of Kyme.¹ The Boroughden lands and some of the Umfraville inheritance in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire fell to Henry's son, Sir Walter (1351-1417), in 1382, but Umfraville settled the bulk of his estates, including the honour of Kyme in Lincolnshire, in tail male upon his own half-brother, Sir Thomas, and Thomas's bastard sons. Only on the failure of their issue were the lands to revert to his sister's heirs. Such a failure eventually occurred on the death of Sir Robert Umfraville of Kyme in 1437, when South Kyme and other estates in Lincolnshire and Northumberland fell to Walter Tailboys, grandson of Sir Henry.²

By this time, however, the Tailboys family was already well established in Lincolnshire, with its main manor at Goltho, inherited from Umfraville in 1382. Both Sir Walter (d. 1417) and his son, Walter, were active in local government in the county: the younger Walter was frequently on commissions in the 1420s and 1430s, was sheriff in 1423 and also acted as steward of the local estates of the duke of Bedford.³ He appears to have been on good terms with Lord Cromwell for whom he and his brother, John, several times acted as feoffee⁴: John apparently remained Lord Cromwell's client throughout the period of Cromwell's feud with his nephew, William, and acted as his

¹ *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, Harleian Society, lii (1904), 945-6; *Victoria County History of Durham*, iii (1928), 286-8; R. S. Surtees, *History of Durham* (1816-40), iii. 252-4.

² G.E.C., *Complete Peerage* (12 vols. 1910-59), vii. 352-9; *Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, xlv (1884), App. 1, 272-3; *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, 1-7 Richard II, pp. 176-80.

³ *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1422-1429*, pp. 327, 354, 362, 405, 566, etc., 1429-1436, pp. 128, 130, etc., 1436-1441, pp. 25, 537, 585-6; *List of Sheriffs of England and Wales*, P.R.O., Lists and Indexes, no. ix (1898), p. 79.

⁴ *C.P.R. 1422-1429*, p. 212, 1429-1436, p. 147, 1436-1441, p. 292; Historical Manuscripts Commission, *De Lisle and Dudley MSS.*, i. 172-3.

executor.¹ Walter, like his father,² was, however, involved in disputes over land which several times led to violence: these included a quarrel with Lord Beaumont, his son's future patron, in 1439.³ In 1432-3 he took as his second wife Alice, daughter of Sir Humphrey Stafford of Hooke, Dorset, and widow of the judge, Sir Edmund Cheyne.⁴ Her lands helped to make him by the time of the 1436 subsidy one of the wealthiest gentlemen in Lincolnshire: his estates in nine counties were assessed as worth £159 p.a.⁵ In the following year he succeeded to the Umfraville inheritance.⁶ On Walter's death on 13 April 1444, the whole inheritance did not at once fall to his heir: Walter had settled £100 p.a. of land on his wife in 1432 and other lands on another son's widow in 1441.⁷ By 1448, however, both these ladies had died and the whole inheritance was re-united.⁸

Walter's heir was William Tailboys who in 1444 was, perhaps, in his late twenties.⁹ He was probably not the eldest son: there are a number of references in the 1420s and 1430s to a Walter Tailboys junior, probably an elder brother, and in 1441 one of that name went with Sir Robert Cromwell to France; there he seems to have been knighted but died soon after.¹⁰ Nothing is

¹ *C.P.R. 1452-1461*, pp. 199-200, 341; Prerogative Court of Canterbury 5 Stokton.

² *C.P.R. 1408-1413*, p. 317; J. F. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 274.

³ *C[alendar of] Cl[ose] R[olls] 1429-1435*, pp. 109-10, 114-15; *C.P.R. 1436-1441*, p. 271.

⁴ *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, pp. 945-6; *C.Cl.R. 1429-1435*, p. 223.

⁵ P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], Exchequer, Lay Subsidy Rolls, E. 179/136/198.

⁶ *C[alendar of] F[ine] R[olls] 1430-1437*, pp. 327-8.

⁷ Walter died intestate: letters of administration were granted to his widow, Alice (Lambeth Palace: Register Stafford, fol. 123d.) Alice continued to hold in dower the manors of Goltho, Bolyngton, Skellyngthorpe and Faldingworth, whilst Newton Kyme and Hessele, Yorkshire, had been granted to the widow of Walter's son and namesake for life (P.R.O., Chancery, Inquisitions Post Mortem, C. 139/115/30; *C.Cl.R. 1429-1435*, p. 223, 1441-1447, p. 245).

⁸ *C.P.R. 1446-1452*, p. 155; P.R.O., Chancery, Inquisitions Post Mortem, C. 139/129/38. ⁹ P.R.O., Chancery, Inquisitions Post Mortem, C. 139/115/30.

¹⁰ *C.Cl.R. 1422-1429*, p. 395, 1429-1435, p. 109; *C.P.R. 1436-1441*, p. 271; P.R.O., Exchequer, Various Accounts, E. 101/53/33. The inquisition on Walter mentions his deceased son, Sir Walter, to whose widow, Mary, her father-in-law had granted lands for life in 1441 (P.R.O., Chancery Inquisitions Post Mortem, C. 139/115/30).

known of William's early life: he may have been the "young layman by name Tailboys" who was living in Bardney Abbey in 1437 and allegedly "did most foully browbeat and scold" one of the monks there—this certainly seems consonant with his known character.¹ By 1441 he was retained as a squire of the king's household and he continued to hold this position after he had livery of his father's lands in August 1444.² He had been appointed a J.P. in Holland in 1441 and on his father's death in 1444 he became a J.P. in Lindsey and in Northumberland: in 1446 he was added to the Kesteven bench.³ He was on few other commissions, but his election as knight of the shire for Lincolnshire in 1445 shows that he was a man of standing in the shire and acceptable to at least some of the local nobility.⁴ Before November 1446 he married the daughter of Sir William Bonville, who had acquired Lincolnshire property through his marriage to the widow of Lord Harington.⁵

Tailboys, then, was wealthy, well-connected, with a considerable following and under the patronage of the king and, it would appear, of the marquess of Suffolk and Viscount Beaumont.⁶ But even before his father's death he had become involved in a series of local disputes in which he showed a violence and recklessness of behaviour unusual even for that age, behaviour which was to take him briefly to the centre of the national political stage and eventually to bring about the temporary downfall of his house.⁷ Probably these disputes were originally about contested property rights, but they were given wider implications by Tailboys's own character and the unruly state of the shire where a large population

¹ *Visitations of the Religious Houses of the Diocese of Lincoln*, ed. A. H. Thompson (2 vols., Canterbury and York Society, 1919), ii. 19.

² P.R.O., Exchequer, Wardrobe Accounts, E. 101/409/9, 410/1, etc.

³ *C.P.R. 1441-1446*, pp. 473-4, 476. The apparent appointment to the Holland bench in 1441 might be suspected as a misreading for Walter. The original patent roll reads "Willelmus" but this might be a clerk's mistake.

⁴ J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Register* (1938), p. 61.

⁵ *Complete Peerage*, ii. 219; *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, trans. H. T. Riley (London, 1854), p. 395; *C.P.R. 1441-1446*, p. 441. For Bonville see J. S. Roskell, *The Commons in the Parliament of 1422* (Manchester, 1954), pp. 153-5.

⁶ See below.

⁷ His career and character might be compared with that of Lord Egremont described by R. L. Storey in *The End of the House of Lancaster*, pp. 124-32, etc.

of gentlemen and freeholding peasants was headed by half a dozen lords none of whom, with the decline of Lord Cromwell's authority in the country, held a dominating position.¹ By 1449 Tailboys and his servants were responsible for the death of three men as well as for numerous assaults and robberies. In their petition of that year the Commons described him to the king as "named and noysed for a Comon Murderer, Mansleer, Riotour and contynuell Breker of your peas"; and even if we discount some of the evidence of indictments against him, their very number and variety, together with the evidence of his servants' confessions, show that such phrases were thoroughly justified.

The main source of information on Tailboys's earlier crimes is a series of indictments taken before the J.P.s of Lindsey and Holland in August and October 1448, but earlier in the year, on 5 May, there had been issued a special commission of oyer and terminer to investigate crimes and trespasses committed by Tailboys and his servants: the members appointed included the earl of Salisbury, Chief Justice Fortescue and Lord Cromwell.² On 3 June, however, the chancellor was ordered to supersede this commission, allegedly procured by the conspiracy of Tailboys's enemies.³ Tailboys, the royal warrant goes on to say, had agreed to abide by the decision of some members of the king's council. In consequence Tailboys was released on bail from the Marshalsea to which he had been committed on the complaint of John Dymoke, and on 14 July a new commission was issued to Chief Justice Fortescue and other judges with the specific task of investigating Dymoke's complaint.⁴

Undoubtedly Tailboys's position at court and the patronage of the duke of Suffolk were instrumental in limiting the effect of local hostility upon Tailboys: the royal letter addressed to Lord Welles on 5 April, possibly in 1448, suggests that the sympathies of the court were with Tailboys.⁵ There is no evidence that

¹ For a discussion of Lincolnshire politics in this period see Storey, "Lincolnshire and the Wars of the Roses", *ut supra*.

² *C.P.R. 1446-1452*, p. 187.

³ P.R.O., Exchequer, Council and Privy Seal, E. 28/77.

⁴ *C.P.R. 1446-1452*, pp. 189, 201-2.

⁵ *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, ed. N. H. Nicolas (6 vols., 1834-7), vi. 336-7. The year might equally well be 1449.

Fortescue's commission did anything but, on 9 August 1448 at Horncastle before the Lindsey J.P.s, among them his enemy, Lord Welles, a number of presentments were made against Tailboys and many of his servants, and on 2 October another long series of presentments was made before the Holland J.P.s at Boston.¹ Among the crimes of which Tailboys and his servants were accused were the murders of Thomas Lodde at Brethertoft in July 1442, of John Sanderson at Frampton on 10 November 1447 and of John Storrour at Tevelby on 6 February 1448, besides a whole series of assaults and trespasses over a wide area of southern Lincolnshire.² For Tailboys the most serious of the assaults was that made on John Dymoke at Langworth on 14 March 1448. Dymoke was a squire and a servant of Robert, Lord Willoughby, and it was probably this incident that produced the commission of May 1448. Lord Willoughby was a powerful man whose enmity was to bring Tailboys considerable trouble.³

The process was not to reach completion at a local level. On 16 October the indictments were ordered to be sent into the King's Bench.⁴ In the same term appeals of murder against Tailboys and his men were brought in the King's Bench by the widows of John Sanderson and John Storrour.⁵ Through the intercession of the duke of Suffolk, Tailboys received a pardon on 8 November for not appearing to answer the charges brought by

¹ P.R.O., King's Bench, Ancient Indictments, K.B. 9/260/92-96. More readable copies are on the Plea Rolls, K.B. 27/754, rex, rot. 31-32 ; 769, rex, rot. 38 ; 784, rex, rot. 39.

² Tailboys is usually named as instigator and accessory rather than principal. He had received a general pardon in November 1446, so most of the offences in which he was directly implicated derived from later years (P.R.O., Chancery, Patent Rolls Supplementary, C. 67/39, m.23).

³ In his will of 1452 Robert, Lord Willoughby, mentions his nephew, William Willoughby, who was in dispute with Thomas Kyme over the death of William Kyme. This William Willoughby "of Boston" was an annuitant of Lord Cromwell and was in dispute with William Tailboys in the 1450s. Tailboys won damages from him but the case has not been traced (*Lincoln Diocesan Documents*, ed. A. Clark, Early English Text Society, Original Series, cxlix (1914), 59-63 ; *C.Cl.R. 1461-1468*, pp. 207, 227, 299, 1454-1461, pp. 197-8 ; *C.P.R. 1461-1467*, p. 295).

⁴ P.R.O., King's Bench, Ancient Indictments, K.B. 9/260/92, 95.

⁵ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/750, plea, rot. 74, 94.

John Dymoke¹ but it was difficult, even with Suffolk's favour, for Tailboys to wriggle out of all the accusations. Three of the Lincolnshire magnates were now his enemies. A letter from Tailboys to Viscount Beaumont, which can probably be dated 15 August 1449, shows that Tailboys saw Lords Willoughby, Welles and Cromwell as his enemies, who intended to hang one of his servants, to his "great shame".² Welles and Willoughby were local barons of the second rank, but Cromwell was one of the great magnates of the realm, even though he had lost some authority since he resigned the office of treasurer in 1443, and it is the enmity of Tailboys and Cromwell that makes the former's actions during the next few years specially interesting.

Tailboys's continued favour in high places is, however, indicated by his re-appointment to the Lindsey bench in November 1448.³ The appeals went forward in the King's Bench, but when in the Trinity Term of 1449 writs of exigent were issued against Tailboys and some 150 of his men the duke of Suffolk was able to soften the blow.⁴ The writs were delivered to the deputy of Mauncer Marmyon, who had reluctantly accepted the office of sheriff of Lincolnshire in January 1449.⁵ In the summer Marmyon himself was at Winchester, where Parliament was being held, and there, according to one of the articles of impeachment against Suffolk in 1450, the duke of Suffolk persuaded him not to execute the writs, promising him a pardon for any action taken against him over the matter.⁶ This charge is confirmed by the

¹ *C.P.R. 1446-1452*, pp. 201-2; *Rot[uli] Parl[iamentorum]* (6 vols.), v. 181. He bound himself to Lord Willoughby to keep the peace towards John Dymoke.

² *Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Library Edition, 1904), i. 96-98; B.M. Additional MS. 34,888. Tailboys mentions in this letter that he has been indicted, which must date the letter after 1447, and it cannot be later than 1449 for he was in prison thereafter. The enmity towards Cromwell shown in the letter makes it likely that the true date is 1449. Willoughby had married Cromwell's niece and his own daughter and heir was wife to Lord Welles's son.

³ He had been re-appointed to the Holland, Kesteven and Northumberland benches in 1447: there is no further commission enrolled for these shires until 1452, when Tailboys's name is omitted.

⁴ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Rolls, K.B. 27/754, plea, rot. 111; 753, rex, rot. 18.

⁵ P.R.O., Exchequer, King's Remembrancer Memoranda Roll, 28 Hen. VI, E. 159/226, Easter, Brevia Directa, rot. 2d.

⁶ *Rot Parl.*, iii. 181.

survival of a privy seal warrant of May/June 1449, ordering the issue of a pardon to Marmyon for his failure to execute the writs.¹ The pardon was finally issued from Chancery on 6 November.²

Although Tailboys had for the moment avoided outlawry he was still in serious trouble. His letter to Beaumont in August shows that strong action was being taken against his servants locally,³ and process in the appeals and indictments against him and his servants was to be continued in the following Michaelmas Term. Parliament was about to meet, too, a parliament that was to reflect the temper of the country, which was increasingly hostile to the government and supporters of Suffolk.⁴ Tailboys moved to London and he was in the custody of the Fleet on 18 November when he appeared to answer the indictments against him: process on these actions was adjourned until Hilary Term, whilst adjournments continued to be made in Elizabeth Sanderson and Joan Storrour's appeals.⁵ Action was also being taken against Marmyon and heavy damages were eventually recovered against him by Elizabeth Sanderson though fines imposed on him for dereliction of duty were invalidated by his pardon.⁶

It is clear that Tailboys felt, probably rightly, that the main danger to him lay in Lord Cromwell, and on 28 November, it was alleged, he and his band of "slaughterladdes" assaulted and tried to murder Lord Cromwell during a meeting of the council in the Star Chamber at Westminster.⁷ It is possible that the allegation exaggerated the incident which may have consisted rather of jostling and threats than a serious attempt at murder,

¹ P.R.O., Exchequer, Council and Privy Seal, E. 28/78/103.

² P.R.O., Exchequer, King's Remembrancer Memoranda Roll, 28 Hen. VI, E. 159/226, Mich., Brevia Directa, rot. 18.

³ *Paston Letters*, i. 96-98.

⁴ See R. Virgoe, "The Parliament of 1449-50", London Ph.D. 1964. It may be no coincidence that the returns for Lincolnshire are missing for this parliament. There may well have been a violent contested election.

⁵ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/754, rex, rot. 31-32; 750, plea, rot. 72, 94.

⁶ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/754, plea, rot. 111; Controlment Roll, K.B. 29/81, Trinity, rot. 28; Exchequer Writs and Returns, E. 202/130; Issue Roll, E. 401/814, 30 October; L.T.R. Memoranda Roll, E. 368/222, Mich. Communia, rot. 10.

⁷ *Rot. Parl.*, v. 200-1; P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/755, plea, rot. 21d.

but it was to have serious consequences for Tailboys and his patron. According to one chronicle Cromwell's attempt to seek a remedy for this assault, presumably by action through the Council, was blocked by Suffolk. This so incensed Cromwell that he "laboured among the Commons" to encourage them to proceed to the impeachment of Suffolk in January 1

There is no corroborative evidence of these activities and it is unlikely that the Commons needed much encouragement to proceed against an unpopular and unsuccessful government; but the support of a man of Cromwell's stature and political experience would certainly have been of great assistance in supplying information and in securing a hearing of the impeachment articles among the lords, where Cromwell had many friends and connections. And the inclusion of two charges concerning William Tailboys among these articles suggests that he was very much in the mind of the Commons.²

Whether or not he was responsible for the impeachment of Suffolk, Cromwell must have inspired the earlier bill brought by the Commons against Tailboys near the end of the first session of the parliament, soon after the Star Chamber incident.³ In this petition the Commons claimed that William Tailboys had, with a great company of armed men, attempted to murder Lord Cromwell at the Star Chamber. They demanded that he be transferred to the Tower, there to stay without bail for twelve months to allow any indictments and other actions against him to be heard in the courts. The king agreed to this, a concession significant of the growing insecurity of the régime, but rejected a second demand that all proceedings against Tailboys be allowed to proceed by bill, as if he were in the custody of the Marshalsea (a much more expeditious procedure),⁴ and that before being released he be forced to find heavy security for his good behaviour thereafter. On 20 January 1450, just before parliament re-assembled, the king issued a writ authorizing Tailboys's transfer

¹ "Wilhelmi Wyrcester Annales" in *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France during the Reign of Henry VI*, ed. J. Stevenson (2 vols., Rolls Series, 1861-4), ii (2), 766.

² *Rot. Parl.*, v. 181.

³ *Ibid.* v. 200-1.

⁴ For this procedure see W. S. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, i (7th ed. 1956), 219-20.

to the Tower, and during the next few months, during the dramatic period of Suffolk's impeachment, civil actions were brought against him in the King's Bench by Cromwell, Lord Willoughby and John Dymoke.

Of these actions that of Cromwell was heard most quickly as the offence was committed at Westminster and this permitted procedure by bill of Middlesex. On 6 February a Middlesex jury assessed Cromwell's damages at £3,000: though reduced by agreement to £2,000, this enormous sum suggests something of the general hostility to the followers of Suffolk, more openly revealed since the latter was himself in the Tower.¹ Willoughby and Dymoke had to wait longer for judgement: it was not until Easter Term 1451 that their damages were assessed at £650 (reduced by agreement to £500) and £1,000 respectively.² The appeals of the two widows received even more dilatory treatment, like most common-law actions.³

The fall of Suffolk left Tailboys in a parlous plight: he had no chance of paying the enormous damages and there was no likelihood of a pardon. The disorder of the summer of 1450, however, gave him an opportunity to plan revenge on his chief enemy and perhaps secure his own release. Most of what is known of Tailboys's activities in 1450-1 derives from the confessions made by two of his servants in 1452 or 1453.⁴

The confession of John Stanes, chaplain to William Tailboys, provides graphic and circumstantial evidence of his master's animosity towards Lord Cromwell and his propensity to employ violence against his personal enemies. In the autumn of 1449, Stanes says, Tailboys twice sent him to Tattershall to see if there was a chance of kidnapping Lord Cromwell. Cromwell was too well guarded, and it may be that Tailboys saw a better opportunity at Westminster, though here, too, he failed. Sometime during Lent 1450, however, Stanes was ordered by Tailboys, who was now in the Tower, to send men to Colly Weston and Wingfield, Cromwell's other seats, to kill Cromwell while he walked alone

¹ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Rolls, K.B. 27/755, plea, rot. 21d.

² Ibid. K.B. 27/755, plea, rot. 26, 30.

³ See below, p. 472, n. 3.

⁴ P.R.O., Chancery Miscellanea, C. 47/7/8. See below.

with his chaplain. The right opportunity did not occur, but at Whitsun (24 May) Stanes collected money from Tailboys's receiver in order to gather a force at York (no doubt many of Tailboys's "slaughterladdes" came from his wild northern estates). This he did, but on hearing of the Kentish Rebellion, Cromwell rode to London where he was followed by Stanes and his men. There they secured a retainer to fight with the king's army and went to Blackheath, but were there recognized and so returned to London. Tailboys made a last dramatic attempt at revenge, providing Stanes with a bag of gunpowder (perhaps filched from the royal armoury in the Tower) to blow up the house next to Lord Cromwell's London residence so that they might have their "entent" of him while his men fought the resulting fire. But nothing happened, says Stanes, and "alle men left and were wery of hym".

Stanes's account is so circumstantial and so self-incriminating that it is probably accurate. It throws a sharp light upon the state of order in mid-fifteenth century England and also upon William Tailboys's character. This was no country gentleman driven to arms and faction by the failure of the law-courts to give him protection but a lawless and ruthless gang-leader: the complaints against him in 1449-50 and against Suffolk for protecting him become more plausible.

As the confessions show, the failure of his plans in 1450 did not end Tailboys's intention to destroy his enemy. While in prison it would have been impossible for him to maintain a large band of "slaughterladdes" so it was necessary for him to adopt more subtle methods. In the late summer of 1450 Tailboys and many of his servants were outlawed as a result of the appeals of Joan Storrour and Elizabeth Sanderson,¹ but about Easter 1451 he must have been moved from the Tower, the twelve months prescribed by the 1449 petition having elapsed. He remained in custody until his fines and damages should be paid,² and it was in

¹ P.R.O., King's Bench, Controlment Roll, K.B. 29/82, rot. 1.

² P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/761, rex, rot. 5d. He was in further financial trouble early in 1451 when he was being distrained for failing to pay relief on his inheritance (P.R.O., Exchequer, Writs and Returns, E. 202/130). Two years later, when in Newgate, he was being sued for repayment of a large loan (P.R.O., Exchequer Plea Roll, E. 13/145B, rot. 4d.)

Newgate and in the house of one of the sheriffs of London that, according to John Stanes and John Millom, he devised his next plan. During the early months of 1450 there had been posted in public places numerous "bills", ballads and pasquinades satirizing the duke of Suffolk and the court.¹ They had undoubtedly played a part in producing the climate of opinion which brought about the fall and murder of Suffolk and the rebellion of Jack Cade. Tailboys found the example instructive and planned in 1451 to strike at Cromwell by linking him in the minds of the public with the new "Court group" and with the failures in Gascony for which they seemed responsible. Such a link was plausible in view of Cromwell's appointment to a number of important offices in 1450-1 and his long connection with the chancellor, Cardinal Kemp, and with the late Cardinal Beaufort, uncle of the duke of Somerset, who was now the dominant figure at court. In May 1451, Stanes and Millom confessed, they drew up a "bill in ryme" to the "finall destruccion of þe good name and fame of the Lord Cromwell", linking him with Cardinal Kemp, the chancellor, as responsible for England's losses abroad and corruption at home. They showed it to Tailboys who, more conversant with the trends of public opinion, substituted the name of the duke of Somerset for that of Cardinal Kemp. Millom then displayed it in several public places in London. During the next few months Millom and Stanes set up numerous other bills in London, Kent, Lincolnshire and the north. Only one verse is quoted in Stanes's confession and it may be that we ought not to judge the quality of them all by this particular piece of doggerel. But, unsubtle though it is, it illustrates clearly the use of the "guilt-by-association" techniques through which Tailboys intended to rouse opinion against Cromwell. The anti-court and Yorkist attitudes shown in it do not, of course, represent Tailboys's consistent allegiance.

The propagandist campaign appears to have had no immediate effects, but it is unlikely that Tailboys desisted from his attempts to bring about Cromwell's downfall. In the summer of 1452 a priest, Robert Collinson, who himself was later indicted for sedition and rebellion, apparently made a series of charges

¹ *Political Poems and Songs*, ed. T. Wright (Rolls Series, 1859-61), ii. 221-36.

against Cromwell, alleging that he knew from the confession of John Wilkins, who had been executed for rebellion in March, that Cromwell had been involved in plotting the Yorkist rebellion of February 1452.¹ There was clearly some suspicion, on what grounds is not known, that Tailboys had been behind this allegation. On 22 September 1452 his servant, John Dewlyn, was examined in Chancery.² He was asked whether anyone had instigated him to accuse of treason William Venour, a servant of Lord Cromwell and keeper of the Fleet prison,³ and whether Venour had bribed him to allege that Tailboys had inspired "the priest" (Collinson) to accuse Cromwell of treason. Dewlyn denied both allegations, and there seem to be no more chancery records of these proceedings. Their implications are far from clear, but it would seem that there was strong suspicion of Tailboys's involvement. From what is known of Tailboys's earlier attempts against Cromwell such suspicion may well have been justified: in any case it seems likely that the investigations arising from Collinson's accusations were responsible for the examination and confessions of Stanes and Millom, which were originally made in the presence of Robert, Lord Willoughby, and therefore before 25 July 1452 when the latter died.⁴ They were subsequently drawn up into a series of articles, and interrogations were based on them: it is these, with the certified answers of Stanes and Millom, that comprise the documents printed below.⁵

No action seems to have been taken against Tailboys on the basis of his servants' confessions. Outlawed and unable to pay his damages, he remained in prison whilst the slow process of indictment and appeal against him and his followers ground its way from term to term in the King's Bench.⁶ Lord Cromwell,

¹ P.R.O., King's Bench, Ancient Indictments, K.B. 9/273/134; *C.P.R. 1452-1461*, pp. 93-102; R. Jeffs, "The Poynings-Percy Dispute", *Bull. Inst. Hist. Res.*, xxxiv (1961), 148-64. Cromwell cleared himself of the charges before the Council in February 1453. Collinson also seems to have accused Sir John Fastolf (*Paston Letters*, iii. 41-2).

² P.R.O., Early Chancery Proceedings, C. 1/21/68.

³ He was one of Cromwell's executors (P.C.C. 5 Stokton).

⁴ *Complete Peerage*, xii (2), 666.

⁵ Pp. 476-82.

⁶ E.g. P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/750, plea, rot. 72, 94; 752, plea, rot. xxvi; Controlment Roll, K.B. 29/80, rot. ii-iii.

now an old man, lost much of his political authority : he played an equivocal part in the events of 1455 and died soon after.¹ The death of Tailboys's chief enemy and creditor brought the opportunity of a settlement which would permit his release from prison. Even before Cromwell's death Tailboys seems to have benefited from the Yorkist victory at St. Albans. In the autumn of 1455 he and a number of his men were granted general pardons and, even more significant, he was restored to the commission of the peace for Kesteven.² The pardon disposed of the outstanding indictments against him and the appeals petered out in Easter Term 1457, the widows being non-suited for default of appearance : possibly they had died.³ The damages still remained unpaid : it was not until March 1457 that Cromwell's executors, who included the chancellor, Bishop Waynflete, and Chief Justice Fortescue, released to Tailboys the sum he still owed on condition that he bound himself in 1,000 marks to be of good behaviour and not to harm Cromwell's former servants or any of the jurors involved in his cases or implead anyone for maintenance, conspiracy etc., and on condition that he released all personal actions save that against William Willoughby.⁴

In the same term (Easter 1457) he made fine with Lord Willoughby's executors for his damages : whether he paid the damages owed to John Dymoke is not known.⁵ There is evidence that the release by Cromwell's executors did not exempt him from all financial obligations to them,⁶ and it can hardly be doubted that Tailboys was a much poorer man at the end of his imprisonment, even though he retained large estates. There is, on the other hand, no evidence that he was any wiser. He was

¹ C. A. J. Armstrong, "Politics and the Battle of St. Albans", *Bull. Inst. Hist. Res.*, xxxiii (1960), 1-72.

² P.R.O., Chancery, Patent Rolls Supplementary, C. 67/41, m. 30 ; *C.P.R. 1452-1461*, p. 670.

³ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/784, rex, rot. 8-9.

⁴ *C.Cl.R. 1454-1461*, p. 197 ; P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/784, plea, rot. 64d. For Willoughby see above, p. 464, n. 3. The implication of the settlement is that Tailboys was still in prison, but it is hard to square this with his re-appointment as J.P. in 1455.

⁵ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/784, plea, rot. 64d ; Controlment Roll, K.B. 29/82, rot. 20d.

⁶ H.M.C. *De Lisle and Dudley MSS.*, i. 211.

omitted from the Kesteven commission in November 1458—presumably a sign of continued distrust of him among the ruling faction—and his next appearance, save as the recipient of another general pardon which he took out in 1458,¹ is on the roll of the Coventry Parliament of 1459 when the Commons petitioned that a number of robbers and criminals be summoned before the chancellor and undergo imprisonment while the justices of assize heard complaints against them: among these criminals was William Tailboys, now styled “of Enfield, Middlesex”.² The king agreed to the petition, but there is no evidence that it was carried out. The approach of civil war made men like Tailboys potentially valuable to both the Court and its enemies, and it is no surprise that in 1459 he was placed on a commission of array in Holland.³ Perhaps more surprisingly he was not on any other royalist commissions of 1459-60, though he played an active part in the battles, particularly at St. Albans, where he was knighted, and at Towton.⁴ He escaped after Towton and was attainted.⁵ He remained a prominent leader of the Lancastrian faction in the North until he was captured after the battle of Hexham when hiding in a mine near Newcastle in possession of a large part of the Lancastrian funds: charitably we may suppose that he intended to disburse them in the Lancastrian interest.⁶ He was at once executed. Part of his forfeited lands was eventually recovered by his son, and in the sixteenth century the family added a baronial title to the “earldom of Kyme” which William had apparently claimed in his last years.⁷

¹ P.R.O., Chancery, Patent Rolls Supplementary, C. 67/42.

² *Rot. Parl.*, v. 367-8.

³ *C.P.R. 1452-1461*, p. 494.

⁴ *Complete Peerage*, v. 360-1; *Rot. Parl.*, v. 477.

⁵ *Rot. Parl.*, v. 477, 480. Tailboys's Lincolnshire estates went mainly to Sir Thomas Burgh, with the exception of Kyme, which was granted to the duke of Clarence. His northern lands were for the most part granted to Lord Ogle (*C.P.R. 1461-1467*, pp. 112-15, 151, 199).

⁶ G.E.C., *Complete Peerage*, v. 360-1; “*Wilhelmi Wyrcestre Annales*”, *Wars of the English in France*, op. cit. ii. 779, 782; *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J. Gairdner, Camden Soc. N.S., xvii (1876), 226. The reference given in the *Complete Peerage* states that he was discovered in his lordship of Redesdale: this is not, perhaps, irreconcilable with the Gregory's Chronicle assertion that he was found near Newcastle.

⁷ *Complete Peerage*, v. 359-61.

The career of William Tailboys brings into prominence a number of features of politics and government in the mid-fifteenth century. The propensity to violent self-help among the gentry in an age of long-drawn out and inconclusive litigation (itself well illustrated by the fate of the appeals and indictments against Tailboys's men) is well-known.¹ Tailboys, it has been suggested above, was exceptionally violent and unscrupulous even for that age, but the weakness of royal government was such that his wealth and local influence long allowed him to escape the consequences of his behaviour. With the patronage of the powerful Viscount Beaumont and connections at Court he was even able to defy the local magnates, Welles and Willoughby. Lord Cromwell, however, was of a different order of wealth and influence. Against him Tailboys could in the last resort rely only on the protection of Suffolk and the Court : thus once again local faction was to "escalate" into national politics. The protection given to Tailboys by Suffolk became a minor but significant factor in stimulating the opposition to Suffolk during the parliament of November 1449. Cromwell was able to use parliament to obtain the redress against Tailboys that he could not secure from the council, still dominated by Suffolk and his friends, and this parliamentary action was the precedent for the impeachment of Suffolk in the second session of the parliament.

As a consequence of Suffolk's fall Tailboys lost the protection he had formerly enjoyed, and the appointment of Cromwell's friend, Cardinal Kemp, as chancellor in January 1450, an office he held until his death in 1454, made it pointless for Tailboys even to hope for help from the new dominant faction at Court. He was forced after 1450 to try to make use of the opposing faction led by York. In this he appears to have been unsuccessful, though his re-appointment as a J.P. after the Yorkist triumph in 1455, suggests that he had some useful connections there : no doubt his father-in-law, Lord Bonville, was of assistance to him. His long imprisonment, however, clearly saw him incur severe losses both financially and in local influence, and his loyal support

¹ See, for instance, the numerous examples in Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, and in the *Paston Letters*.

of the Lancastrian cause between 1460 and 1464 represents a gambler's last throw to recover his position.

The most interesting aspects of Tailboys's activities, however, are those described in the confessions of his servants printed below. His first reaction to imprisonment and the heavy damages awarded against him was to take advantage of the confusion attendant upon Suffolk's fall to seek violent revenge on Lord Cromwell. Unsuccessful in this, he devised in the following year the more subtle means of destroying his enemy by arousing public opinion against him. The process by which slanderous letters and "bills" were drawn up and distributed is graphically described by Stanes and Millom. Their confessions show how individuals could employ the written word to stir up public sentiment against a rival: and they might make us more sceptical of the origin of many of the political poems that survive from this period. These have often been seen as representing public opinion, but it may well be that, as Tailboys thought, they were, rather, successful in creating and manipulating such opinion. In 1453 Sir William Oldhall and other servants of the dukes of York and Norfolk were accused of having conspired in the spring of 1450 to produce at Bury St. Edmunds "diverse bills and writings in rhyme and ballads" critical of the king and Court, and to place them on men's doors and windows, thus encouraging the murder of Suffolk and Cade's Rebellion.¹ These "bills" no doubt include some of the surviving "political poems" that can be ascribed by internal evidence to the spring of 1450,² and it is easy to envisage the same sort of process of production and distribution described by Stanes and Millom having taken place at Bury in 1450. The verses, perhaps written by pupils of John Lydgate—even, conceivably, by Lydgate himself—were, if undistinguished, certainly more skilful than those of Stanes or Millom.

It cannot be said that all the problems associated with the career of William Tailboys have been satisfactorily solved. But perhaps enough information supplementary to the confessions has emerged to explain how this wealthy, gentle-born gang-leader

¹ P.R.O., King's Bench Ancient Indictments, K.B. 9/118/30, 271/117.

² *Political Poems and Songs*, ii. 221-36.

influenced for a short time the course of national politics and how, for a longer period, national politics influenced his career. He was not alone in this, of course. But there can be few fifteenth-century men of his rank, outside those appearing in the Paston Letters, for whose activities such an amount of colourful detail is available to illustrate so many aspects of Lancastrian politics and government. It is for this reason that it has seemed worthwhile to describe his career at length and to transcribe the main source in full.

P.R.O., Chancery Miscellanea, C.47/7/8¹

Rot. I

Vobis tenore presencium certificamus quod septimo die Maii anno [. . .] primo² apud Lincoln accessimus ad Johannem Myllom clericum et Johannem Stanes capellanum et ipsos ibidem et eorum alterum examinavimus secundum tenorem brevis no [. . .]³ omnibus et singulis articulis in quadam cedula nobis sub pede sigilli regis directa modo et forma quibus sequitur.

In primis super articulo primo qui incipit "First the said John Stanes preest and servaunt to William Taylboys squyer" etc. et eius circumstanciis in eodem articulo contentis idem Johannes Stanes capellanus respondet, dicit, fatetur et recognoscit quod omnia et singula in eodem articulo contenta cum suis circumstanciis sunt et fuerunt vera sicut coram summo iudice in [die] iudicii voluerit respondere. Et Johannes Myllom super eodem articulo et eius circumstanciis examinatus respondet, dicit, fatetur et recognoscit quod omnia etiam in eodem articulo contenta cum omnibus suis circumstanciis sunt et fuerunt vera sicut dictus Johannes Stanes recognovit velut ipse in die iudicii voluerit coram summo iudice respondere etc.

Item ad secundum articulum qui incipit "Afterward be commaundement of ther said maystir Taylboys etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true. And John Myllom concurs with Stanes].

Item ad tercium articulum qui incipit "And in the conclusion of this confession thus made before Thomas, Lord Roos etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true].

¹ This consists of two rolls, the first an account of the interrogatories being put to Stanes and Millom with their replies; the second a report of their previous confessions which serves as the basis of the interrogatories. They are endorsed in a much later hand "Petitiones and Examinaciones in Chancery a^o xxxi Henr' Sext'" and in another later hand "towching lybelles denyed ayenst ye L. Cromwell". There are some holes in one or two vital places. Large parts of the second document were printed in a very unsatisfactory form by Hubert Hall—"An Episode of Mediaeval Nihilism", *The Antiquary*, xii (1885), 57-61, 118-21.

A minimum of punctuation has been added and the text's arbitrary use of capitals replaced by the modern practice.

² Hole. This should presumably read "anno tricesimo primo", i.e. 7 May 1453.

³ Hole.

Item ad quartum articulum qui incipit "Item the said John Myllom, servaunt and clerk to William Taylboys squyer etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true]. Item ad quintum articulum qui incipit "And after this William Taylboys had knowledge of the forsayde confessions wherewith he was gretly displeased etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true. And John Myllom concurs with Stanes].

Item ad sextum articulum qui incipit "Item the said John Stanes preest was examyned and questyoned ferther if he made ony famose billes and letteres withowt knowleche of his said maistir Taylboys etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true]. *Uterius addendum in vulgare ydiomate anglicano hec verba: Myn maistir William Taylboys said to me dyvers tymes that the name of the lord of Suffolk was destroyed be billes made of him and sette upp; aftir the wich sayng I my selff made a bille wich was the first bille made ageyns the Lord Cromwell, wich I schewyd to my said maistir Taylboys and he aggreid weel to the making therof and gaffe me in commaundement to sette yt up and to make moo etc.* [John Myllom concurs with Stanes].

Item ad septimum articulum qui incipit "And as to the said John Myllom in lyke forme he hath confessed alle the sayd answer of Ser John Stanes to the displeaser and contradiction of ther said maister Taylboys etc." [John Myllom replies that it is true] *hoc excepto, quod non dixit hec verba in anglicis ibidem recitata "for the displeaser or evill will of my said maister William Taylboys", sed tum modo hec dicit in declaracionem sui ipsius et veritatis prout ipse coram summo iudice in die iudicii respondere voluerit etc.*

Item ad octavum articulum qui incipit "Item the sayd John Myllom hath confessid and knowleched that withinne Alresgate Strete in London at the Signe of Christofer etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true. And John Myllom concurs with Stanes].

Item ad nonum articulum qui incipit "Item the said Sir John Stanes for the more evydence proff and liklynesse of the trowthe to be hadde in these precedent articules etc." [John Stanes replies that it is true].

Ista examinacio facta fuit die loco et anno supradictis in presencia Willelmi Rither, Johannis Pakyngton, Johannis Willesford et Hugonis Wellys, notariorum publicorum, per Alexandrum Prowet, clericum, Johannem Tylney, clericum, et Hamonem Sutton seniore, armigerum, commissionares domini Regis ad examinacionem predictam deputatos ad interessendum requisitos etc.

Rot 2¹

First þe said John Stanes preest and servaunt to William Tailboys squier hath confessed þat in the tyme the said William Tailboys was in the prison of Newgate in the Cite of London and also in the house of John Middylton, shirref of the said Cite,² commaunded the said Sir John and his felawe John Millom, servaunt and clerk to his said maister Tailboys, to make conceyve and ymagyne divers billes and lettres ayenst the Lord Cromwell, yeving theym plaine instruccion and informacion in þe said prison and hous of þe said shirref of the matere of the said billes and letteres wherthurgh the comons of this land shulde engruege agayn, þe said Lord Cromwell and ryse upon hym and so finally to distroye hym, sayeng

¹ This rotulet is in a different hand.

² John Middleton was sheriff September 1450 to 1451.

plainly it was the next meane and waye þat he couth finde to the distruction of þe said Lord Cromwell. Wherupon the said Sir John Stanes and his said felawe went into a place in Ayldrysgate Strete in London at þe signe of þe Cristofer and there they made divers billes and letteres the which they shewed to their said maister Tailboys in the said pryson and hous of þe said shiryef. The which letteres and billes by thadvyce commandement and informacion of their said maister they bothe added to and mynysshed and wrot them clere and theym fixed and sett up and sent forth into divers places according to his commandement, for the which he paide for theyr costes at everych tyme where as they rode or went aboute the setting up of þe said billes and letteres. That is to say at Sandwich in a tavern they fixed and sett up a bille. At Caunterbury upon Saynt Austyn yate they fixed and set up a bille. They delyvered at Billyngesgate to John Richardson certayn billes to bere to Rouchestre and gaf hym a peny. At London upon Poules dore they fixed and sett up divers billes. At the Crosse in the Chepe they fixed and sett up divers billes. At the Standard in þe Chepe they fixed and sett up divers billes. On þe Standard in Cornhill they fixed and sett up divers billes. And on the stulpes at London Brigge ende they fixed and sett up divers billes.

Item afterward by comandement of their said maister Tailboys they went home to Kyme and there they made divers billes and letteres to þe nombre of xxxxi and moo, and there toke of Richard Wenselawe, resceyvour to their said maister, xxs to ryde withall unto the North contraye to sette up billes. That is to say the Thursday at even next after Saynt Barth' day [26 August 1451] upon þe Crosse at [D]oncastre they fixed and sette up iiij billes. The Saterdag at nyght next after þat [28 August 1451] they sette up and fixed at York upon þe Crosse in þe Thursday Market iiij billes and on the mynstre dore there and on other places of þe said cite. And on Soneday next after [þat] in the forest of Galtres they delyvered a letter and therin iiij billes to on Robert Atkynson, sharman, for to bere to Nicholas Stubbes and his felawe, shirrefs of Hull, and gaf hym a peny for his labore. The same Soneday at nyght they fixed and sette up on the Crosse in þe market place at Thirsk iiii billes. The Moneday at even next after folwyng [30 August] they fixed and sett up iiij billes at the Newe Castell upon the Crosse and other places in þe market place called Sandhyll.

And in þe conclusion of this confession thus made byfore Thomas Lord Roos, Robert Lord Willughby and many other worshipful gentilmen, knyghtes and squers, as appereth in an instrument under a notarye signe made upon þe same and with þe hande of the same Sir John Stanes subscribed, he had and said this same langage folwyng. That is to say 'besechyng Almyghty God, the said Lord Cromwell and all þe world to have mercy on hym and to forgif hym alle the fals laboures coniectures and ymaginacions þat he for the plesure of his said maister thus falsely and horribly hath labored and wrought ayenst the said lord Cromwell withoute any matere or cause as god knoweth' etc.

Item the said John Myllom, servaunt and clerk to William Tailboys squyer, in presence of þe same Lord Roos and Lord Willughby and many other worshipfull gentilmen as is afore rehersed confessed, for þe discharge of his owne sowe as he saide and concyence ayenes God and þe World playnly and openly as he wolde answer to God and also to man to the deth, that his said maister William Tailboys in þe prison of Newegate at London and also in þe hous of Myddylton,

þat tyme shirref of þe said Cite of London, commanded hym and his said felawe Sir John Stanes prest to make conceyve and ymagine divers billes and letteres ayenst þe Lord Cromwell, yefing them playn instruccion and informacion of theym and specyally to hym to be redy with all his diligence to þe commandement of þe said Sir John Stanes to do his said maister [plesure and]¹ servyce and pleasance both in writting, enditting, affixing and levying in divers places and stedes afore rehersed in al maner and forme as is by þe said Sir John Stanes declared and confessed as above etc. In witesse wherof the same John Millom to this said knowlage and confession with his owne handes hath subscribed þe same forsaid instrument. And beseketh Almyghty God, the said Lord Cromwell and all þe world to have mercy on hym and to forgif hym all þe fals laboures, coniectures and ymagynacions þat he for the plesur of his said maister thus falsely and horribly hath labored and wrought ayenst the said lord Cromwell withouten any matere or cause as god knoweth.

And after this William Tailboys had knowlege of þe forsaid confessions wherwith he was gretly displeased, denyeng þat it shulde be as the forsaid Sir John Stanes and John Millom have said. Wherto bothe the said Sir John Stanes and John Millom answered agayn as appereth in an instrument of record made þerupon and withe their awne handes subscribed þat the said William Tailboys may not forshame denye it by þe way of trowth; for þe said Sir John saith þat upon Saterdag next before Seynt Margarete day the yere of þe Kyng oure souverain lorde þat now is xxixth [17 July 1451] he came to London fro Kyme to his said maister Tailboys with xxli of gold and silvere. And there he enfourmed the said Sir John Stanes how and in what wyse he shuld make a bille for to be sette up in Kent; and thanne he and John Millom made a bille after his informacion and after þat it was made John Millom bare it to hym and shewed it to hym, the which he lyked well, and on Seint Mary Magdalene day [22 July] rode they forth into Kent with this bille. And his maister Tailboys sent to hym by þe said John Millom xxs of gold to hyre withall horses and for their expenses. And on the Monday next after [26 July] they came to London agayn [to hym] and there they were accorded that the said Sir John and John Millom shuld ryde to Grantham and so northward to sett up moo billes, and ye said Sir John Stanes departed fro hym at London and John Millom lefte stille with hym; and he gaf þe said Sir John in commandement to ryde to Kyme in his way to gar iiij dere be slayn and sende to hym to London baken. And so they were sente by one Thomas Staynfeld a man of his owen. And whenne thiese dere come to London thenne John Millom was sent by hym unto Kyme uppon þe same horse þat brought þe venyson to London. And thenne John Millom and he tok their journaye northwarde as they were accorded at London before; and thenne he brought word to þe said sir John fro his said maister Tailboys howe and in what wise they shuld make þe billes þat they shuld sette up in þe North contray and to increse þe said billes after þe noise as they herde in þe contre aboute as they rode.

Item þe said John Stanes preest was examyned and questyoned further if he made any famose billes or letteres withoute knowlech of his said maister Tailboys. Wherto he answered in thiese wordes: alle þe billes þat he and his felawe John Millom sett up were made by the instruccion of their maister William Tailboys and after by them clerely wreten as they appere and made in ryme, the whiche

¹ These words are deleted.

were redde by John Millom and puplissed and made open in his awne presence or they were sette up, and well knowen unto hym in all parties except on bille þat they made in Kent of the Lordes Cromwell and Say. And the lordes names expressed and wreten in þe saide billes were well knowen unto hym bothe by writting and reding of his said felawe John Millom, and if the said Tailboys wolde have commaunded hym or his felawe for to have putt them out of þe billes they wolde have done his commandement with a good will as God knoweth by þe same token þat his said maister Tailboys was gretly displeased bothe with hym and his said felawe that they taryed so long aboute þe setting up of þe said billes.

And as to þe said John Millom in lyke forme he hath confessed all þe said answeere of Sir John Stanes to þe displeaser and contradiccion of þe said maister Tailboys and specially the thinges touching hym self, declaryng forþermore þat by þe commandement yvell will and pryve consent of his said maister Tailboys in letteris and billes by theym made and in divers places sette up the names of þe honorable princes the Dukes of York, Norfolk and Somersett were put in made in ryme in this wyse: York and Norfolk come rescowe Caley. And we will go with you bothe more and lesse. That as Somersett hath eten Fraunce and Normandie So Cromwell lereth to ete Gasconye and Guyan. And for the strength of their declaracion in this cas aswell þe said Sir John Stanes and John Millom have subscrybed an instrument made upon þe same.

Item þe said John Millom hath confessed and knoweleched þat within Alresgate Strete in London at þe signe of þe Christofer within þe space of iii wekes after þe fest of Pasch' þe yere of oure lord m^ccccli [May 1451] þe same Sir John Stanes and John Millom made and ymagyned a bille in ryme to þe finall distruccion of þe good name and fame of þe Lord Cromwell in þat they couth or myght, and þat same bille delyvered to John Heron of Forth [Ford] of þe counte of Northumberland, þat tyme being but squyer,¹ for to bere and delivere to their maister William Tailboys being within þe prison of Newgate within þe Cite of London þat he myght see whether þat bille so made were after his entent or not. Which bille, after it was by þe said William Tailboys seen, herde and afore hym redde by þe same John Heron, was sende agayn' to þe same Sir John Stanes and by þe commandement of þe said William Tailboys for his more crafty conceyte and subtill imaginacion taken in þat behalf þe name of þat worshipful fader in God þarchibishop of York þat tyme being by þe handes of þe said John Millom was taken oute and þe name of þe duke of Somersett in þe place þerof putt in; and by þe commandement of þe said Sir John Stanes wrot it newe and the same bille in divers places within the Cite of London þe same Sir John and John Millom affixed and lefte. The said John Millom knowleching ferther þat þe said John Heron was of knowleche þe first tyme and þe laste and of counsell of making of þat said bille by þe token þat he kneled at his awne beddes feet within þe said hous of þe Cristofer and there he seye þe same bille and redde it hym silf. In witnessing of þe which þe said Sir John Stanes and John Millom according and affermyng all þat is aforesaid in þat cas have subscribed an instrument mad upon þe same.

¹ Heron's role in this affair and his relationship with Tailboys is obscure. Wedgwood's biography of Heron is unsatisfactory (*History of Parliament: Biographies* (1936), pp. 446-7).

Item þe said Sir John Stanes for þe more evident proof and lyclynnesse of þe trowth to be had in all thiese precedent articles of his owne hand hath wreten in papir in þe manere and fourme as foloweth and delyvered it to þe said Lord Cromwell. Memorandum [y]¹ John Stanes made a knowelech to my Lord Cromwell þe xxvi day of Septembre þe yere of þe reigne of oure lorde King [. . .]¹ Sir John Stanes cam fro Kyme to Doedyke for to spie what rule was at Tattershall by þe commandeme[nt of] my maister [. . .]¹ re yere and the reigne of oure kyng xxviii. And fro Doedyke y sente Hugh Fyssher but he wist not what y mente, and he broughte me word as þat had ben afore tyme but that there was moo straungeres þan was wont to be. And þen y went to Kyme and tolde hym ther was mekyll poeple. Thanne he made me go agayn and aspye if he walked to þe Conyngarth or to þe watersyde for þat was somtyme his walk; and y did as he bad me and sente Hugh agayn, for he saide and he helde þat walk he wolde have a boot and felaship and trusse my lord away. But as y myght answer afore God y felt not he wolde do hym no bodely harm. And þanne went y to Kyme and tolde hym where so my lord walked he had with hym xxxti or xl persones iacked and their bowes shoting as they went. And he saide y did but disceyved hym; and this was at þe litill postern gate withoute þe brugge and fro thens he went to the hart garth and John Madison with hym. Thanne y herde nomore þerof or he went to London. þan the Lenten after he was areste [i.e. 1450] he sente for me by writting to come to London and there he uttered this matere to me agayn and bad me take suertee of as many as wolde fulfill his intent and there he told and enformed me what y shuld do: he bad me have a man at Coly Weston an other at Wynfeld and ther we shulde not do faille of oure purpos for we shulde have either morwenyng or evenyng hym and his chapelyn walkyng to þe park and þere utterly to slee hym. And yit he said þat was better at Wynfeld þanne at Coly Weston for ther was covert for to scape. þanne y came home to Kyme and maistresse Jonett and y examyned als many as wolde fulfill his entent and many more but thus many were sworn upon a book for to kepe counsell: Richard Assheburne, Olyver Lewter, James Gartside, John Millom, John Dawbeney, William Wilde, William Hacforde, John Obilson, John Staynfeld, Aundrew Frer', John Medylton, Sir Walter Flynton, Sir John Stanes.² And this surance was taken undre a stak of haye within the place of Kyme. And þanne they asked wher on they shuld lyf and y saide til theym y shulde telle them whanne y spak next with theym. Thanne rode y to my maister agayn and tolde hym all this mater: he was well apaide and ther y told hym þat we had spyes at all ther places and ther cam hoom as God save my soule. Thenne he sent me with a token to þe resceyvour, the parson of Braytofte, for to resceyve silvere and he wolde delyvere noon withoute writting and his seall. Thanne the houshold brake up and ilk man went til his frendes so at þat tyme was do no moo. But we were accorded where we shulde mete whan y had speken with my maister. Thanne y rode til hym after Estre and tolde hym þat the houshold was broken and his men gone. Thanne he sent a lettere to þe resceyvour undre his seal and had hym delyvere me silvere and bad me gadre togedere the felaship agayn and see a tyme, and so y did. But it was after Wytsonyde or y stered, thanne rode

¹ Hole.

² Most of these men figure among those indicted or appealed against for robberies and murders in the 1440s.

y to Lincoln on Witson Moneday [25 May 1450] and there resceyved money of þe resseyvore and so y rod to gader them togider and mette togeder at York, and þere y trowe John Loksmyth of Swyneshed see us. And there we made covenaut to one at Billesfeld, for in York we herde of þe Rising of Kent. And there it was lat us wete my lord wolde to London but he was ever a day afore us so we rode on to we come at Baldok and there we toke a counsell, for some saide they wolde not labore but they had to kepe them upon. There Richard Assheburn and y lefteoure felaship at Baldok and rode to London to my maister and telled hym they wolde not labore but they had some good in hande. And he saide whan they had don their devoir they shulde have a gentilmanly rewarde. And thus he fedde them with faire wordes and made me sende foroure felaship. And ther we hyred an hors ofoure hooste withoute Aldergate strete and a man and sent foroure felaship; for he saide and we wolde dooure devoir we myght fulfille his entent in London or elles we did notoure devoir. So þe felaship cam to towne the Thursday at even and þanne y went to Wenslaye þat was with my lord of Burgeveny and made hym gete ilkon of us a bonde, and so we went to Blak Heth undere his proteccion and for to do þe king servyce if he had nede atoure power and for to see þe rule of my Lord Cromwell. þanne it was tolde us we were espyed and we haste us to London agayn and þanne came we to þe Towre, James Dawbeney, William Ovilson and y, and there we tolde hym alle þe rule and tolde hym his matere myght nat be sped. þanne he took me a bagge of gonne powder and bad me spye where he were loeged and sette fyre in the hous next his loegyng, for þanne wolde his men falle to þe fyre and þanne myght we haveoure entent of my lord. And so we departed fro hym, so at þat tyme menynt no more; but sone after Wenslaye cam til hym and was his resceyvnore, and lyved with hym in his chambre y and Ledburn; and there he uttered þat til hym and hight hym a gret fee and he gaf hym a faire answer but Wenslaye spak nomore þerof. Thus alle men lefte and were wery of hym. For this þat y say is trew as y shall answer afore God upon þe dredeful daye of dome. And þat y saye this for drede of god and discharge of my sowle and for no love nor drede of erthely man but of God for y am passed alle drede save only goddes drede.