The forms of organization within a great lord’s household were of profound significance in the late Middle Ages. The resident working household of family and servants, cooks, clerks, minstrels, chaplains and others were often supplemented by the itinerant or occasional household, the lord’s affinity, including feed retainers. This friendly cast was the vessel which carried the flow of lordship and patronage, in grants and fees, wages and influence, and provided the services on which the actions of lordship rested. Amongst them was that group distinctively treated by virtue of having been retained by indenture for life. Some 156 examples from the period 1278 to 1476 have recently been published.¹ A second example from the archives of the Mainwaring family of Over Peover (in Cheshire), sadly came to light too late for the full text to be included.²

There seems to have been no unique occasion for such grants. The genuine expectation of long future service could jostle with the offer of a life grant only in the hope of loyalty in a present crisis. And there seems to have been no service, whether menial or not, which was excluded from such written agreements.³ Whether such service was performed at a distance, in war, in the law courts or by mere friendship in the region, the focus remained the household, often literally the house.⁴ Lords wore their buildings, investing their architectural patronage with the symbols of family and household, colonizing and exploiting the physical dominance of hall and chapel in the landscape. Forms of organization within the households of great lords also extended in more modest character to those of the

² Ibid., addendum, 179.
⁴ The importance of the household to the development of indentures of retinue is emphasized in J.M.W. Bean, *From lord to patron: lordship in late medieval England* (Manchester, 1989).
county and, occasionally even the parish gentry. No lord so minor that he did not enjoy lordship in its full panoply.

As Sir Geoffrey Mascy of Tatton apparently lay dying in the late winter of 1455–56 he had had some preview of the likely aftermath of his demise and the dissolution of his lordship. His unexpected recovery had revealed the world beyond the grave which testators so often sought to control. The new south chapel to the chancel at St Mary’s church in Eccles, Lancashire, was already constructed, and arrangements for a chantry and two brasses on a marble altar tomb were in hand, together with livery of twelve white gowns to poor men who would accompany his body during the funeral in a solicitous parody of his household in life. In that world the following of his brother and heir, William Mascy, amongst them ‘John Valentyne, Alis his wyfe, Nicholas Hulton hæwed a strumpet and a bastard doghter of my brother William, Rondull Bromeley and Raynald Legh’ had ‘sklaundert and noyset in the cuntre’ that he owed them debts and fees. The post-mortem fate of his widow, Margery, and illegitimate son, John, and of his two manors at Worsley (Lancashire) and Tatton (Cheshire) seemed perilous indeed. Geoffrey sought protection from his own lord and neighbours, Thomas, recently created Lord Stanley and Sir Thomas Assheton, willing twenty marks to the former, ‘besechyng hym as I moste trist his gode lordship to be gode lorde and to se to my said wyfe hæ the said Geffrey my son’. In the event of a direct assault Geoffrey also bequeathed all the moveable fixtures at Tatton and Worsley, including ‘all the glasen wyndowes, clokke belles, fournesses and ledes ... all dorres, wyndowes, lovers, pates, bedde trees, brigge and planke, and the skrenes and sidebordes’ to Thomas, Lord Stanley. Whatever the legal fiction thus created there is a curious solidity to this last bequest; Thomas, Lord Stanley was to become possessed of the material fabric of Mascy’s household in order to protect its now ethereal political life.

Later in the same year, the rumours of his death having again proved premature, Sir Geoffrey Mascy entered into a post-marriage indenture and bond in the domestic chapel at Worsley with his son John, guaranteeing him forty marks, the goods of his mother (now also his sister-in-law), ‘and a servaunt man wæ̂t pai mete drynke clothes as longes to Pair degree and noo worse ðan the said Geffrey

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5 Warrington Public Library, Mascy of Tatton Deeds, MS 371. Mascy’s will is published verbatim from a ‘Langton Ms.’ in A collection of Lancashire and Cheshire wills not now to be found in any probate registry, 1301–1752, ed. William Fergusson Irvine, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, xxx (1896), 12–15.
and Margery have pair selve. And that to be w't the said Geffrey and Margery or in suches places as pleases the said John and Margaret duryng all the lyve of the said Geffrey and Margery also w't ij horses sufficiantly fonde for ho't tyme of gresse haye and corne'. In return John 'shall be true to hym duryng his lyve and to the said Margery'. These terms are more than the customary post-marital arrangements for the domicile of the married couple, which commonly lasted for two or three years and alternated between the households of the bride's and groom's families. Mascy was here again preparing his lordship and household against siege, and seeking to guarantee a place in it for an illegitimate son.

In the transubstantiated feudalism which K.B. McFarlane saw as a characteristic of the late Middle Ages, a lord's affinity was part of the search for settled loyalty in the locality. The ties of neighbourhood and marriage, the mutuality of legal relations, the granting of fees and annuities to household officers, the livery of robes, collars and badges, even, as Nigel Saul has suggested, the hunting party, were all part of a political life heavily dependent on daily expressions of lordship and friendship. The offer of good lordship was matched by the promise of mutual friendship. This was the world to which Sir Geoffrey Mascy vainly appealed and which he rightly saw as embedded in the household.

The household was both a venue and an occasion, notably during annual or biannual liveries of robes at Christmas and Pentecost. Mascy's neighbour, Randle Mainwaring of Over Peover (d. 1456), his patrimonial wealth swollen by wardships and profitable leases, used the occasions to grant liveries of ruby gowns to numerous of his neighbours amongst the minor gentry between 1427 and 1429. Similar expressions of lordship were already of some antiquity amongst the lesser gentry in this territory. William Tabley had been granted an annual livery of robes for life there amongst the esquires of John Grey, son of Reginald Grey, lord of Dyffryn Clwyd and justiciar of Chester, in 1294. Robert Grelley, lord of nearby Manchester, had a similar retinue of esquires who received annual liveries in 1302.

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6 Warrington Public Library, Mascy of Tatton Deeds, MS 373.
7 There is an impressive series from this territory in J.R.U.L., Cornwall Legh MSS 62–3, 75–6; Michael J. Bennett, *Community, class and careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire society in the age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), 29.
9 *Community, class and careerism*, 87–8.
The household of Randle Mainwaring was a cognate world divided between the halls at Baddiley near Nantwich and at Over Peover, the site of the hallmoot. The former, a moated hall with its knight's chamber, gate house and other manorial buildings carefully delineated, was granted to Randle's sister-in-law in dower after 1410. Like Sir Geoffrey Mascy, Mainwaring too was a builder. Mascy's tomb, chantry and chapel have long gone, although a fragment of the hall at Tatton, ignorantly abused by the National Trust through daily re-enactments of 'gentry' life, survives. Contrariwise Mainwaring's halls have been lost but the perpendicular south chapel at Over Peover, a characteristic private box, with its recess tomb and glass, is all that survives of the medieval church.

A variety of commissions, offices and grants carried him into the orbit of the earl of Chester's lordship in a long career which began as a member of Richard II's ill-fated Cheshire retinue. In 1422 he indented to provide Henry V with two archers for the army in Normandy during what would prove to be the king's final months. His son and heir, Sir John Mainwaring, was retained for life by Humphrey, earl of Buckingham, in September 1441 'to do hym service and with hym to sojourne and ride', one of eleven coterminous indentures with Cheshire gentry. In such fashion members of his household might find themselves temporarily in those of greater lords, but such links were always of lesser import than Mainwaring's own lordship.

The life indenture of retinue between Randle Mainwaring and his son, Sir John Mainwaring, and Thomas Alcumlow sealed on 5 March 1443 is to be seen in these familiar contexts, although in several of its items it is quite unlike the life indentures now in print. The proximity in time of Alcumlow's indenture and that of Sir John Mainwaring with the Earl of Buckingham might perhaps suggest that it was here that the lesser lord had found a model. Buckingham was at this moment making considerable use of members of his own

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12 Chartularium Mainwaringianum 10.t. This is the cartulary completed by Sir William Dugdale in 1669. It is briefly described in the 1883 report on the Manuscripts of Sir Philip Tatton Mainwaring, Tenth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, appendix IV (1885), 199–210, and is listed amongst the supplementary Mainwaring MSS in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. It was returned to the family in March 1956. I am grateful to the owner for her kindness and hospitality in allowing me to examine the manuscript.


14 Chartularium Mainwaringianum, 11.a.

household, notably the receiver of Staffordshire, Humphrey Cotes, at the Chester assizes. The dispute was with Thomas Stanley and concerned the manor of Bosley, a case in which Buckingham's Cheshire affinity, Sir John Mainwaring included, were prominent. However, the two indentures are unlike in either their terms or language. Contracts with lawyers or for legal services are scarce but the phrase 'penne and inke and counsel' has the ring of a vernacular composition, services provided in marriage agreements, leases and peace bonds.

Alcumlow was retained by the Mainwaring household, by father and son acting together, an apparently unusual arrangement. All the texts edited by Michael Jones and Simon Walker are between two parties. Elsewhere, a genuine emphasis on mutuality and hospitality, a semi-public affirmation of Mainwaring's 'gode maystreshippe' in the declaration to 'all oure gode frendes', and the absence of a money fee speak eloquently of a landscape of narrow horizons with which the affinity sought influence. If there could be a parochial gentry there must needs be parochial retaining.

Private Collection, Sir William Dugdale's MS, Chartularium Mainwaringianum, 12.i.17

An Endenture made between Hondekyn/Maynwarong Squier the Alder and Sjt John/Maynwaryng Knyzt on pat one parte: And/Thomas Alkemontelowe on pat oþr parte/xxi. Henr: vi

This Endenture made betwene us Hondekyn/Maynwarong Squier the alder and Sjt John Maynwarong Knyzt on þat one parte, And Thomas Alkemontelowe on þat oþr parte, beres witnes þat the said Thomas is to be last wþ us to do us service to oure ouen persones in such ocupacion as he most useth, þat is to say wþ Penne and Inke and Counsell be fore all oþr men oute take the Kyng and his Mynystres for queche be lewyng and service. And specially for the plesance þat he has done to us nowe of late tyme. We faythefully graunten hym oure gode Maystreshippe forthering and helpe at all tymes to hym to be hadde þat we may hym forther or else in word dede or wrytyng. Prayng all oure gode frendes hym to favour forther and socoure in all his besynes in resonable wyse. Also we graunten to þe said Thomas durying his lyve covenable mete and drynke and beddyng to hym & to hys servaunt, And to hys too horses quen he will come to us and abide wþ us. Also we the saidez

16 The Staffords, earls of Stafford, 48–9, 157–8; PRO, Chester 2/119 m.3.
17 The original indenture is not amongst the Mainwaring MSS in the J.R.U.L.M. and is not known to survive.
Hondekyn, And Sr John graunten to the said Thomas to gif hym iche yere a covenable Gowne cloth of oure lyvery quen we or ojer of us giffez lyveres And quat yere þat we gifz no lyveres we graunten to gif hym a covenable Gowne <cloth> iche yere will he leffez orast for us to geffe & profitable for hym to where, and quat yere þat we faylyn to giffe hym a lyvery Gowne or a noþr covenable Gowne clothe as aboue reherset we graunten to gif hym for hys Gowne vii viijd. In witnes of the qwiche thyng, As well we the saidez Hondekyn and sir John as the said Thomas to thes Endentures on aither side hanne set oure seales. Writon on the Tuesday next aftur the fest of Seint Chadde in the Bishoppe, Anno RR Henrici Sexti post conquestum Anglie vicesimo primo.

[5 March, 1443]