

THE FAMILY OF DE STALLIS AT WALLINGFORD IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

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THE year 1155 when Henry II granted a charter of liberties to the men of Wallingford 'in consideration of the service and great labour which they bore' in support of his cause during Stephen's reign, was regarded by later inhabitants of the borough as the most important date in their history. One burgess writing a short history of the town in the early 16th century found a source of pride in the antiquity of the grant while mistakenly crediting it with the inauguration of that embodiment of borough self-consciousness, the office of mayor:

Henry the 2 granted the Charter for the first Maioraltie of Wallingford in 1155. Soe the Maioraltie of Wallingford was before London 35 yeres.¹

The charter gave the burgesses a measure of freedom from the control of the king's reeve, and important economic advantages, as well as confirming by a covering clause a mass of accumulated custom.² The charter also implied, or a subsidiary grant gave, the right to farm the royal revenues from the borough, and 'the men of Wallingford' accounted for the farm at the Exchequer in 1157;³ by 1180, and probably earlier, Wallingford had that other requisite for a borough's advance to self-government, reeves who were men of the town and perhaps were already being elected by the townspeople.⁴ Nevertheless the grant of the charter proved to be merely the beginning of a period of uncertainty when neither the borough's much-prized liberties nor its economic position were at all secure.

Continual failure by the burgesses to meet the annual fee-farm led *c.* 1164 to its reduction from £80 to £40,⁵ and in 1205 when the debt

owed to the Exchequer for past arrears had risen to £700, to the taking of the borough into the king's hands to be farmed by the sheriff of the county.⁶ The economic instability indicated by the history of the farm in the later 12th and early 13th centuries was further reflected in the strenuous efforts of the townspeople to prevent encroachment on their trading area by rival markets at Abingdon⁷ and Crowmarsh Gifford.⁸ Efforts were made by King John to boost the trade of the town: he granted it a fair in 1205,⁹ and in 1207 money was allowed out of the fee-farm revenues to repair shops in the marketplace and in 1214 for building others there.¹⁰ The town remained in the king's hands until the early years of Henry III. In 1219 the burgesses secured a confirmation of the 1155 charter, and two reeves of Wallingford, by now almost certainly annually elected by the townspeople, were mentioned in 1220; and by 1225 the burgesses were once more farming the town.¹¹ In 1232 Henry III granted the borough to his brother, Richard, Earl of Cornwall, who already held the castle and honor of Wallingford,¹² and in the period of the earl's lordship, until his death in 1272, Wallingford experienced reasonable prosperity—at least there was no difficulty with payment of the farm—and, except possibly during the upheavals of the early 1260's,¹³ unchallenged enjoyment of its liberties. This period roughly coincided with the adult lives of three brothers who were among the more important burgesses of the time, Nicholas, Alexander, and Stephen de Stallis.¹⁴

The father of the three men was Robert de Stallis who was alternatively called 'Robert, son of William',¹⁵ which suggests that he was

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the first of the family to bear the nickname 'of the stalls'; it may have originated from his tenure of stalls in the market-place or from his ownership of a house near the market stalls. Robert was evidently a burgess of some standing, and from 1218 to 1220 he was one of the king's overseers of the extensive repairs and improvements then in progress at Wallingford castle.¹⁶

Nicholas de Stallis was presumably Robert's eldest son describing himself in a case in the borough court in 1252 as Robert's heir. He was then disputing the ownership of three shops in the town with the Abbot of Reading; the abbot evidently based his claim on a grant from Richard the chaplain of Theale of land and appurtenances in Wallingford,¹⁷ while Nicholas claimed the property by descent from the same Richard. The case was initiated in the borough court in December, 1251 by a writ of right from the king in Nicholas's favour, and at the beginning of February, 1252 Nicholas made his plea against his powerful opponent, but the abbot claimed he could not be impleaded in any court but the king's. The case dragged on until at least the end of May, Nicholas demanding that the abbot show warrant for his freedom from the court's jurisdiction, and the abbot's attorneys producing both a charter of Richard I and a charter of 'King Henry'. The court finally overruled the abbot's objection and a 'view' of the property was granted.¹⁸ Any subsequent developments in the case are lost, but a settlement had apparently been arrived at *c.* 1258 when Nicholas quitclaimed his right in one of the shops to the abbey.¹⁹ Other property in the town belonging to Nicholas was mentioned in an agreement of *c.* 1258 by which the mayor and gildsmen of Wallingford lent Nicholas 60s. and he as security for repayment mortgaged to them:

one shop which lies between the shops of Alexander de Stallis and John Robechild, with 6*d.* rent which he used to receive from the said shop of John Robechild in the high road, and with all the right which he had or was entitled to have in Simon Rokeby's

house, and 18*d.* rent of assize which Eustace, son of Clement, used to pay Nicholas from the houses of Richard of Colchester and Richard, son of Henry, . . .²⁰

A house in the parish of St. Martin owned by Nicholas was mentioned *c.* 1232 when he granted it away for one mark (13*s.* 4*d.*) and an annual rent of 3*s.*²¹ From 1228 his property in the borough owed a total of 4*s.* in chief rents—the original burgage rents owed to the lord of the borough which formed part of the fee-farm revenue.²²

The shops mentioned at Wallingford in this period mostly stood in the market area, apparently then a broad open space—of which the Market Place and St. Leonard's Square are surviving parts—dividing the town south of the High Street.²³ The three disputed by Nicholas and the Abbot of Reading were almost certainly there, being described as 'in the parish of St. Mary'.²⁴ The shops, which served both as workshops and selling-booths, were often the ground-floor rooms of houses overlooking the market area; in 1272 the lessees of a house opposite the corn-market, then held in the south of the area within St. Lucian's parish, were allowed to make doors and windows looking onto the street from which to sell their merchandise.²⁵ Other shops were detached buildings; one mentioned *c.* 1232 stood on the north-east of the market area inside the churchyard of the church of St. Mary-the-Less, which was sometimes called 'St. Mary-of-the-Stalls' from the use made of its churchyard at market times.²⁶ Other shops near the church were occupied by the sellers of fish.²⁷ Six or seven shops built beneath the raised gildhall, which then stood in the centre of the market area south of St. Mary-le-More church, probably also existed at this period,²⁸ although they were not recorded before 1307 when they figured in an accusation of corruption levelled at one of the borough reeves; a jury of the town reported to the justices-in-eyre in that year that:

William of Donrugge killed Thomas of Ilsley in Roger of Blewbury's house at Wallingford and directly afterwards he

fled . . . and he had goods and chattels worth 5 marks in a certain shop beneath the gild-hall in that town. And John Mariot then a reeve of the town marked the door of the shop with a seal, and afterwards entered the gild-hall and ripped up a plank from its floor, lying above the shop, and entered the shop and carried away a portion of the goods and chattels worth 40s. . . .²⁹

Nicholas de Stallis, like most of the more important burgesses, also owned agricultural land outside the borough; in 1241 he had 12 a. in the fields of Newnham Murren across the river.³⁰ Although the majority of the burgesses lived by trade, husbandry played a fairly important part in the life of the town which had its open fields and common meadows and pastures. Nicholas, who almost certainly followed a trade, supplemented his income by the sale of produce from his land, and on one occasion c. 1230 he became involved in a lawsuit in the borough court with his brother, Stephen de Stallis, over the ownership of some corn:

Nicholas de Stallis shows that he sowed an acre and a half with corn, and when he wished to get his corn in he could not find it. He made inquiry after it and discovered it in Stephen's yard. He showed this to the reeves and before them and other worthy men made recognition of the corn. And when Nicholas sent two men, Richard and Henry, to collect the corn Stephen cursed them . . .

Nicholas's servants evidently succeeded in recovering the corn, but Stephen continued to claim it as his, complaining at the same session of the court that one of the servants:

carried away his corn to sell it in the market of the lord king in despite of the same Stephen and without leave of the reeves . . .³¹

Stephen also owned lands in the fields of Newnham and in the late 1260's granted 2½ a. there to the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Wallingford;³² if the land of both brothers there had been inherited from their father, their strips may have lain intermingled and the dispute have arisen from the confusion over

boundaries which often occurred among holders of land in open fields. In another case in the court Nicholas de Stallis impleaded another burgess for breaking an agreement about 'a ploughing day' (*die arura*), perhaps a compact to plough their strips jointly.³³

Nicholas's brother, Alexander de Stallis, on the evidence of the surviving rolls of chief rents, steadily increased his property in the town. In the year ending at Michaelmas, 1229 he paid only 1s. rent, in 1235 2s. 1d., in 1244 5s. 8d., and for a year in the 1250's 6s. 4d. One of these acquisitions, made before 1243, was a property earlier held by Richard, son of Henry, carrying a rent of 1s. 2d.;³⁴ the rent presumably represented the four shops in the town about which Richard's son William impleaded Alexander before the eyre of 1248, when a jury of burgesses found in Alexander's favour.³⁵ In another case before the same eyre Alexander unsuccessfully claimed three years arrears in a rent of 3s.³⁶ At an earlier eyre, in 1241, John the metalworker claimed to have been disseised by Alexander and another burgess of 5s. rent from a house in the town, but was found to have never been in seisin.³⁷

About 1266 Alexander made a grant of 2s. rent, arising from a house in St. Martin's parish and another in St. Leonard's parish, to found a charity in the Hospital of St. John the Baptist which stood outside the south gate of the town. The hospital had a close connection with the town and its inhabitants: grants of property made to it and leases made by the master and brethren of the hospital were usually witnessed by the mayor and leading men,³⁸ and in 1355, in the course of a dispute with Edward, Prince of Wales, then lord of the borough, the burgesses claimed the patronage and the right to make a visitation of the house once a year.³⁹ Alexander's grant stated:

I, Alexander de Stallis, for the health of my soul and for the souls of my ancestors and descendants, by this charter give, concede, and confirm to the brothers and sisters of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Wallingford, in perpetual alms, 2s. annual rent . . . that they may, after my death, on my

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birthday, distribute 8*d.* worth of bread, 8*d.* worth of ale, and 8*d.* worth of relish (*componagio*) amongst the paupers living in the hospital.⁴⁰

At one time Alexander owned property outside the borough, described as 'the land of Acgrave'. He granted it for 54 marks, which suggests a fairly large acreage, to Adam de Heriz; subsequently Adam's title to the land was challenged and he called Alexander to 'warrant'—give evidence in support of his claim—and as security for performance of the warranty Alexander pledged 'all the lands, rents, and possessions which he has in the town of Wallingford and outside it'.⁴¹

In 1273 shortly after Alexander's death his property in Wallingford was disputed between his widow Alice and his son Thomas. Thomas impleaded Alice in the borough court, claiming from her his father's 'chief house' and also 20 charters, presumably the title deeds to Alexander's property. In the matter of the charters Alice refused to make her defence in the required manner and the court judged that Thomas should take possession of them. The chief house was claimed by Alice under the custom of 'free bench' by which a widow held the whole or part of her late husband's property until her death or re-marriage. In attempting to prove her claim, however, she involved herself in another plea. Eustace Clement and 11 other burgesses complained that they had been summoned before the royal justices at Westminster to give evidence on oath as to whether 'Alice held the house of her late husband, Alexander de Stallis, by virtue of free bench or by her husband's will.' Annoyed at being burdened with the journey:

they went and met Alice in St. Martin's church, and she said that she had not constrained them to appear before the justices on that day, and she swore to this to Eustace and the other worthy men.⁴² But in spite of this Alice caused them to be summoned before the Bench, and because of the uncertainty among them the jury of twelve stayed at home, for which default they were all placed in mercy before the justices . . .

However, a week later a settlement was made between Alice and the indignant jury; she agreed to pay them damages if they were fined for their default. At the same court Alice and Thomas agreed to submit their dispute to the judgement of a jury of burgesses, and the next week a final agreement between them was witnessed by the court, under which:

the chief house in the parish of Holy Trinity in Wallingford where Alexander de Stallis used to live, with its surrounding close and buildings, gardens, and yards, will remain fully in (Alice's) free bench for her dowry in the borough while she lives without any contradiction by Thomas. And all rents paid from the other thresholds and hearths in the borough, which belonged to Alexander on the day of his death, shall remain to Thomas by right of heredity without any reclamation or challenge by Alice.⁴³

The chief house was almost certainly that, mentioned in 1281 as formerly Alexander's, standing in Canescroft (now Kine Croft), the common pasture on the west of the town where the fairs were held;⁴⁴ Holy Trinity was the parish of the church of Wallingford Priory which stood north of Canescroft on the other side of the High Street. Alexander's was evidently one of the larger houses in the town standing detached in a close and with a number of outbuildings; a grange belonging to it was mentioned in 1284.⁴⁵ No detailed description of a house of this period has been found, but a fisherman's house mentioned in 1369, comprising a hall, chamber, kitchen, and shop, was probably typical of those lining the streets of the medieval town.⁴⁶ The fact that one burgess was known as 'John of the stone house' in 1275 suggests that most were of timber.⁴⁷ By this time some at least had tiled roofs; tiles brought from Nettlebed were mentioned c. 1230,⁴⁸ and a tiler was living in the borough in 1267.⁴⁹

The third brother, Stephen de Stallis, was living in a house in the parish of St. Peter in the east of the town in 1272;⁵⁰ it was probably the one in that parish owing rents of 2*s.* to the fee-farm and 3*s.* 1*d.* to Wallingford Priory which Robert Freeman granted away in 1294,

stating that he had acquired it 'by the gift of Stephen de Stallis'.⁵¹ A brawl in which Stephen was involved in 1237 presumably resulted from his failure to pay the rent owed to the priory; he complained that:

Hugh of the Sacristy (earlier called 'Hugh of the Priory') came onto his tenement and tried to distrain upon him, and afterwards came into the street and man-handled and beat him and tore his gown . . .⁵²

Hugh evidently cleared himself of Stephen's accusations for it was Stephen who was fined as a result of the plea.⁵³ A settlement was fairly soon made between Stephen and the monks for a few weeks later the Prior of Wallingford made Stephen his attorney to pay 10*d.* of the rent from his house to the Bishop of Winchester.⁵⁴

Another house owned by Stephen was described as a corner house and stood near the south gate of the town in St. Leonard's parish; he paid 1*s.* chief rent for it between 1229 and 1244.⁵⁵ Before 1250 he granted it to Herbert the ditcher (*fosseur*) for a rent of 5*s.*, but by c. 1255 it had reverted to Stephen⁵⁶ who gave it in 1267 or 1268 to St. John's Hospital.⁵⁷ A third house, for which he also owed 1*s.* chief rent from 1229,⁵⁸ was apparently lost by Stephen before the eyre of 1248. Roger the carpenter who with his wife Joan then impleaded Stephen, claiming a house in the borough and was awarded it by the court's verdict,⁵⁹ was presumably the Roger of Oseney who owed the rent in 1252 and later.⁶⁰

As much information relating to the three brothers appears in the surviving rolls of the borough court as in the deeds and other records concerning their property. The court met on Thursdays usually each week and had jurisdiction over a fairly wide variety of pleas, including trespass, debt, covenant, and pleas of land in certain cases, as well as being the forum for most administrative business. The majority of pleas heard by the court in the 13th century were pleas of trespass—actions brought for an injury to person or property. Many were of a trivial nature arising from petty brawls or arguments; a court held regularly and near at

hand meant that legal action could be resorted to with comparatively little cost or trouble. At this period almost all pleas in the court were dealt with by the process of compurgation. A plaintiff, having succeeded by the process of summons or distraint in making the defendant appear, made his accusation and claimed damages, producing as his 'suit' (*sequela*) friends who would testify to the truth of the charge. The defendant then made a formal denial and was assigned a day on which to 'make his law' by finding a required number—usually six—compurgators to support his denial on oath; if he failed the court fined him and awarded damages, and, if he succeeded he was allowed to depart freely 'without day' and the plaintiff fined for making a 'false plea'.

Experience in pleading and a knowledge of borough custom was necessary when bringing an action in the court. A slip of the tongue however trivial—even, as in a case in 1304, getting an opponent's Christian name wrong⁶¹—or a mistake in the required form of words or procedure could mean the failure of the plea or defence and a fine by the court. A case in which Alexander de Stallis accused Christine Geri of raising the hue and cry 'to the harm of his tenement' developed into an argument as to whether Christine's husband was still living in which case he and not she should have been summoned by Alexander to answer his charge.⁶² Another plea, in 1232, reached deadlock, both Alexander and his opponent raising technical procedural points to justify their refusal to reply:

Robert de Ros impleads Alexander de Stallis (saying) that Alexander insulted and unjustly treated him in the borough, whence he would not have had the damage or disgrace for 2*s.* and then he produces his suit. Alexander came and says that he need not reply because he (Robert) did not name his suit.

Alexander de Stallis impleads Robert de Ros (saying) that a member of his household insulted him and called him 'thief' and badly treated him whence he would not have had the damage or disgrace for 6*s.*, and he pro-

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duces his suit. Robert says that he need not reply without his wife as the plea concerns her. Judgement is placed in respect . . .⁶³

A case in 1272 in which Stephen de Stallis was a party provides a good example of the full formula of a plea, and his opponent's defence, of the required word for word (*de verbo ad verbum*) refutation:

Stephen de Stallis impleads Eustace Clement concerning the great force and injury which he did to him in the peace of God, and of the lord Edmund, son of the King of the Germans,⁶⁴ and of his reeves of the borough of Wallingford who keep the peace in the town of Wallingford, namely that on the Tuesday next after the feast of the Blessed Mary in March of the fifty-sixth year of the king's reign the same Eustace came to Stephen's house where he lives in the parish of St. Peter-in-the-East and took from there a parti-coloured tunic, made half of Flanders burrel and half of camlet, and kept it from that Tuesday until the Tuesday following, refusing to accept gage or pledge for it, until it was released by the reeves; and this to the damage and disgrace of half a mark. And if he wishes to confess this, that is well, but if not he (Stephen) has sufficient witnesses—William, etc.

Eustace Clement defends the force and injury, the damage and disgrace to Stephen, and the breaking of the peace of God and of the lord Edmund and of his reeves who keep the peace in Wallingford, and the half mark . . .⁶⁵

Eustace went on to claim that he was not liable to answer the charge—technically one of *vetitum namium*⁶⁶—because of an omission in Stephen's plea.

Nicholas de Stallis must have possessed the required knowledge of procedure and custom as he acted as an attorney in three cases of which record survives. At a court in the early 1230's a burgess made Nicholas and his brother Stephen his attorneys to plead for him in a dispute over some land with the Abbot of Thame,⁶⁷ and in 1266 the sacrist of Wallingford Priory appointed Nicholas to act for him in recovering some

rent that was being withheld by the Rector of St. Leonard's church.⁶⁸ In February, 1268, Nicholas was received by the court as the attorney of Nicholas the goldsmith in a long-standing action for debt, which had been in progress since at least November, 1265.⁶⁹ Nicholas de Stallis was evidently among the more wealthy and influential burgesses. In 1235 he was one of the three borough aldermen; his name headed the list of the inhabitants of the ward for which he was responsible on the record of the tallage taken in that year for the Earl of Cornwall.⁷⁰ In 1251 or 1252 Nicholas and Stephen de Stallis were among four leading burgesses sent to Reading 'to seek the liberty of the town concerning the mint before the lord William de Haxemue, the king's justice'⁷¹; the Wallingford mint had been one of those reconstituted in 1248 at the time of Henry III's recoinage.⁷² Nicholas was acting on the king's business in 1240 when with another burgess he was ordered to escort a prisoner from Oxford to Windsor.⁷³

In the 13th century the affairs of the borough were conducted by a fairly small group of men, who, although there is no evidence for any formally constituted body before 1275,⁷⁴ were evidently the equivalent of the 12 or 24 leading burgesses or 'portmen' of other towns; the same names appear regularly as holders of the chief borough offices and as witnesses to the deeds of the period. Of 38 deeds, either conveyances of property between burgesses or grants to the Hospital of St. John, which survive for the period c. 1230-c. 1270, 34 were witnessed by Alexander de Stallis, 28 by Nicholas, and 8 by Stephen,⁷⁵ and it was undoubtedly Alexander who played the most prominent part in the life of the town.

Alexander served as one of the two borough reeves in the year beginning at Michaelmas, 1235. The reeves were the chief executive officers of the borough and had a wide range of duties most of them connected with the borough court. As keepers of the king's peace or lord's peace they were the embodiment of the power of the court; in the usual wording of a plea the plaintiff accused his opponent of

committing an offence 'in the peace of God and of the reeves'. Any action required by the court, such as summoning juries, keeping prisoners, hearing recognitions of debt, collecting fines, and distraining on defaulters, was the responsibility of the reeves and their subordinates, the serjeants. Naturally the execution of these duties often led to unpopularity: *c.* 1230 it was reported in the court that:

Alice, the wife of Richard Wrau, . . . refused to give distress to the collectors and called them 'thieves', and took up a stick and tried to strike the two serjeants and closed the door on them. And when the reeves came and sought gage and pledge she raised the hue . . .;⁷⁶

and in 1311 the collectors of the levy for the expenses of the borough's members of Parliament had water poured over them.⁷⁷ The reeves wielded considerable power and their duties must have given them ample opportunity for the abuse of their office, but very few instances of corruption have in fact been recorded. There were a number of factors which limited their power, notably that any action by them against an offender had to be taken in the court and subject to the usual procedure; in an action brought by one of the reeves in 1233 the case was adjourned because he lacked 'suit',⁷⁸ presumably because the general opinion was that the action was an unjust one. The reeves could also be disciplined by the court; in 1312 a reeve was convicted before the mayor of having released distrained goods before the case had been brought to a judgement and 'made no execution of justice in this plea'.⁷⁹

An important part of the reeves' office was the assessment, collection, and payment of the fee-farm. The revenues which made up the farm came from four main sources—the chief rents from the burgages, the fines levied by the court, the toll taken at markets and fairs, and the payments by the *pactionarii*, burgesses, and 'foreigners' from surrounding villages, paying an annual sum for the right of trading in the town and sharing in the gild privileges. The rolls recording the payments of the *pactionarii*⁸⁰ and the chief rents survive for Alexander's year

of office, and at the foot of the latter is Alexander's account of money paid out by him towards the general running expenses of the borough.⁸¹ These included: payment of the borough clerk and for the parchment on which he wrote; the cost of repairs to the town's cucking-stool; payments towards preparations for the coming of the justices-in-eyre led by Robert de Lexinton⁸² for whom a court was apparently improvised—'Item. to William the carpenter for repairing the seat in Peter the vintner's barn against the coming of the lord Robert de Lexinton 2½*d*'; the expenses of two journeys to Berkhamstead (one of the Earl of Cornwall's chief castles)⁸³ to pay instalments of the farm; a payment to the serjeants of the market 'at the second coming of the lord king',⁸⁴ probably as at other royal visits to provide fodder for the horses;⁸⁵ 6½*d.* for a present for the Steward, the official who from the castle administered the honor of Wallingford for the Earl of Cornwall, and 2*s.* for a present for the earl himself; and payments to two of the town's butchers for sheep, presumably for borough feasts.⁸⁶

Alexander was mayor of the borough in at least six years—those beginning at Michaelmas, 1262,⁸⁷ 1263,⁸⁸ 1267,⁸⁹ and in three other years in the 1260's or early 1270's.⁹⁰ The office, first recorded in 1220,⁹¹ was still a developing one. The earliest references to the mayor show him carrying out his chief function as the representative of the body of the townsfolk, the *communitas*, and spokesman for their interests, as in 1230-1 when he went to London to put the town's case in the market dispute with Crowmarsh.⁹² Alexander as mayor represented the town in a dispute with Robert de Luches in 1264, which was settled when Robert pledged half a mark to the mayor and community at the west gate,⁹³ and the 'Alexander the vintner', who in June, 1268, went to the royal palace at Woodstock to pay a fine of 100*s.* for Henry III's confirmation of the 1155 charter,⁹⁴ was undoubtedly Alexander de Stallis acting in his capacity of mayor and guardian of the chartered liberties of the borough. The mayor also acted as head of the gild, a position which he had taken over before 1258 from the official known

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as alderman of the gild;⁹⁵ Alexander appeared in this capacity in 1268 when an admission to the liberty of the town—which gave the right to share in the trading privileges of the gild without the annual payment as a *pactionarius*—was made in the court:

Let it be remembered that William de Camera and Juliana his wife were received into the liberty of the town in return for an annual rent of 1s., with the agreement of Alexander de Stallis, then mayor, and of the whole court.⁹⁶

It was during Alexander's tenure of the office that the mayor was first mentioned acting in another capacity, as a magistrate in the court. In 1268 Alexander, with the reeves and others, presided over a settlement of the long dispute between Nicholas the goldsmith and Walter of Hagbourne⁹⁷ (the same case in which Nicholas de Stallis acted as an attorney). In 1275, after Alexander's death, the mayor was first mentioned in the prologue to a plea as one of the keepers of the peace in the borough,⁹⁸ and by the end of the century he was evidently acting together with the borough aldermen as a regular president of the court. The growth of the office in power and authority, a process in which Alexander must have played a part, continued throughout the later medieval period; an entry in the court roll for 1321 illustrated the status the mayor had already by then achieved:

Because Peter of Didcot was convicted by the whole community of insulting Nicholas de la Barre, the mayor, and slandering him among worthy men by calling him 'false detractor' and 'thief' in contempt of the whole community, the same Peter came to this court and pledged himself to the mayor in 100s. It was further decided that anyone of the community who was convicted three times . . . of offending against this or any other mayor should be deprived of his liberty by the sound of the gild-hall bell.⁹⁹

In a private capacity Alexander appears in the court rolls mainly as a creditor. In 1233 William Irish mortgaged two houses in St. John's parish to Alexander as security for a loan of

10s.; William evidently failed to make the first repayment of the loan, fixed for 2nd February, 1234, for on 23rd of that month he was attached to answer Alexander.¹⁰⁰ In 1261 Alexander accused Peter de Wika of detaining from him 7s. 4d., which he recovered with damages when Peter failed to make his defence 'according to the law'.¹⁰¹ In 1266 Alexander and his brother Stephen brought an action against another burgess for a debt of half a mark,¹⁰² and in 1268 he and Richard of Brightwalton impleaded Robert the tanner who was ordered to be distrained 'day by day' until he gave them satisfaction for a debt of 25s.¹⁰³

In the most interesting transaction in which Alexander was involved he was the debtor, owing a considerable sum to the Jew, Abraham of Berkhamstead. Abraham was one of the leading Jewish financiers of the time and sometimes acted for the king in his dealings with the Jewish community.¹⁰⁴ He was perhaps among the king's Jews at Berkhamstead whom Richard, Earl of Cornwall, was allowed to move to Wallingford in 1242,¹⁰⁵ and in 1249 when Abraham lost the royal favour—it was rumoured that he had murdered his wife when she refused to abet him in defiling an image of the Virgin—he was apparently protected from the consequences by the earl.¹⁰⁶ He was restored to favour in 1250,¹⁰⁷ but later the same year was charged with coin-clipping and his goods forfeited to the king,¹⁰⁸ who later granted Abraham and his possessions to the Earl of Cornwall. In 1255 the earl was given permission to have a chirographer's chest at Wallingford, kept by two Christians and two Jews, to hold all the documents relating to Abraham's debts,¹⁰⁹ and shortly afterwards an order was issued to the sheriffs responsible for 27 counties to distrain the Jew's many debtors to make repayment within the next few weeks; Alexander de Stallis of Wallingford figured among the debtors owing £7 10s.¹¹⁰ It seems unlikely that Alexander, living almost under the eyes of the earl and his receivers, escaped making settlement of the debt.

The debt to Abraham had perhaps been incurred in the course of Alexander's trade as a

vintner; in 1241, 1248, and 1261 he was presented at the eyre for breaking the assize of wine. In 1241 he was also presented for breaking the assize of cloth,¹¹¹ but the sale of wine was evidently his main business; the reference to his payment of the fine for the confirmation of the borough charter shows that it was by his trade as a vintner that he was known to the royal officials. The vintners were one of the leading groups of tradesmen in thirteenth-century Wallingford; two others besides Alexander became mayor of the borough and a number held other offices. The earliest mentioned was Hugh the vintner in 1201, who was probably the same recorded in the Berkshire section of the pipe roll from 1202 paying off a debt incurred to a wealthy merchant of Southampton,¹¹² and in 1226 Peter the vintner, who was Hugh's son or heir,¹¹³ had permission to sell all the red wine he bought at Southampton and took to Wallingford for 10*d.* a sester. Peter was to continue to sell the wine he bought at London at 8*d.* a sester, the assize fixed for Wallingford among other inland towns in 1223.¹¹⁴ In 1229 the 10*d.* assize was extended to all the Wallingford vintners on all the wine they sold.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless Alexander, like most medieval victuallers, found it more profitable to charge a still higher price and meet the resulting fines from the profits.

One or more of the shops in the borough owned by Alexander, mentioned in 1248 and *c.* 1258,¹¹⁶ were presumably used for the sale of his wine, and in the early 1230's he also had a pitch for a stall at the market of Crowmarsh Gifford across the river; he claimed in the borough court that another burgess:

came to the market at Crowmarsh and took his place, and called Robert, his man, 'thief' and said that he ought to be hanged as Nigel of Berkhamstead was at 'Deerstone' . . .¹¹⁷

It is surprising to find a leading burgess of Wallingford selling in the same market, which was then being so bitterly opposed by the borough. The dispute over the right of the men of Crowmarsh to hold a market had been in progress before 1155, when the charter

contained a clause prohibiting it,¹¹⁸ and a renewal of the dispute led to a further royal prohibition in 1214.¹¹⁹ The main issue at the time of the second prohibition was whether the inhabitants of Crowmarsh had the right to sell bread and ale, and the burgesses later claimed that justices sent to enforce the prohibition had caused the ovens used for baking in the village to be destroyed, the vessels for brewing carried off, and the tumbrel—used for the punishment of offenders against the assize of ale—cast down. In 1228 the dispute led to an action in the king's court which was not brought to a conclusion, with a decision in favour of the burgesses, until 1234.¹²⁰

Alexander's brother Stephen played a less important part in the life of the town; he was, however, a fairly wealthy burgess and, like Alexander, was assessed at 10*s.* for the tallage of 1235, among the 14 highest assessments.¹²¹ He also held office as one of the two borough coroners, a position of considerable responsibility with its duties of holding inquests on corpses, hearing abjurations of the realm by felons in sanctuary—this a comparatively frequent task in a small town with 11 churches¹²²—hearing appeals of felony, and pronouncing outlawries, as well as attaching suspects and witnesses and keeping an adequate record of all the cases against the coming of the eyre justices. Stephen and his colleague were apparently elected to the office at the eyre of 1235; on the roll of the crown pleas for the borough at the eyre of 1241 they were named as the coroners 'after the last eyre'.¹²³ The presentments in 1241 included: three inquests on men drowned in the Thames—the most common form of accidental death in thirteenth-century Wallingford; three appeals of robbery (one by Alexander de Stallis); and the record of an abjuration of the realm by a thief in the chapel of St. John's Hospital, after his two associates had been taken with the stolen goods and, in accordance with the borough privilege, hanged by sentence of the borough court.¹²⁴ Stephen and his colleague apparently escaped any of the fines which the justices often imposed on the coroners for lapses of

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detail in their records or mistakes in procedure, but the jury of burgesses was fined for presenting the wrong 'first finder' of a corpse, and the whole town was indicted for failure to capture the felon who gained sanctuary.

The tenure of an office or position of responsibility in the borough did not apparently carry with it the sense of dignity that it would in a later age. Even leading burgesses figured in the street brawls which provided much of the subject matter of pleas in the court and reflect something of the claustrophobic quality of life in a small medieval town; everyone knew everyone else and most of their affairs, out of necessity as much as curiosity, for every man needed the frequent help of his neighbours to act as pledges, suit, essoinators, or compurgators. In the case of Stephen de Stallis, however, the surviving records give the impression of a particularly quarrelsome and litigious man prone to making enemies. His public altercations with the servants of his brother Nicholas and with Hugh of the Sacristy were mentioned above; in a case in 1231 Stephen complained that Osbert the baker 'insulted him and called him 'dog' and badly treated him . . .', and later in the same year, that Henry de Porta 'came into the highway in front of his door and beat his servant . . . and called him (Stephen) 'thief' . . .'¹²⁵ Court rolls survive for about one seventh of the period c. 1230-1272 and estreat rolls for six full years and parts of three others; in them Stephen was recorded as a party to 26 separate cases. In one case he made the liberties of the town the basis of his plea when the action of his opponent who 'went into the castle and made a plea with the Steward' threatened the jurisdiction of the borough court.¹²⁶

No record of the trade followed by Stephen has survived. None of the three brothers appear on the surviving rolls of *pactionarii* (which list the payers by trades); all were evidently wealthy enough to pay for admission to the freedom of the town which gave immunity from the annual payment for gild membership. A grant of c. 1230 by which Stephen gave an annual rent of 1s. to the alder-

man and gild may have been for his freedom although this was not specified;¹²⁷ the assignment of an annual rent from property in the town was the usual method of payment for the freedom at this time. Stephen planned that one of his sons should become a goldsmith by trade, and apprenticed him in 1251 to Ralph the goldsmith. Ralph had been appointed one of the assayers of the Wallingford mint in 1248,¹²⁸ and was one of five or six burgesses recorded as following the trade in the mid-13th century; one of the group, Nicholas the goldsmith, was mayor of the borough for a number of years. The apprenticeship of Stephen's son to the trade was, however, short-lived:

Ralph the goldsmith impleads Stephen de Stallis about a certain agreement made between them on the feast of St. Mary in March of last year. It was in this form: Ralph took Robert, Stephen's son, for a period of six years to teach him the goldsmith's craft; meanwhile he (Ralph) was to receive 10s. each year, paid at four terms, to cover his keep and tuition, and a quarter of wheat to be paid at Christmas, and an acre of land to be ploughed, left fallow, reploughed and prepared for sowing at Stephen's cost. When the first term for the payment of the 10s. came round Ralph went and demanded payment; he went at the second term, the third, the fourth, but Stephen paid him nothing. Then Stephen took his son away to the damage and shame to Ralph of 20s. . . .¹²⁹

Alexander de Stallis died in 1272 or 1273;¹³⁰ Stephen was last mentioned in 1272,¹³¹ and Nicholas was dead by 1274 when his widow Julia was mentioned.¹³² Few references have been found to the next generation of the family and nobody of the name later played a part of any importance in the town. Nicholas's son Nicholas was mentioned in 1274¹³³ but not later, and no later record has been found of two sons of Stephen, Robert and Nicholas, mentioned in his lifetime.¹³⁴ William de Stallis, the chaplain, who in 1294 was living in the house next to that formerly occupied by Stephen,¹³⁵ was mentioned several times until 1312 when a grant of three cottages by him was witnessed

in the court.¹³⁶ Thomas de Stallis, Alexander's son, the party to the dispute over Alexander's chief house in 1273, was mentioned in the year before when he made an agreement to lend another burgess 6 marks,¹³⁷ and he was perhaps the 'Thomas, son of Alexander' who was accused in 1268 of having been associated with an adherent of Simon de Montfort in the recent rebellion.¹³⁸ Thomas was evidently dead by 1284 when his daughters, Agnes and Julia, had the reversionary right to Alexander's chief house and impleaded Alice de Stallis, Alexander's widow, for committing waste in part of the property. It was perhaps a mark of the position which the most successful of the de Stallis family gained in the borough that in this case eleven years after his death he referred to simply as 'Alexander of Wallingford'.¹³⁹

REFERENCES

- ¹ The history appears in the minute book of the corporation, 1507-1683 (Berkshire Record Office, W/ACa 1, ff 25-v) and is entitled: 'A markable remembrance of the antiquitie of the Castle and Colledge with our Charter and Freedome granted unto this ancient Corporation of this poore Borowe of Wallingford Gathered and Collected out of dyvers authors by A.C. one of the Burgesses of this boroughe with the help of one gentelman of the Midle Temple who Translated one part thereof out of latten into English which was out of my ellement for to doe . . .'
- ² For the charter see *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, 1257-1300, 68.
- ³ *The Great Roll of the Pipe . . . 1155-1158* (ed. Rev. J. Hunter, 1844), 83.
- ⁴ *Pipe Roll* 1183 (Pipe Roll Soc. XXXII), 38.
- ⁵ Ibid. 1178 (P.R.S. XXVII), 99.
- ⁶ Ibid. 1205 (P.R.S. N.S. XIX), 65, 77
- ⁷ See *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon* (Rolls Ser.), ii. 227-9.
- ⁸ See below.
- ⁹ *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum* (Rec. Com.), i. 24.
- ¹⁰ *Pipe R.* 1207 (P.R.S. N.S. XXII), 185; 1214 (P.R.S. N.S. XXXV), 49.
- ¹¹ Public Record Office, E 372/63, 64, 69.
- ¹² *Cal. Chart. R.* 1226-57, 155; *Close Rolls*, 1227-31, 258.
- ¹³ The preamble to Henry III's confirmation of the 1155 charter in 1267 guaranteed to the burgesses full enjoyment of any of the liberties which might have been curtailed 'from the beginning of the disturbance lately stirred up in our kingdom since our Parliament held at Oxford': Berks. R.O., W/IC 1/1, a later copy of the confirmation.
- ¹⁴ Berks R.O., W/THa 3, and other sources, establish the relationship.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Berks R.O., W/JBa II (court held Thursday, the feast of the Purification of B.V.M.)
- ¹⁶ P.R.O., E 372/62-64.
- ¹⁷ British Museum, Harl. MS. 1708, f. 75v.
- ¹⁸ Berks. R.O., W/JBa II (ct. held Thurs. before St. Thomas, & sqq.).
- ¹⁹ B.M., Add. Ch. 19619.
- ²⁰ Berks R.O., W/TLb 1.
- ²¹ Ibid. RTa 1.
- ²² Ibid. FT 1-9.
- ²³ *Victoria County History of Berkshire*, iii. 517.
- ²⁴ Probably the parish of the church of St. Mary-le-More, which stands in the centre of the old market area, rather than St. Mary-the-Less.
- ²⁵ Berks. R.O., W/RTb 25.
- ²⁶ Ibid. RTa 1; TLb 4.
- ²⁷ Ibid. RTb 36; cf. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1364-8, 195.
- ²⁸ Berks. R.O., W/TLb 9, 10; the old gild-hall was replaced between 1548 and 1561 by a new building to the north of the church, on or near the site of the later Town Hall: Bodl. Libr. MS. Top. Berks. c.28 (R), m.9.
- ²⁹ P.R.O., J.I. 1/50, m. 3d.
- ³⁰ *Feet of Fines for Oxfordshire* (Oxford Rec. Soc. XII), 112.
- ³¹ Berks. R.O., W/JBe 8.
- ³² Ibid. THa 53.
- ³³ Ibid. JBa. 2.
- ³⁴ Ibid. FT 1-9.
- ³⁵ P.R.O., J.I. 1/38, m. 19d.
- ³⁶ Ibid. m. 20.
- ³⁷ Ibid. 37, m. 26d.
- ³⁸ Berks. R.O., W/THa 1-53; THb 1-11.
- ³⁹ *Register of Edward the Black Prince*, iv. 173-4.
- ⁴⁰ Berks. R.O., W/THa 19.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. RTb 5.
- ⁴² In the Latin: 'et hoc affidavit in manu Eustachii et in manu aliorum virorum fidedignorum', perhaps denoting an oath sealed by a handclasp.
- ⁴³ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 20.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. THa 28a. Alexander's house was the scene of the murder of Stephen, chaplain of All Saints Church, at some time before 1248, but his connection with the crime, if any, was not stated: P.R.O., J.I. 1/38, m. 40d.
- ⁴⁵ P.R.O., J.I. 1/43, m. 17.
- ⁴⁶ Berks. R.O., W/FR 2.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. JBa 24 (after St. Barnabas).
- ⁴⁸ Ibid 2 (before St. Michael).
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. FC 17.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. JBa 19 (St. Augustine).
- ⁵¹ *Medieval Archives of Christ Church* (Oxford Hist. Soc. XCII), p. 155.

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- ⁵² Berks. R.O., W/JBa 9 (eve of St. Leonard).
- ⁵³ Ibid. JBe 2.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. JBa 9 (morrow of St. Katherine).
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. FT 1-6.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. RTb 11; FT 7-9.
- ⁵⁷ *Med. Arch. Christ Ch.* p. 152; Berks R.O., W/THa 20.
- ⁵⁸ Berks. R. O., W/FT 1-6.
- ⁵⁹ P.R.O., J.I. 1/38, m. 20.
- ⁶⁰ Berks. R.O., W/FT 7-9.
- ⁶¹ Ibid. JBa 35 (before SS. Philip and James).
- ⁶² Ibid. 5.
- ⁶³ Ibid. 6. (before St. Peter's Chains).
- ⁶⁴ Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, became lord of the borough in that year on the death of his father, Richard, Earl of Cornwall, who had been elected King of the Germans in 1257.
- ⁶⁵ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 19 (St. Augustine).
- ⁶⁶ An action brought against the taker of distress who will not accept pledges or other security in place of the distrained goods: cf. Berks. R.O., W/JBa 32 (after Conception of B.V.M.).
- ⁶⁷ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 4 (before Annunciation of B.V.M.).
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. 17 (after St. Scholastica).
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. 18 (after St. Peter's Chair); 17 (after St. Edmund, & sqq.).
- ⁷⁰ Ibid. FTt 1; *Close R.*, 1234-7, 215.
- ⁷¹ Berks. R.O., W/FT 8.
- ⁷² *Chronica Johannis de Oxenides* (Rolls Ser.), 320-1.
- ⁷³ *Close R.* 1237-42, 248.
- ⁷⁴ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 25 (after Translation of St. Thomas), when the 'twenty-four chief burgesses of Wallingford' made an order concerning Wallingford bridge.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. RTb 1-21; THa 3-20.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid. JBa 3.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid. 39 (St. Martin, and small attached membrane).
- ⁷⁸ Ibid. 7 (After St. Luke).
- ⁷⁹ Ibid. 39 (after Nativity of St. John the Baptist.)
- ⁸⁰ Ibid. FC 8.
- ⁸¹ Ibid. FT 4.
- ⁸² Cf. *Close R.* 1234-7, 146.
- ⁸³ *V.C.H. Herts.* ii. 166.
- ⁸⁴ Henry III's second visit to Wallingford in the term of the account was in April, 1235; he made three or four visits each year in the 1230's, staying with his brother at the castle; see Itinerary of Henry III (TS. at P.R.O.).
- ⁸⁵ Cf. Berks. R.O., W/FT 1; FC 4.
- ⁸⁶ Cf. Ibid. FC 2 (list of butchers).
- ⁸⁷ *Med. Arch. Christ Ch.*, p. 150; cf. Berks. R.O., W/JBa 15.
- ⁸⁸ Berks. R.O., W/THc 1.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid. JBa 18 (after St. Gregory).
- ⁹⁰ Ibid. THa 7, 12; RTb 33.
- ⁹¹ *Curia Regis Rolls*, ix, p. 186.
- ⁹² Berks. R.O., W/FT 2; see below.
- ⁹³ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 16 (after St. Vincent; after Purification B.V.M.). The west gate of the town may have been a traditional place for settling disputes, if not peacefully, by blows; at a court c. 1231 one burgess was said to have threatened another 'that if he had him at Westgate he would beat him': JBa 5 (after St. Peter).
- ⁹⁴ *Cal. Close.* 1272-9, 11; see below.
- ⁹⁵ Berks. R.O., W/TCa 1-3; TLb 1.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid. JBa 18 (after St. Peter's Chair).
- ⁹⁷ Ibid. (after St. Gregory).
- ⁹⁸ Ibid. 22 (St. Valentine).
- ⁹⁹ Ibid. 42 (after Nativity of St. John the Baptist).
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 7 (after All Saints, & sqq.).
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid. 14 (after St. Matthias).
- ¹⁰² Ibid. 17 (after St. Matthias).
- ¹⁰³ Ibid. 18 (after St. John at the Latin Gate).
- ¹⁰⁴ e.g. *Close R.* 1242-7, 395; *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1247-58, 46.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Close R.* 1237-42, 393. The Jews from Berkhamstead increased an already existing community; several Jews were recorded in the town earlier in the 13th century, notably one Diei who was lending money there in 1238: Berks. R.O., W/JBa 9 (morrow of St. Mathias), cf. *Calendar of Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews* (ed. Rigg & Jenkinson), i. 73. The Jewish quarter (*Judaismus*) of the town was mentioned in 1261: P.R.O., J.I. 1/40, m. 30.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Close R.* 1247-51, 235; Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* (Rolls Ser.), v. 114-15.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Close R.* 1247-51, 363.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 299, 323, 389, 418.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Cal. Pat.* 1247-58, 393, 396.
- ¹¹⁰ *Close R.* 1254-6, 170-2.
- ¹¹¹ P.R.O., J.I. 1/37, m.36; 38, m. 40d; 40, m.30.
- ¹¹² *Cur. Reg. R.* i, p. 468; *Pipe R.* 1202 (P.R.S. N.S. XV), 11, & intro. xxii-xxiii.
- ¹¹³ Berks. R.O., W/FT 2, 3.
- ¹¹⁴ *Rot. Litt. Claus.* i. 568; ii. 122.
- ¹¹⁵ *Close R.* 1227-31, 192.
- ¹¹⁶ See above.
- ¹¹⁷ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 4 (before Nativity of B.V.M.).
- ¹¹⁸ *Cal. Chart. R.* 1257-1300, 68. The charter gave the borough economic hegemony over Crowmarsh by providing that all who traded in the village must belong to the Wallingford gild, and in the 13th century the Crowmarsh tradesmen were listed in a separate section of the rolls of *pactionarii*: Berks. R.O., W/FC 2-13.
- ¹¹⁹ *Rot. Litt. Claus.* i. 175.
- ¹²⁰ *Cur. Reg. R.* xiii. pp. 251-2; *Bracton's Note Book* (ed. F. W. Maitland, 1887), ii. 686-7.
- ¹²¹ Berks. R.O., W/FTt 1.
- ¹²² The parish churches recorded in the 13th century were the three surviving ones—St. Mary-le-More, St. Leonard, and St. Peter-in-the-East—and All

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Saints, Holy Trinity, St. Lucian, St. Martin, St. Mary-the-Less, St. Michael, St. Rumbald, and St. John-on-Thames, completing the total of the eleven parish churches that the burgesses claimed in 1439 had once existed in the town: *Cal. Pat.* 1436-41, 317.

¹²³ P.R.O., J.I. 1/37, m. 36.

¹²⁴ These men were foreigners to the borough; if a burgess was taken with the stolen goods he escaped hanging but suffered blinding and castration: P.R.O., J.I. 1/40, m. 30.

¹²⁵ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 5 (after St. Peter; before Exaltation of the Holy Cross).

¹²⁶ Ibid. 13 (before Nativity of B.V.M.).

¹²⁷ Ibid. TCa 1.

¹²⁸ *Chron. Joh. de Oxenedes*, 320-1.

¹²⁹ Berks. R. O., W/JBa 11 (St. Mark).

¹³⁰ Ibid. RTb 25; JBa 20.

¹³¹ Ibid. JBa 19 (St. Augustine).

¹³² Ibid. 26 (after St. Valentine).

¹³³ Ibid. (before Pentecost).

¹³⁴ Ibid. 19 (after Hockday); see above.

¹³⁵ *Med. Arch. Christ Ch.*, p. 155.

¹³⁶ Berks. R.O., W/JBa 39 (after SS. Tiburtius & Valerianus).

¹³⁷ Ibid. 19 (— St. Giles).

¹³⁸ P.R.O., J.I. 1/42, m. 12d.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 43, m. 17.