New evidence for dating the letter from Edmund Tilney to Sir William More

When the present author transcribed the letter from Edmund Tilney to Sir William More, dated 25 January, for the Society in 1977 it was dated not to the late 1590s as in the author’s dissertation, but to 1595, in the conviction that it had to do with the assessments for the collection of the Lay Subsidy of 1594 when Tilney and Sir Thomas Vincent were appointed commissioners in Surrey. In 1986, R J Fehrenbach published an article in which he argued that the original dating was more accurate. He pointed out that the letter must have been written later than 1595 because Matthew Brown, knighted by Charles Howard, Lord Admiral, in the Cadiz expedition in June 1596, is referred to as ‘Sir’. He argues that the background of the letter must be the assessments for the Lay Subsidy of 1597, not 1594, and that it must be dated to 1599 or 1600.

As Fehrenbach points out, more convincing evidence for dating was lacking at the time because the letters appointing the commissioners for collecting the subsidy of 1597 could ‘not be found in the Public Record Office’. However, recently, some miscellaneous documents associated with the Elizabethan subsidies have been catalogued at The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office), and it has been possible to locate two books which name the commissioners for two of the three collections for the 1597 subsidy. The first book lists Tilney and Vincent among the commissioners. The second book lists Vincent but not Tilney among the commissioners.

This new documentary evidence supports Fehrenbach’s case. The tensions between Tilney and Vincent mentioned in the letter must have occurred during the summer of 1598 or 1599. The former summer is preferable because it makes sense of the reference to ‘mr. Slyfield’ who had complained about Vincent to the Lord Admiral. Henry Slyfield of Great Bookham died between 2 October and 6 November 1598. Tilney’s letter, then, can be dated 25 January 1599. The reference to the ‘last Lord Chamberlayn’, as Fehrenbach argues, must be to Sir William Brooke, Lord Cobham, who served as Lord Chamberlain between August 1596 and his death on 6 March 1597, but there is no conclusive evidence to support his suggestion that the friction between Tilney and Cobham had to do with Shakespeare’s use of the name ‘Oldcastle’ for the character he renamed Falstaff in Henry IV, pt 1.

1 Streitberger 1977.
2 Fehrenbach 1986.
4 On 16 December 1597 Parliament granted (among other taxes) three subsidies, payable in three equal annual instalments. Assessments were to be made by 1 October annually (1598–1600); certification was to be at the Exchequer by 1 November (1598–1600) and payment was due by 12 February (1599–1601). See Jurkowski et al [nd], 168–9.
5 Fehrenbach 1986, 89.
6 TNA: E 179/282/40, the book for 25 October 40 Elizabeth [1598], f 24r. The book for 41 Elizabeth [1599] is not included in this box of documents.
7 TNA: E 179/282/41, the book for 30 October 42 Elizabeth [1600], f 24r.
8 Streitberger 1977, 228, 231, reproduction of the letter, line 5.
9 TNA: PROB 11/92, will dated 7 August 1598 with a codicil dated 2 October 1598 and proved 6 November 1598. See also VCH. 3, 329.
10 Streitberger 1977, 228, 231, reproduction of the letter, line 17.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manuscript sources
TNA: The National Archives, Kew
  E 179 Exchequer: Records of the King’s Remembrancer
  PROB 11 Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills and Letters of Administration

Published sources
Fehrenbach, R J 1986  When Lord Cobham and Edmund Tilney “were att odds”: Oldcastle, Falstaff, and the
date of I Henry IV, Shakespeare Stud, 18, 87–100
Hasler, P W, 1981  The House of Commons, 1558–1603, 3 vols, Southampton: HMSO
Jurkowski, M, Smith, C L, & Crook, D, [nd]  Lay taxes in England and Wales, 1188–1688, Public Record Office