

III: The Handfords of Macclesfield Hundred

A Cheshire Family and Military Service in France and Normandy in the Fifteenth Century

by Christopher Allmand*

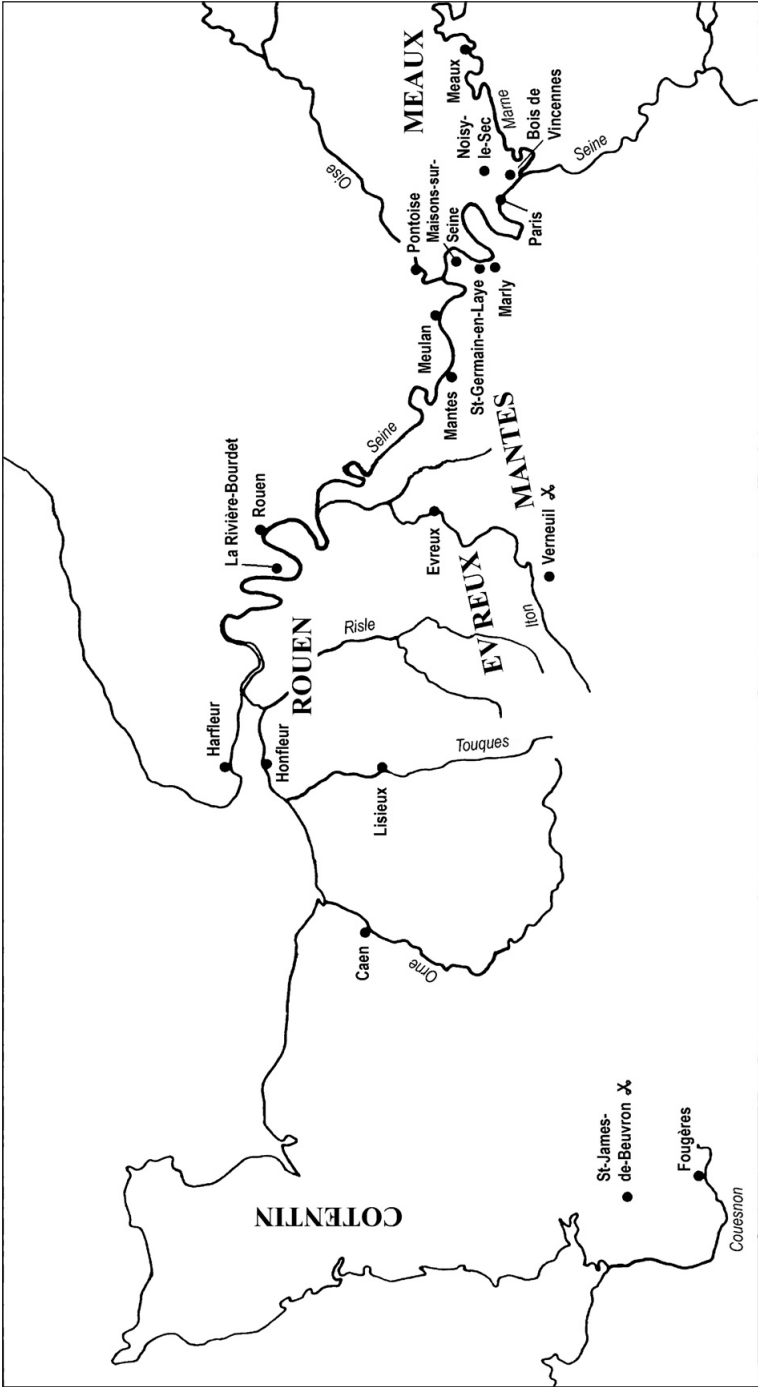
This article follows the career of Sir John Handford, from the hundred of Macclesfield, who, with members of his family, served in France under Henry V and Henry VI. It shows him involved in both military and civil capacities, winning the trust of successive royal lieutenants in France and Normandy and sometimes obliged to defend at law the material rewards of that service. As the evidence shows, it was possible for a man to pursue an active military career, helping to extend and then defend the English occupation of Normandy while, through visits home, maintaining fairly regular contact with his native county and its affairs. In spite of an absence of some thirty years, Cheshire was probably never far from Handford's mind as, with years of service and ever-growing experience to offer the crown, he became a linchpin of English rule across the Channel.

Aspects of the Cheshire background

Cheshire was a county which, in the late thirteenth century, was already sending considerable numbers of archers to serve in the armies of Edward I, service destined to become even more prominent in the era of the Black Prince's victories in the mid-fourteenth century. Scholars have also underlined the significance of the part played by the county's gentry during the conflict with France. Some of these men, such as Sir Robert Knolles, appear by name in the chronicles. Traces of others are found in surviving archive material; while in the case of one of them, Sir Hugh Calveley, we are able to admire the fine effigy in the church of Bunbury, which reflects the profits which he derived from his life as a professional soldier.¹

England's long involvement in war in France cemented the relationship between the crown and the palatinate, above all in the way in which Cheshire provided manpower for royal armies and, in return, saw some of its gentry advance in the royal service, thus earning themselves 'standing' within the community from which they had emerged. In Cheshire, perhaps more than in most other parts of England, military service in royal armies was one of the best ways of achieving social recognition and advancement. (*See Bennett 1983, chapter 9*)

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III III.1 Map of northern France showing places mentioned in the text. The names of *bailliages* are shown in capitals.

Yet the lure of serving the crown for a wage does not, of itself, fully explain the draw of military service abroad. Other factors encouraged men to play an active role in the king's wars in France. Among these, economic conditions within the county held pride of place. Historians have not been unanimous in their views of the state of the economy of late medieval Cheshire, some having been inclined to paint a gloomier picture of it than others. However, there appears to be little doubt that, by 1370 or so, the evidence of lasting economic deterioration had become all too clear, with cultivation in decline and much land going to grass for lack of ploughing. Factors such as these encouraged men from a county not over-endowed with agricultural resources (too much woodland, too little arable, with little employment offered by livestock farming) to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Michael Bennett (1983, *passim*) has shown how this encouraged men from the neighbouring county of Lancashire, too, to move to other parts of the country in search of fortune and advancement. The result was that by the end of the fourteenth century Cheshire, a county of relatively limited opportunities for the socially or financially ambitious, was punching well above its weight in terms of the number of its men who entered into the service of the crown, such as those who formed Richard II's notorious Cheshire archers.

Men with Cheshire names such as Acton, Helsby, Marbury, Mobberley and Peover, were prominent among those serving the Black Prince in south-western France in the mid-fourteenth century. The example of John Jodrell is particularly instructive. At the battle of Poitiers (1356), perhaps as his share of the booty, he picked up a silver salt cellar which the Black Prince purchased from him for £8, the equivalent of almost a year's wages for the archer that Jodrell was. Some twenty years later we meet John Jodrell again, this time referring to himself as 'Jean Joudrell de Peytowe' (Poitou), which suggests that he considered himself to be settled in France. It is hardly insignificant to note that on this occasion he was seeking compensation for the loss of goods, houses, horses and rents incurred in the war, which left him unable to pay the sum owed to a Frenchman who had recently taken him prisoner. Here is evidence which suggests that he was a man who had risen above the relatively modest status which would probably have been his had he remained at home (Morgan 1987, 158).

John Jodrell was only one of those who served the Black Prince in Gascony. Another was Roger de Hondford, who was rewarded by the prince for his services, particularly at the battle of Poitiers (Earwaker 1877–80, 1, 238). A generation or two later, in 1398, the records reveal a John de Honford, esquire, as a man-at-arms in Richard II's bodyguard, the same being present in the Cheshire retinue serving Henry IV in Scotland in July 1400 (Morgan 1987, 209, citing TNA, E 101/42/29, m 1). This was a family which took its name from Handforth (today a suburb of Manchester), situated in the hundred of Macclesfield and the parish of Cheadle, and which, by the end of the fourteenth century, had developed a certain tradition of military service to the crown.

Sir John Handford's early career

Today's visitor to the parish church of Cheadle can see there a tomb chest with alabaster monument which, although it bears no name or inscription, is regarded as being the resting place of Sir John Handford (Bostock 2001). His father was the 'John de Honford' just referred to. We have a number of autographs of the 1430s and 1440s which show that Sir

John consistently wrote 'de Handford' or simply 'Handford', while his seal refers to him, in the Latin form, as 'Handforde'. So much is revealed by French sources. Local English sources, on the other hand, very often use the form 'Honford' for both John and other members of the family.

Born probably in 1391/92, he was, it is believed, the eldest of five children, although a brother, Richard, whom we shall encounter later, is not listed as such in Earwaker's work on east Cheshire. In June 1402 he entered into lands held by his father, who had died in 1400 (TNA, SC 2/255/5, m 5d. For the little known of his family origins, see Earwaker 1877–80, 1, 239–40). The lands in question were in the area of Macclesfield, and Sir John would always retain strong links with the eastern part of the county. Of his early years we know virtually nothing. Information about his marriage is scanty: all we learn is that his wife gave him three sons, the eldest of whom, yet another John, would marry Margery, daughter of Sir Lawrence Warren of Poynton; he died in 1473 (Bostock 2001, 21; *DKR* 37, 346). Early evidence reveals that in December 1412, along with William de Handford (a future bailiff of Macclesfield and perhaps a brother), he gave recognizances at the Chester exchequer, something which he repeated in April 1414 (TNA, CHES 2/85, m 1d; 2/87, m 5).

Further evidence presents us with a problem. In 1415, John Handford, along with seven men recruited by him, was one of those due to take part in Henry V's first expedition to France (TNA, SC 6/776/5; *ex inf* Dr Neil Jamieson). Did he cross the sea? Probably not. In October he, named as John de Honford de Honford, and a number of others were indicted before a court, presided over by Gilbert, Lord Talbot, the Justiciar of Chester, accused of desertion. All from Cheshire, they included John de Benson, one of those whom Handford had recruited. Accused of taking the king's wage for the royal venture into France under false pretences (*in deceptionem ipsius domini regis*), it appears likely that they got as far as Portsmouth, from where, it would seem, they returned to Cheshire, where they were seen on 26 August (TNA, CHES 25/11, m 5d; *ex inf* Michael Bennett). Was this an early sign of reluctance on the part of some in the county to contribute (in this case through military service) to Henry V's ambitions in France, a reluctance which would, within months, lead to a 'tax revolt' against the royal project (Bennett 2013, 171–86)? Whatever it was (a blot on his record, perhaps) it does not appear to have harmed Handford's relations with the crown or with his fellow gentry. Nor did it prevent him being one of six men, two of them knights, chosen to act as collectors of the Mise (or subsidy) in the hundred of Macclesfield in April 1416 (TNA, CHES 2/89, m 6; *DKR* 37, 637). None the less, an impression of him at this stage as neither entirely reliable nor consistently law-abiding (some might say just like many others in the county at this period) may not be entirely wide of the mark. His 'belligerent character' (Bostock 2001, 20) may have made him the subject of several recognizances to keep the peace in his native county (*see*, for example, *DKR* 37, 344, 345). Ormerod remarked on his brushes with the law (1875–82, 3, 638), while litigation of one kind or another proved to be a fairly ongoing activity during much of his career in both England and France. At the same time, such activity is evidence of his willingness to play the part in the public life of Cheshire society expected of a man of his social background.

Details of Handford's early career in France are likewise in short supply. He appears as a mounted man-at-arms in the retinue led by Sir John Blount on Henry V's second venture into France in 1417 (TNA, E 101/51/2; *ex inf* Anne Curry). He seems to have been there in 1419, when he was said to have been serving as an esquire of honour to Thomas, Duke of Clarence, the eldest of Henry V's three brothers and at that time heir-presumptive to the throne (*Archives du Prince de Montholon-d'Umbriano*, 15–16; AN, Coll Lenoir 45, fols 331–2). Handford will have been aware of the importance which patronage could play in a man's advancement. At the same time, such patronage may be seen as evidence of the potential which his patron saw in Handford, already nearly thirty years old. It was part of Henry V's policy to reward those in royal service with grants of estates, whose nominal value depended on the status of the recipient, confiscated from those French who had preferred to flee rather than recognise the legality of the English claim to the crown of France. Such gifts of land, part of the enticement with which the English king could encourage his subjects to engage in war in France, normally brought in some revenue, although rather less than in days of peace. But they might also bring with them something else, important to men of non-noble origin: the right to a title. The noble fief of La Rivière-Bourdet, overlooking the Seine some five miles west of Rouen, nominally worth 500 [*livres*] [*tournois*] (or some £83 sterling) a year, along with its title, '*seigneur de la Rivière*', granted to Handford in the spring of 1419, was still proudly claimed by him a generation or so later.²

The link with Clarence indicates that Handford was in direct contact with men of the highest rank and position. It may have been after his patron had been killed at the battle of Baugé in March 1421 that he transferred his loyalty to the next royal brother, John, Duke of Bedford (TNA, C 76/104, m 4; *DKR* 44, 633). The shrewdness of this move, completed by February 1422, would be proved by events. When Henry V died in August 1422, leaving a son, not yet a year old, with a kingdom to be ruled (England), and a claim, already partially achieved through conquest, to another kingdom (France) to be pursued and defended in the coming years, the Duke of Bedford was named regent of the French kingdom for his young nephew. The window of opportunity to those willing to serve under him in France was now open.

John Handford was one of the willing. By March 1423 he was serjeant of the bakery of Bedford's household, a position worth up to 400 *l t* (some £66 sterling) a year (AN, JJ 173/103; Coll Lenoir 13, fol 77). The significance of this position in the regent's household lay in the fact that it clearly implied a certain intimacy with the duke in an age when the household lay at the very centre of any princely administration and the patronage it might offer. There, Handford will have met the military leaders of the time, Sir John Fastolf, the regent's *grand maître d'hôtel*, being one of these. There he saw and was seen, and his abilities and personality could be observed and assessed by the men who had influence and held the reins of authority and power.

The evidence strongly suggests that Handford now began to be loaded with both favour and responsibilities. In March 1423 he was granted estates at Maisons-sur-Seine (today Maisons-Laffitte) which had once belonged to Raoul de Gaucourt, formerly French *bailli* (chief royal administrative and judicial officer) of Rouen (AN, JJ 172/641). In September he was named captain of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and of the neighbouring tower at Montjoie,

both overlooking the river Seine some miles west (and downriver) of Paris (Dupont-Ferrier ed 1942–66, 4, 399). For some time Handford would be in charge of a number of fortified positions dominating the river Seine between Paris and Rouen. The evidence strongly implies that, having won the confidence of the Duke of Bedford, he was becoming an active figure in the higher echelons of the occupying power. The location of the estates and the military commands granted him suggest that he was being given what amounted to responsibility for keeping safe the valley of the Seine, the axis which provided a strategic and economic lifeline, giving access by water from the sea to the Norman capital in Rouen and to the national capital in Paris (see Grondeux 1993).

Further recognition soon followed. In 1424 he received a grant of land in the *bailliage* of Cotentin in western Normandy (Massey 1987, 402; Le Cacheux 1907–8, 1, 154n). It was as a man already knighted (although the date of the knighthood is unknown) that, on 17 August 1424, at the end of a campaign in which he had taken part, Handford participated in the important victory achieved by the English army, led by the Duke of Bedford, over a sizeable French one outside the town of Verneuil, in southern Normandy, a victory which, by relieving much of the duchy from the immediate military pressure of the enemy, opened up the way southwards towards the river Loire. In March 1425 his services to Bedford at this battle, as well as to the late king, Henry V, were recognised with the grant of ‘yerey Revenewe’ for life to the value of 100 *l t* (about £16 sterling) to be taken from the estate of a ‘disobedyente personn’ (one who had forsaken the English obedience) in the *bailliage* of Meaux, east of Paris, the grant referring to the good work which Handford was doing ‘daylye and we hope will doe in tyme to come’ (Earwaker 1877–80, 1, 240). Thus he now had interests both east and west of the capital. Handford’s ties with Paris were also strengthened by the grant of a fine house in the Rue des Bourdonnois for services to the regent in 1424 (AN, JJ 172/441. See also Thompson 1991, 135 and the plan on 141) and by his appointment as captain of Bois de Vincennes from 1425 to 1428. This fortress, developed mainly in the second half of the fourteenth century not far from the Seine to the east of Paris, was not only an important royal residence (Henry V had died there on 31 August, 1422) but, with St-Germain-en-Laye to the west of the city, constituted one of the two main pillars of the capital’s defences, both now under Handford’s command (Thompson 1991, 97). By 1428 he would be the recipient of yet further grants in the *bailliages* of Chartres, Meaux, Sens and Troyes, the *comté* of Joigny and the *prévôté* of Poissy (Massey 1987, 115, 402; Le Cacheux 1907–8, 2, 327–8, 338).

Late in 1428, with the military problems at Orléans, soon to be visited by Joan of Arc, increasing by the day, Handford could be found reviewing the troops of leading English captains, with orders to report on their numbers and, not least, on their quality, thus providing the regent with accurate information on the true state of the army (‘*pour rapporter au certain la vraie vérité de la puissance qui y est*’: BnF, Ms fr 26051/996) so that realistic decisions about its readiness to resist the enemy might be taken. Clearly, this was a task given to Handford as a man of growing experience whose judgement in such matters could be trusted. It may have been a mark of the rising esteem in which the Duke of Bedford now held him that he presented Handford with a gift to mark his son’s christening (BnF, Ms fr 26077/5870; *ex inf* Dr Jenny Stratford).

The major setback suffered by the English army at the hands of the French in 1429, inspired by Joan of Arc, does not appear to have had an adverse effect upon Handford's career in France. On the contrary, the urgent need to defend key points became all-important. One such was Mantes, a fortified staging point with a bridge over the river Seine between Paris and Rouen, which, if taken by the French, would have enabled them to disrupt, even to cut, the fluvial link between the two cities and thus to severely undermine, if not to destroy, the effectiveness of government in the English-occupied lands. The command at Mantes required a person with experience. By late 1429 Handford, earmarked for promotion and advancement, had been appointed *bailli*, in charge of thirty-four men. Before long he would also be appointed captain of the town. The roles which he exercised in Mantes were thus of two kinds. As *bailli*, an office he held until 1435, he was in charge of both administration and justice within the *bailliage*, or bailiwick, while as captain, now with some eighty or more armed men under him, his responsibilities were clearly of a more military nature, the maintenance of sufficient forces to defend the town and its bridge against possible French incursions on or across the river (Curry 2000, 183). From Mantes he could also quickly take himself to either Paris or Rouen should the need arise. Already in March 1427 he had been brought in with twenty English archers to reinforce those guarding Paris while senior members of the administration were away (Thompson 1991, 97).

Thus in the early 1430s Handford's growing experience was being used to good effect in a number of capacities, civil and military, in places in or close to the Seine valley. In addition to being in charge of Mantes, in 1433 he was living in Rouen (at the '*ostel ou pend l'ensaigne de la cuillier à pot*' within the parish of St Pierre-le Portier: Massey 1987, 207), acting as captain of the bridge and the castle of the Norman capital — positions which, by effectively placing him in charge of the defence of the city rapidly becoming the centre of English rule in France, emphasised the confidence in which he was held by the regent.

Did commitment to the defence of the English interest in Normandy mean that a man's links with his native country, still more with his native county, were likely to be irretrievably diminished? One such as John Jodrell, who had gone to France as an archer, might choose to remain in Poitou, begin a new life there and never return to his roots. Sir John Handford, however, came from a different social background. As a knight, he was one of Cheshire's elite, with links to preserve and social responsibilities to honour. Unlike Jodrell and his kind, Handford maintained contact with his native heaths. In January 1427 he was recorded as being in England, but 'about to depart for France', although he may have still been in England in July (*DKR* 37, 344, 228). On 21 December 1430 he was one of those commissioned to arrest William Venables, charged with threatening behaviour. A few months later, on 24 July 1431, he was involved in proceedings concerning the theft of his cattle some two years earlier (*DKR* 37, 276; TNA, CHES 25/12, m 23d). Six months later, on 7 January 1432, he was recorded as having been one of those who appeared before Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, the King's Justice in Chester, to attend an inquisition regarding a breach of the peace which had occurred some five years earlier in Macclesfield and which had involved, among others, one William de Handford (TNA, CHES 25/12, m 24. See also *DKR* 37, 345)

The French lawsuits

At this point we may leave examination of Handford's military career to consider another aspect of his life in France. A note to the effect that he was away for six days in April 1434 on a visit to one of his receivers reminds us that war was not a constant activity, while also emphasising the importance which Handford attributed to the revenues provided by the lands he now owned in France (BnF, Ms fr 25771/829). The grants made to him reflected the trust of the administration in the recipient; they were recognition of his service to the crown and an inducement to further service; they brought prestige and evidence of social promotion; and, last but not least, they might be sources of revenue for the fortunate recipient.

However, in the litigious society of a world turned upside down by war, such grants could also bring difficulties which might lead to challenges in the courts. Late in November 1424 Handford, then captain of St-Germain-en-Laye, was called before the *Parlement* of Paris — the country's highest tribunal, which normally heard appeals from the lower courts but sometimes considered cases in first instance — to answer a demand from Jean de Gaucourt, a member of the higher clergy, for the restitution of the estates at Maisons-sur-Seine confiscated from his cousin, Raoul de Gaucourt, which had been granted to Handford by Henry VI (Allmand 1983, 135–7; Allmand & Armstrong eds 1982, 44–74). The arguments put to the court were complex and, generally, need not concern us here. What must be noticed, however, and what made this case unique, was the way it quickly led to an argument between the parties as to which court had the authority to hear it, a dispute with not only legal but significant political implications. For Gaucourt it was argued that since Henry V, in agreeing to the terms of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, had undertaken to respect the rights of existing French institutions, the authority of the *Parlement* could not be ignored. Handford's counsel took a different view, claiming that the same king had ordered that all disputes arising out of grants of confiscated lands made by the English should be heard not in Paris but before the royal council, sitting in Rouen.

It is clear that the suit had implications going far beyond the value of the rents and other revenues which may originally have prompted the litigation. It was one aspect of a rivalry, involving a number of different aspects of life, which engaged the two 'capitals', Paris and Rouen, during these years. At one level, for instance, the suit matched a protégé of the regent, the Duke of Bedford, against the might of the highest court in the land; at another, since it constituted a challenge, from Paris, to the jurisdiction over certain issues of land ownership claimed by the English to be within the authority of a court in Rouen, it pitted the pretensions of 'English' Rouen against those of 'French' Paris. Caught between conflicting claims to jurisdiction, and facing a long and expensive procedure, Handford was forced to compromise for the sake of arriving at a settlement and limiting further costs (*'pour bien de paix et eschever tous proces, frais, missions et despens'*: Allmand & Armstrong eds 1982, 73), although, through his lawyer, he agreed to pay certain sums from the estates concerned, both in future as well as in arrears. The proceedings underlined the difficulties which English settlers, hoping to benefit financially from the war, could experience at the hands of both the courts and those who chose to bring suits against them; something, too, of the legal turmoil, in this case amounting to a crisis of almost 'constitutional' significance, which an unsuspecting English knight might have to face in defence of rights and revenues granted to him by the English crown in years of conquest and success. The suit

continued on and off for eight years, until 1432. That it took so long was not unusual; proceedings involving soldiers active in war could go on for years, as other suits demonstrated. In this case it was complicated by the fact that others tried to jump on board this particular legal bandwagon: a religious community brought a secondary suit first against Gaucourt, then against Handford, while later still the chapter of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, hoping to secure rent charges from Maisons, also joined in.

Handford was involved in three other suits heard before the *Parlement* at this time. Their subject matter is interesting. One, brought by the inhabitants of Noisy-le-Sec, a small settlement north-east of Paris, regarding their responsibilities for providing guard and watch at Vincennes (of which, we recall, Handford was captain), began in 1426, but never really developed. Another, brought against Handford by a royal notary who claimed exemptions from tolls which the English knight demanded he should pay at the *travers*, or ferry, across the river at Maisons-sur-Seine, went rather further, but led to no known outcome. A third concerned an unsuccessful appeal brought by Handford from the court of the marshal, a military tribunal (Allmand & Armstrong eds 1982, 282, 286). Consideration of the evidence which these cases offer adds a little to our view of both Handford himself and the world in which he lived. As an English interloper, he was accused of asserting his rights too aggressively, of being unwilling to recognise the privileges and customs of native Frenchmen, contrary to what Henry V had undertaken in the Treaty of Troyes of 1420. In the case brought against him by the people of Noisy, he found himself up against a community opposed to the demands, made by a foreign captain, for military service to satisfy the requirements of local defence. The dispute at Maisons may indicate that a measure of security had been achieved on the river, encouraging the parties to go to law over ownership of a revenue-producing ferry. An image of Handford as a possibly rather overbearing individual, determined to exercise both military authority and the economic benefits of lordship, emerges from this legal evidence. The picture may have been common enough in ‘occupied’ France at this time.

Other Handfords in France

Any consideration of the role played by members of the Handford family must take account of what we know of that played by Sir John’s brother, Richard *l’aisné*, and his nephew, Richard *le jeune*. Our knowledge of the activities Richard *l’aisné* in France is limited but not without interest. In December 1424 he appeared for the first time before the *Parlement* as the defendant in a suit which, like the one involving his older brother, arose out of a challenge, filed on behalf of two minors, to a grant of land to the annual value of 300 *l t* (£50 sterling) made to Richard Handford by Henry V after the fall of Meaux in the early summer of 1422, a date which gives us an approximate *terminus a quo* for his involvement in the war. The record of the proceedings reveals that this Handford was already sufficiently in favour with the English king to be rewarded with confiscated lands in France. Then came the challenge, first heard before the *Parlement* of Paris in December 1424, Richard Handford being cited to appear in person to provide an undertaking, or recognizance, not to harm the complainant.

By the spring of 1428, when the case reappears on the record, a good deal had happened. The dispute had been before other tribunals, and Richard Handford was accused of making

use of legal procedures to ensure delays. Already rewarded by Henry V, he was now described as an *escuier*, a brother of the captain of Vincennes (*'bon escuier et est frere du capitaine du Bois de Vincennes'*), a blatant attempt to earn himself respectability and trustworthiness by association. To underline his loyalty and commitment he stated that he had fought in the battle at Verneuil in August 1424 and had also been present at the defeat of a Breton force at Saint-James-de-Beuvron in March 1426. At some time, probably before 1425, he had been taken prisoner by the enemy. In short, this was the impeccable record of a man who had assumed an active role in the war against France. The final outcome of the suit (not very favourable to Handford) was not declared until 1434 and emphasises yet again the great difficulties experienced by the courts in doing justice in time of war, confusion and delays, not to speak of claims and counter-claims (Allmand & Armstrong eds 1982, 75–85, 296–7).

From other sources we learn that, by the time this case was concluded, Richard Handford was serving in garrisons chiefly along, or nor far from, the Seine valley. For some years after 1432 he is recorded as a man-at-arms at Mantes, at Lisieux, where he acted as lieutenant for the captain of the city, and most frequently at Rouen, where, under the command of Sir John Handford, soldiers guarded the city's castle, walls and gates, as well as the bridge over the Seine. Richard Handford also saw service at Caen, where his experience was recognised with his appointment as marshal of the garrison in 1439 and 1440. Within the next two years he took part in trying to contain the French at Harfleur, leading a company of forty men against them in 1440, and then at Honfleur and Evreux. By 1441/2 he was acting as constable of the garrison at Rouen. The varied pattern of his service reflects the French offensive of these years and the need for soldiers to be moved around from one garrison to another as the military requirements and availability of troops dictated, serving under different captains in different locations. Such positions were significant in the general advancement of a man who, while not of the rank of his elder brother, was clearly making something of a military career out of the English occupation (BnF, Ms fr 25770/739, 25774/1275 (Mantes). BnF, Ms fr 25773/111; Nouv acq fr 8602/24 (Lisieux). BnF, Ms fr 25771/790, 829; BL, Add Ch 11818; BnF, Ms fr 25776/1566 (Rouen). BnF, Ms Clairambault 220/17, 19; Ms fr 22468/52; Dupont-Ferrier ed 1942–66, 5, 231 (Caen). BnF, Ms Clairambault 220/27, 28 (Harfleur). BnF, Ms fr 25774/1318; Arch Seine-Maritime, 100J 32/19 (Honfleur). BnF, Ms fr 25773/1113, 25775/1397; P O 1473/18; AN, Coll Lenoir 4, fol 323 (Evreux)).

Such, in brief, are the known facts of Richard Handford's career in France. In a handful of documents, dated 1433 and 1434, he is referred to as *'l'aisné'*, 'the elder', to distinguish him from the man of the same name referred to as *'le jeune'*, or 'the younger'. In two instances both men, in all likelihood father and son, appear in the same documents as Sir John Handford, under whom they were serving in Rouen, as if emphasising their presence as part of a joint family enterprise (BnF, Ms fr 25770/751; 25771/790). At first an ordinary man-at-arms, by 1435 Richard 'the younger', now termed *'escuier'*, had advanced to the position of mounted man-at-arms, with special responsibilities at the gate of St- Hillaire (BL, Add Ch 11818).

Two further family members should be mentioned. William Handford appears as an archer serving at the garrison of the Bastille in Paris in January 1431 and as a man-at-arms by the end of that year (TNA, E 101/53/1; BL, Add Ch 11739; AN, K 63/13/25). From the dying days of the English occupation in the autumn of 1449 there survives the authority to pay one Robert Handford, 'squyer', retained by indenture in the king's service to fight in the wars in France and Normandy, the wages of one quarter due to him, nineteen men-at-arms and 100 archers (a ratio of five archers to one man-at-arms). Sir John Handford had a son called Robert, whose will he would witness a few years later. The likelihood that the two Roberts were one and the same appears highly likely (*DKR* 37, 345; TNA, E 404/66/19; Devon ed 1837, 465).

Sir John Handford's later years in Normandy and Cheshire

In September, 1435 Sir John Handford's patron, the Regent Bedford, back from England, died in Rouen, a significant loss of leadership which would be followed by the capture of Paris by the French in April 1436. The process of reconquest by the enemy, which would take some fourteen years to complete, had begun. With Paris lost, Rouen, now the centre of Lancastrian power in northern France, became the command post for a succession of royal lieutenants: Richard, Duke of York; Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick; John, Lord Talbot; John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset; and, finally, Edmund Beaufort, Earl of Dorset, later Duke of Somerset.

The French reconquest, slow-moving as it was, did not prevent Handford from returning to Cheshire. In March 1436 he was one of those summoned to attend the king's council in Chester regarding the grant of a subsidy of which, two months later, he was appointed one of the collectors in Macclesfield. Evidence strongly suggests that he was again in England between September 1439 and November 1440, including an attendance at the county court on 5 April 1440 (*DKR* 37, 671, 484, 345; TNA, CHES 25/12, m 39). In August 1441 he is described as being in charge of the garrison of Rouen (*'chief des gens de la garnison de la ville de Rouen'*), leading a contingent from the city to serve under Talbot at the siege of Pontoise, along with the Duke of York's army recently arrived from England (BnF, P O 1473/14). Some weeks later Handford may have been in London, when he sealed a life indenture with Humfrey, Earl of Stafford (one of a number which the earl entered into with men from Cheshire at about this time), committing him, in return for an annual fee of £10, to serve the earl, whenever summoned, in time of both peace and war, with the number of men specified at the time.³ Should we see this as part of a decision gradually to loosen the ties which had linked him to service of the crown for the past two decades? Affairs in Cheshire seem to have occupied him more and more from about this time onwards. In January and February 1442 he was again in Chester (*DKR* 37, 38), attending the county court, a key institution of local government, as it sought to police a less than law-abiding society, and being a sworn member of a grand jury there. Here he was, back in his native county, playing out some of the roles which his social position demanded of him, such as witnessing deeds and acting as commissioner for the collection of the Mise in Macclesfield hundred in June 1442 (Chester, CRO, DCH/H/33, 34 (I owe these references to Dr Dorothy Clayton); TNA, CHES 2/115, mm 3, 3d, 7; *DKR* 37, 485; Clayton 1990, 198). Handford was probably still in Cheshire in late October 1442; he was to be seen there in April, October and December 1443 (*DKR* 37, 121; TNA, CHES 31/31/21 Hen VI/1, 2 and 5) and

again in April 1444, when he and Thomas Beeston, probably a son-in-law, were the subject of a recognizance to accept arbitration in a dispute between himself and Beeston on the one hand, and Katherine and Ralph Stanley on the other (TNA, CHES 2/117, m 4; *DKR* 37, 345). On 15 June 1444 Handford was one of those empowered to act as justice of the eyre in Macclesfield hundred (*DKR* 37, 485), and he was probably still in Cheshire later that year when, on a number of occasions between June and December, he was recorded as having acted as a final concord panellist (TNA, CHES 31/31/22 Hen VI/1, 4 and 6; CHES 31/32/23 Hen VI/ 1 and 2).

Sir John Handford as a prisoner of war

It was at this time, May 1444, that a truce was sealed with the French at Tours. There was now to be a pause in military activity in France, of which Handford may have taken advantage to further closer ties with Cheshire. However his movements at this time were also influenced by a significant event in his life. At an unspecified date he had been taken prisoner by the French while on the king's business (also unspecified) and detained 'for a long time' at Meulan. The little that we know about his captivity comes from a document in which, on 6 March 1444, John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, undertook to pay Pierre Jaillet, captain of Meulan and Handford's master, 4135 *salus* (a sum made up of a ransom of 4000 *salus*, in addition to custodial expenses, equivalent in total to approximately £920 sterling) to enable Handford to leave captivity for a period of four months to secure his ransom. Somerset also undertook to provide Jaillet with other prisoners ('*hostages*'), each paying two *salus* a week for maintenance, during the four-month period. The letters recording this undertaking were to be kept by Jaillet until the ransom, to the total value of 4400 *salus*, had been paid in full, as it duly was (BL, Add Chs 12211, 12212. See Ambühl 2012, 41, 129, 143, n 88; Jones 1982, chapter 2; Allmand 1983, 77; BnF, Ms fr 26072/4938).

Handford's captivity and the details of the manner of his release are significant in more than one way. At a general level, they underline the ever-present dangers of capture (an experience which Sir John Handford shared with his brother Richard), and the possible financial consequences faced by the soldier. The sum demanded for John Handford's release suggests that the French appreciated his position as a person of seniority, experience and influence in the English camp. Furthermore, the guarantee of his ransom by Somerset and, after Somerset's death in May 1444, the authorisation by Edmund Beaufort, Earl of Dorset, the new royal lieutenant in Normandy, of payment to him of compensation of 1500 *l t*, or £250 sterling, from the issues of a grant recently made by the Estates of Normandy, underlines Handford's closeness to members of the Beaufort family and to the source of authority in France (BnF, Ms fr 26072/4938, 5071; Jones 1991, 231). It confirms, too, the importance attached to his loyalty, experience and services by the English administration and the correct estimate of them made by the French. In October 1444 Handford acknowledged receipt of 1400 *l t*, paid to him in consideration of the fact that he had suffered capture and imprisonment at Meulan, now in enemy hands; furthermore, in order to guarantee the payment of his ransom he had surrendered his own son and others who were still being held at great expense ('*en hostage nostre proper filz et autres qui encores y sont a grant frais et despens*'). Another acquittance, autographed 'R Handford', for the remaining 100 *l t* of the compensation was signed on 5 January 1445. The letter 'R' is very similar to that found on an acquittance signed by Richard Handford in June 1440. Was he, perhaps,

signing on behalf of his elder brother, at that time away in England? (BnF, Ms Clairambault 166/33). An alternative interpretation of the letter 'R' is to associate it with Sir John Handford's son, Robert. It is noticeable that the text states specifically that his 'own son' had acted as one of the guarantors of the ransom due to the French captain.

The last years in Normandy

The chronology of Handford's movements in the period 1445–50 is unclear. The need to arrange the payment of his ransom, as well as the cessation of hostilities which followed the Truce of Tours, may account for his presence in England in 1444. He appears to have been in Cheshire in April and December 1446 (*DKR* 37, 63; TNA, CHES 2/119, m 3; CHES, 31/32/25 Hen VI/1), and again in February, April and May 1448, when he was a sworn member of the grand jury, acting as surety for two recognizances and as a final concord panellist (TNA, CHES 2/121, mm 2d, 6, 6d; CHES 31/32/26 Hen VI/2). However, the administration in Normandy could not afford to lose the services of such an experienced figure. Responsibilities still drew him back to Rouen, where he was to be found in July 1448 (BnF, Ms fr 26078/5967). Although now a member of the '*commission de réformation générale*' (BL, Add Ms 11509, fols 15–16; AN, Coll Lenoir 74, fol 207) ordered to report on recent events in France, he appears yet again in Chester on 1 April 1449, acting on a final concord panel (TNA, CHES 31/32/27 Hen VI/1), just at the moment when, in late March, the Breton fortress of Fougères was seized by soldiers in English pay contrary to the terms of the truce negotiated at Tours in 1444. This event created a major diplomatic incident, the French demanding an explanation and possible compensation. Later in April Handford, once again in France, was ordered back to England with Jean Lenfant, a lawyer and a senior member of the English administration in Rouen, to consult with the king as to how to handle this latest crisis (BL, Add Ms 11509, fols 35–35v). In the weeks which followed, Lenfant and Handford (the latter described by the chronicler Gilles Le Bouvier simply as '*ung autre d'Engleterre*': Courteault & Celier eds 1979, 293) spent time trying to placate the French king, Charles VII, whom they visited at his court near Chinon. But all to no avail. Determined to bring matters to a head, the French, helped by the Bretons, pursued a strong military campaign which finally led to the capture of Rouen in November 1449. Within a few months Normandy, which had been under English rule for some thirty years, a span which had coincided with the most active and fruitful period of Sir John Handford's life, and to which he had devoted much of his career, had all too quickly been lost (Beaucourt ed 1863, 1, 157, n 1, 160, n 1; Stevenson ed 1861–4, 1, 251–2; Stevenson ed 1863, index *sub* 'Hanneford').

By the time that he returned to England for the last time, Handford was approaching his sixtieth year. How did he (and others like him) reintegrate into local society after the defeat recently experienced in France? Writing mainly, but not exclusively, about the late fourteenth century, Philip Morgan argued that even leading members of county society who had experience of war, in this instance mainly in Gascony, played no active role in the public affairs and governance of Cheshire while they were away. 'Much of the evidence', he wrote, 'speaks of the almost inevitable separation of roles between the soldier and the member of county society'. He would also suggest that some 'who had made good [in France] were reluctant or unable to re-enter the local society from which they had sprung,' (Morgan 1987, 168–9). Handford's case does not fit the pattern thus proposed. On the contrary, it

suggests that, in his time at least, not all saw themselves as either soldiers or members of Cheshire society, but possibly as both, and that a life spent largely in a war zone might be followed by a period of 'retirement' in the world from which an individual had gone to the wars.

Handford's determination to preserve his links with Cheshire and to play a role in local communal affairs, both while serving in France and after his return to Cheshire, is clear. Between 1441 and 1455 he attended meetings of the county court, where he is known to have served on twenty-three final concord panels, of which fourteen were in the period 1442 to 1449 (Clayton 1990, 193). Evidence of a still active life in local society is to be found in surviving archival sources for 1453, 1456 and, finally, for 1460 (CRO, DDX 18/2 (Feb 1453); Preston, LRO, DDX 293/52 (May, 1453); DDHE 64/8 (Feb 1456); CRO, DLL 2/26 (May, 1460). After that, then aged nearly seventy, and some forty years after he had first set foot in France, John Handford disappears from view. It is not unlikely that his death occurred fairly soon afterwards, as English society drifted into the series of civil conflicts of the so-called Wars of the Roses.

The significance of Handford's military career and role as a leader of Cheshire society

What may we learn from the careers outlined in the pages above? They illustrate and underline the importance of the contribution of members of one Cheshire family to the wars of English kings in the late Middle Ages. The Handfords considered here were the long-term successors to those others whom we noticed serving in Gascony and in Scotland in earlier years, and benefiting materially from their experiences. If Sir John Handford's thirty-year career was not as dramatic as those of other great Cheshire military figures, Sir Hugh Calveley and Sir Robert Knolles, who pursued their careers in the spotlight of what all too often appears like the action-packed years of the 'Age of Chivalry', it was no less significant. Generally speaking, in spite of battles and sieges, the Anglo-French war of the fifteenth century, the legacy of the Treaty of Troyes of 1420, was less dramatic than that fought in the previous century. In particular, after the successes achieved by Joan of Arc (1429–30), English military policy was essentially one of containment of a gradual process of reconquest begun by the French, in which the English were all too often on the defensive, fighting a war which lacked much of the drama of the previous century's conflict.

Handford's considerable abilities, energy and experience were certain to make him into a leading military commander and administrator, who helped defend the English interest in northern France for a quarter of a century or more. He had brought to France the experience and expectations of a particular social background. Once there, having proved himself as a soldier and leader, Handford was given responsibilities in government and everyday administration: so we have found him as both *bailli* and captain of Mantes, doubtless taking part in decision-making processes which had administrative, military and political implications. It becomes increasingly evident, as we follow his career, that Handford was a man whose presence over many years at the centre of government in Normandy was important, even reassuring, to a succession of men placed, often for a short period of years, in nominal charge of that government. Over more than a quarter of a century, he came to represent the continuity and experience which lieutenants of the crown, however exalted

their rank, might not provide. During that time, Handford not only had dealings with some of the most important men in the land; he must have been looked to for advice, based on his years of service, on a multitude of matters, both civil and military. As the payment of his ransom suggested, he was a man whom the English administration could ill afford to lose.

It was this growing sense of ‘indispensability’ which was Handford’s chief gain from his years in France. Whether he derived much financial benefit from the lands granted him by the crown we shall probably never know. His seals, already referred to, emphasise the satisfaction which the use of a French title gave him, as does a surviving acquittance written by him in which he chose to emphasise his French lordship. It seems clear that he relished the use of titles which possession of those lands gave to a man who, at home, although a person of considerable status, was not a member of the nobility.

Many of those destined to lose everything in France were angry, and showed that anger publicly. What Handford’s feelings may have been, whether he bore resentment against those whom he may have felt responsible for the loss of Normandy, we have no effective means of telling. It is likely that his sympathies in England’s civil conflict would have been Lancastrian. He had links with the Staffords; he was also indebted to the two Beauforts, John and Edmund, whom he had served in France, particularly in the 1440s. Had he still been young and active enough to do so, it is probable that he would have sided with them, and their supporters, in the troubled years to come. Whatever had happened to the cause to which he had devoted some thirty years of his life, he could at least console himself with the fact that, unlike many others, he had a home and a position in Cheshire society to which to return. In short, he had not lost everything.

Born into the Cheshire gentry, Sir John Handford belonged to that class which history had turned into ‘natural’ leaders in matters civil, judicial and military. The county lacked the presence and leadership of a great noble family, and in Handford’s time had no more than six or seven knights living within its boundaries (Clayton 1990, 137). This handful of men thus formed the elite of local society, committed to maintaining peace and the social order, and responsible for the running of the administration and legal system (on this subject, *see* Clayton 1990, particularly Part II). Their meetings at the county court were both social occasions and formal opportunities to carry out public business. Membership of a panel whose task included responding to acts of violence and other breaches of the peace was an important communal activity which the gentry were called upon to fulfil. It would be no exaggeration to claim that, for much of his career, Handford was fulfilling two functions simultaneously: one in France (as described above), the other (which risks being underestimated) as a member of Cheshire’s elite who, as far as circumstances in France permitted, played his part in maintaining the role which came with his social position as a member of a prominent Macclesfield family, underlined by the knighthood conferred on him in France.

Notwithstanding the plentiful evidence underlining the importance of his lengthy career in France, where he worked among the highest echelons of the English administration, we should not ignore that which recalls his continuing commitment to his native county. In

spite of being the recipient of lands and titles in France, granted to him in recognition of his services (and as incentives to encourage his personal involvement in the war in time to come), Handford was never 'implanted' in French soil as the Cheshire archer, John Jodrell, whom we met earlier, appears to have been in the previous century. Jodrell had gone to France to fight in the service of Edward the Black Prince. There were good economic reasons for a man of his relatively low social standing to be ready to go to war: activity, a wage, and the lure of possible profit from the conflict (which, as we saw, materialised in Jodrell's case) could be powerful incentives. The lack of much to return to once the fighting was over may have decided Jodrell to remain in France.

Handford's case was very different. His roots in Cheshire and his obligations to its society went deeper. As just seen, Cheshire demanded much from its knights, and the evidence presented here strongly suggests that he felt the draw of his social obligations to his native county even when serving the king in France. Since military activity was not a year-round function, absences, doubtless authorised, were in order. These gave Handford the opportunity to return to Cheshire on many occasions, particularly after 1440 or so, to see to his interests at home, to settle disputes with his neighbours (we have observed a certain aggressiveness of spirit in his character), and to fulfil the role expected of a knight in the affairs of his native county. As the record (such as we have it) indicates, for some years after the loss of Normandy in 1450 he appeared as a regular participant in Cheshire's public life. These appearances were not those of a man who had not seen his home turf for thirty years. The visits, some lasting several months or longer, which he had made to Cheshire in the previous twenty years or more, will have enabled him to keep abreast of local affairs, and a younger generation of gentry to get to know him and, through him, to learn something of developments in France. Visits home, made by such as Handford, were an important way of keeping public opinion abreast of events abroad, and of helping secure financial support for the war in France.

Like many others both before and after him, Handford may have been drawn to service in war by the lure of advancement and rewards of different kinds: membership of the households of some of the greatest in the land notably, in his case, those of the dukes of Clarence and Bedford; rewards in the form of the lands granted him, which he was obliged to defend in court; promotion to knighthood; recognition of his courage and military skills; the moral reward of satisfaction gained from using his varied abilities in support of a cause, in which he must have believed, through service to both Henry V and Henry VI in France. We should not allow Ormerod's judgement of him, however favourable, to have the last word. Lacking the details regarding Handford's broader activities, Ormerod wrote of Sir John Handford that 'he became a captain of so much distinction in the wars of Henry the Sixth that it is difficult not to speak of him as one of the most eminent warriors of his age' (1875–82, 3, 638). That judgement, well intentioned and generous though it is, takes rather too narrow a view of Handford's contribution to history and to the world which he inhabited. Historians of later generations are entitled to think of his life as illustrating and illuminating, in more than one way, what fifteenth-century society may have expected of an active member of the gentry in time of both war and peace, thereby according greater significance to the career of a man who was very much more than simply a 'warrior', as Ormerod chose to present him.

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Notes

- 1 For general background, the following may be consulted: Bennett 1983; Booth 1979; Clayton 1990; Curry 1977; Driver 1971; Hewitt 1929; Hewitt 1967; Jamieson 1998; Morgan 1987.
- 2 ‘*Seigneur de la Rivière*’ (AN, K 64/12/11; BnF, P O 1473/15). His seal of 1441 tells much the same story: ‘*s[igillum] Joh[ann]is de Hanforde, militis, domini de Marly le Chastel*’ (BnF, P O 1473/12). The grant is recorded in *DKR* 41, 766. Its date, 3 April 1419, suggests the king’s appreciation of the contribution made by Handford to the conquest of Normandy, carried out in the preceding months.
- 3 Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Ms 280, fol 18. The indenture is partly printed in Earwaker 1877–80, 1, 241–2. See also Reeves 1972; Rawcliffe 1978, 23; Jones & Walker 1994, no 156. Handford was one of a number of witnesses to a deed issued in the name of Humfrey, now Duke of Buckingham, in favour of his eldest son on 1 April, 1446 (*DKR* 37, 63).

Abbreviations

Add Ch	Additional Charter
Add Ms	Additional Manuscript
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
Arch Seine-Mme	Archives départementales de la Seine-Maritime, Rouen
BL	British Library, London
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
CRO	Cheshire Record Office, Chester
LRO	Lancashire Record Office, Preston
Ms fr	Manuscrit français
Nouv acq fr	Nouvelle acquisition française
P O	Pièces Originales
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

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