

SIR JOHN RISLEY (1443-1512), COURTIER AND COUNCILLOR
by Roger Virgoe

SUMMARY

Sir John Risley (1443-1512) is shown by recently-discovered evidence to be the son of a minor Norfolk gentleman. A courtier by 1468, he became one of the 'esquires of the Body' to Edward IV. In 1484 he fled from Richard III's court to join Henry of Richmond and under Henry VII his career as a courtier reached new heights. As well as serving in the king's wars, he was employed in diplomatic duties in England and abroad and as an active councillor. Childless, he founded no family, and as he did not fulfil an administrative role and left few personal or estate records his importance has been underestimated.

Sir John Risley, knight of the Body to King Henry VII, was an important figure at the court of the first Tudor king. As with a number of his more famous contemporaries no detailed study has been made of his career and it is unlikely that the materials exist for a satisfactory biography,¹ but his activities and rewards under Henry VII makes it clear that he was, as Professor Dunham writes, among 'the most trusted of Henry's servants'² and the discovery of some documents bearing on his origins and parentage provides the opportunity for a re-consideration of what facts are known about him. These documents show that this distinguished figure of the late fifteenth century can be added to the already long list of 'Norfolk Worthies'.

With the exception of A. F. Pollard who, presumably because of the similarity of names, connects him with the Wriothesley family, later earls of Southampton, those few historians who have touched upon John Risley's life have provided him with an ancestry drawn from a late addition to an Elizabethan visitation of Buckinghamshire.³ In this he was made the eldest son of John Risley of Buckinghamshire by Jane De La Lune; he is said to have died without male issue and to have been succeeded by his brother, Robert, ancestor of the Risleys of Chetwode, in Buckinghamshire.⁴ As John Risley's lands at his death lay in Northants and Bucks and a Risley family of some consequence in the sixteenth century lived in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire the identification was plausible but there can be no doubt that it is wrong.

During the fifteenth century a number of Risleys are referred to in the public and local records, most of them in or near London.⁵ Two esquires named John Risley are mentioned. One was granted, with his wife, Margaret, a corrody at Holy Trinity, Aldgate in 1439; in 1452 a new grant was made to Risley and John Brewster, clerk of the Privy Seal, and in 1465 the king ratified the transfer of the corrody from Risley to Henry Fillongley, yeoman of the king's cellar.⁶ This John Risley must have been a royal servant, perhaps a fairly minor one. He may be identical with John Risley, esquire, of London and East Bedford, Middlesex, to whom there are several references between 1441 and 1457: in the latter year he was granted protection when going in the retinue of Sir Gervase Clifton, treasurer of Calais.⁷

Considering Sir John Risley's long years as a courtier and in Middlesex a connection with one or both of the above would seem plausible but in fact does not seem likely; for though Sir John's father was certainly named John

(like about one-third of the English male population in the fifteenth century) his background and life seems to have been very different. The proof of Sir John's parentage derives from a number of deeds now in the Public Record Office. The clinching evidence appears in deeds of 9 April 1482, in which John Risley of Carbrooke, Norfolk, grants four acres of land in Carbrooke to 'my son, John Risley, esquire of the Body to the Lord King', and of 24 September 1508 in which Sir John Risley describes himself as the son of John Risley of Carbrooke.⁸

These documents and others show that Sir John Risley was a Norfolk man, sprung from a family settled in the west of the county since the early fourteenth century. The Norfolk family may well have derived, like those of that name in the East Midlands and London, from the village of Riseley in Bedfordshire.⁹ It is significant that Riseley was largely owned by the Knights Hospitallers and that it was at Carbrooke, the main manor of the Hospitallers of East Anglia, that the founder of the Norfolk family, Richard de Risley, first appears in 1312. Perhaps he was an estate official of the Order.¹⁰ By 1320 he and his wife, Joan, held land at Carbrooke and in 1329 he was the second-biggest contributor there to the subsidy; he was apparently still alive in 1355.¹¹ His son, John, married before 1344 Alice, daughter and eventual co-heir of Thomas Townshend of Great Cressingham, and Richard, son of John and Alice, inherited both the Carbrooke estate and later substantial holdings from his mother at Great Cressingham where from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century one of the manors was called 'Risleys'.¹² The second Richard died about 1413 and seems to have divided his estates: the lands at Carbrooke and elsewhere went to one son, Thomas, the Great Cressingham lands to another son, John.¹³ About the Great Cressingham family in the fifteenth century little is known – John was certainly alive in 1434 but died about 1440. The family died out in 1497 with the death without heirs of another Richard Risley, esquire.¹⁴

Thomas Risley of Carbrooke died in 1434 – his will mentions his wife, Matilda or Maud, but no children.¹⁵ Maud's own will, however, proved in 1440, mentions four sons, Richard, John the elder, John the younger, and William, together with two daughters.¹⁶ The will certainly implies that Richard, whom she appointed executor, was the eldest son but it was John, presumably the older of the two sons of that name, who inherited the estates at Carbrooke and elsewhere. His younger brother, John, may possibly be identified with the John Risley, priest, who was a prisoner of William Brandon in 1461 and escaped from the Marshalsea in 1470.¹⁷ Another John Risley was Prior of Horsham St. Faith, Norfolk in 1469 and 1492, and a John Risley, gentleman, was living at Bury St. Edmunds in the 1470s. These were probably members of the family but cannot be precisely identified.¹⁸ John Risley the elder was already married to one Margaret when he succeeded to his full inheritance in 1440.¹⁹ It seems very unlikely, however, that he was the man, also with a wife named Margaret, who, as previously mentioned, was granted the corrody in Aldgate; this identity of names must be a coincidence. The few references to John Risley of Carbrooke that have been found suggest that he lived the life of a minor country gentleman. Although styled 'esquire' his importance was purely local and he played no part in the administration and government of the shire.²⁰ In November 1484, almost certainly as a consequence of his son's flight to France, to be discussed below, John Risley, senior, made an enfeoffment of all his lands in Carbrooke, Ovington and elsewhere in Norfolk to a group of feoffees.²¹ The feoffees were to hold the land for the fulfillment of Risley's will. A survey of Risley's lands in 1496 shows he maintained a capital messuage at Carbrooke where he no doubt lived.²² He was still alive in March

1503, when he made a new enfeoffment of all his lands to his son, Sir John, William Eyre, and others.²³ He was certainly dead by 1507.

John Risley's son, the subject of this paper, was born according to his own account, about 1443.²⁴ Unfortunately no reference to him has been found before 1468, when he was already fairly certainly a courtier. How he arrived at Edward IV's court is uncertain. If his father or another kinsman had really been the courtier rewarded with a corrody at Aldgate his entry into the royal household would be fairly easily explicable. Otherwise it is necessary to postulate a patron, an upbringing in a nobleman's house and subsequent transfer to the royal court. The most likely early patrons for a Norfolk gentleman in the 1460s would have been the duke of Norfolk or Lord Scales but no evidence of a link with either family has been found. The Prior of St. John's in England was a leading councillor of Edward IV and it was possibly through this connection that Risley reached the royal household. No record of Risley's early service at court has been found. Indeed, the first record of his adult life so far discovered is a grant made by the Crown to John Fortescue and John Risley, esquires, in June 1468 of the wardship and marriage of Agnes, daughter and heir of John Wynard of Cornwall.²⁵ Fortescue was already a courtier and had strong Cornish connections though he married Norfolk wives:²⁶ Risley was, no doubt, a friend and colleague, perhaps investing some money in a speculative venture. They were to be linked later in more dramatic circumstances.

It is possible that Risley accompanied Edward IV into exile in 1470. Certainly he appears to have become increasingly a favoured servant after the king's return. In 1473 grants made to him and Richard Harleston, a yeoman of the Chamber, were exempted from the act of resumption.²⁷ Two years later he received some important and lucrative grants — two forfeited Courtenay manors in Devon to be held in tail male and with issues back-dated to December 1467; and a life grant of the offices of bailiff and parker of Lavenham, a forfeited De Vere manor granted a month previously to the Queen.²⁸ Soon afterwards he was granted the custody of 'Potelles', a royal holding at Chigwell, Essex, and in March 1480 he and Edward Brampton, another royal servant, were granted the farm of the aulnage and subsidy on cloth in East Anglia, Essex and other counties, paying £165 a year.²⁹

Risley was by now a man of substance and influence at court. In 1474-5 he had indented to serve in the king's expedition to France with three spearmen, including himself, and 20 archers, and soon after he was one of the select 'esquires of the Body' to the king.³⁰ In a deposition many years later he recalled hunting with Edward IV in Waltham Forest and being able to consult him about his private business there.³¹ Risley had also by 1474 made a good marriage to Thomasine, daughter and heiress of Richard Turnant of Tottenham, Middlesex, and grand-daughter of the wealthy Londoner, John Gedney. Thomasine had previously married and been divorced from Richard Charlton of Edmonton, having taken to him a large dowry of 800 marks in cash with plate and other goods. In October 1474 Risley and Thomasine, now his wife, sued Charlton for the return of this property and, though no record of the court's decision survives, Risley's position at court makes it likely that they were successful.³²

John Risley, as an esquire of the Body, was one of the pall-bearers at the King's funeral in February 1483.³³ His attitude to the events of the next few months which led to the deposition and death of his old master's son, is uncertain but, like others of Edward's household, he seems quite soon to have entered the

service of Richard III. He was certainly well rewarded by the new king. In December 1483 his farm of the cloth subsidy was renewed for seven years and about the same time he received grants in tail male of lands in Hampshire valued at over £40; in May 1484 he received a general pardon as an esquire of the Body.³⁴

Some time during the next six months however, Risley's attitude changed. The reasons and circumstances are obscure and known only from an indictment but probably the incentive came from the earl of Oxford's escape from Calais. John Fortescue, with whom Risley had been associated in King Edward's household, was then porter of Calais and fled with Oxford. On 2 November, according to the indictment, John Risley of Colchester, esquire, and his servant, William Coke of Lavenham, yeoman, together with Sir William Brandon and his sons, William and Thomas, Sir William Stonor and others, including a weaver from Hedingham Castle, the earl of Oxford's seat, conspired together to aid the earls of Richmond and Oxford. Risley, the two younger Brandons, and others, seized a ship at East Mersea and sailed to join Richmond in France.³⁵ They must have arrived at Richmond's court by the end of the year.³⁶ All of Risley's lands and chattels were seized by the King during December and some of them granted to Richard's loyal servant, Edward Brampton.³⁷ As has already been noted Risley's father safeguarded his own lands by granting them to feoffees.

It was not until March 1485 that a commission of *oyer* and *terminer* headed by Lord Audley sat at Stratford Langthorn, Essex, to hear the indictments against Risley and the others. The indictments were called into the King's Bench but no further action was taken before Richard's overthrow; thus Risley was never convicted or attainted and the act of Henry VII's first parliament, reversing the attainders of 1484, which includes Risley's name, specifically refers also to indictments where conviction had not occurred. The case was not formally ended, however, until 1488 when Risley appeared in the King's Bench with a pardon granted in January 1486.^{37a} The episode remains mysterious. It is unclear why Risley was at Colchester and why Stonor and William Brandon, both attainted in the 1484 parliament, were at liberty to rebel a few months later. Was Risley acting as keeper of Colchester Castle and were these his prisoners? Did he arrange their escape and flee with them as James Blount had done with the Earl of Oxford at Calais?

In any case Risley's career was now totally committed to the success of Henry of Richmond. He sailed with Henry's expedition in August 1485, was knighted at the landing at Milford Haven and fought at Bosworth.³⁸ Henry's triumph took Risley's career as a courtier to new heights. Like his old companion, John Fortescue, he was made one of the knights of the Body to the new king, obtained a general pardon and on 22 September received the first of a number of important grants: for the 'true hert and service that our humble servant and true liegeman, Sir John Risley, hath borne and doone unto us in soundry wise here before as wele beyond the see as to oure late victorious felde had within his oure realme', he was re-granted the keeping of 'Potelles' and appointed keeper of Pleshey, Dunmow and other Essex lands: this was turned into a life-grant one year later.³⁹ In October 1485 he was granted the farm of Eltham Manor, paying £34 p.a.⁴⁰ In Henry's first parliament he was restored to his lands and all his grants exempted from the act of Resumption though not, apparently, those he had been granted in 1484.⁴¹ In September 1486 for good service and for 'gret labours and perils he has endured during his life' he was appointed steward of the Duchy of Lancaster lands in Essex and Hertfordshire for life and his Pleshey office confirmed, and in March 1488 he was granted in tail male extensive estates in the Midlands and

Essex, some of them forfeited by his wife's former husband, Sir Richard Charlton: when their estates were restored to Lord Zouche and the Earl of Surrey provisos protected Risley's rights.^{4 2}

In July 1486 his father-in-law, Richard Turnant, had died and Thomasina Risley, then 26 years and more, inherited four valuable manors in Tottenham, Middlesex.^{4 3} It was there that he made his main home. He was a J.P. in Middlesex from 1485 until his death and knight of the shire for that county in 1491 and 1495, and no doubt on other occasions.^{4 4} He was also J.P. in Sussex briefly in 1488, in Hertfordshire from 1497 and in Kent from 1501 and was on many commissions in the Home Counties.^{4 5} His connection with Norfolk had for years been slight. His father died between March 1503 and 1507 and soon afterwards Risley visited Norfolk only to sever his final links with the county by selling his inheritance at Carbrooke and elsewhere to William Eyre, a Suffolk lawyer, who had been a feoffee for Risley's father in 1503 and had recently purchased the lands of the other Risley branch at Great Cressingham; Risley did retain a rent charge on the lands for his life.^{4 6} His lack of an heir made it unnecessary for him to build an inheritance and he preferred to capitalise on his estates. Already in 1488, perhaps in an attempt to evade the entail established by Turnant's will, he and his wife had conveyed her Middlesex lands to feoffees who settled them on Risley and his wife in tail; in default of issue they were to be sold and the money distributed in pious work for the souls of himself, his wife and his wife's ancestors.^{4 7} Thomasine was alive in 1505 but had died by February 1507, when he sold the reversion of the lands after his death to the king for 1000 marks.^{4 8} Although he married again he had clearly despaired of having an heir and, unlike his fellow Norfolk-born councillor, Sir Thomas Lovell, had no close kin whom he wished to benefit from his wealth.

Thus Risley, no doubt owing to the misfortunes of childlessness, failed to maintain links with his ancestral home or to put down roots anywhere else. His house at Tottenham was doubtless a fine one and he later seems to have resided at Eltham,^{4 9} this, no doubt, explaining his addition to the Kent commission of the peace in 1501, but his true home was the king's court and it was there that his importance lay. As knight of the Body he certainly played a significant part in Court ceremonies and was in constant touch with the King.

Like other courtiers he served in the king's wars. Apart from Bosworth he was probably at the battle of Stoke and in 1489 he apparently accompanied the earl of Surrey to the north to quell the unrest following the murder of the earl of Northumberland.^{5 0} In 1492 he took 100 horsemen and foot-soldiers on the King's expedition to France, and narrowly escaped capture at the siege of Boulogne.^{5 1} But though not an administrator and receiving none of the offices that men such as Lovell, Bray, Guildford and Daubeney filled, he was not purely a courtier. It was not just his proximity to the King, but also, surely, considerable tact, intelligence and perhaps linguistic skills that brought about his employment on so many diplomatic duties at both home and abroad. In 1488 he, with the clerk of the council, was sent to negotiate a treaty with Maximilian, King of the Romans.^{5 2} In the following year he was sent, with the King's Secretary, on an embassy to France.^{5 3} In 1492 he acted as an 'interpreter' at a meeting with the French ambassador; in February 1496 he was on a commission to negotiate with Archduke Philip's ambassador and in April of that year was one of the six councillors appointed to discuss with the Spanish ambassador the proposed marriage between Prince Arthur and Katharine of Aragon.^{5 4} Two years later he went on another mission to Maximilian and in 1501 was one of the organisers of the reception of Katharine.^{5 5} It would seem that the King saw him as a loyal,

intelligent and intimate servant whom he could use as his personal representative in important negotiations but not a man of such status, ambition or administrative skill as to require formal office, or even high honours.

Risley, was also, however, an active councillor. He was present at almost as many recorded meetings of Henry's Council as Thomas Lovell and at considerably more than Bray and Foxe. On several occasions he was one of a small group of councillors appointed to investigate specific cases.⁵⁶ His background does not account for his conciliar activity and it is probably necessary to assume that his abilities and personality more than status and office were responsible.

Thus, though not one of the most obviously important members of the governing group of Early Tudor England, Risley was clearly an influential and active servant of the King, notorious enough to be among the group of councillors specifically denounced by Perkin Warbeck as 'caitiffs and villains of low birth'.⁵⁷ His influence is difficult to estimate just because it was so dependent on a close personal relationship with the King, but until the end of Henry's life Risley's position was an important and favoured one, though in the King's last years, as Risley aged and a new generation came to power, his activities grew noticeably fewer.

Risley was one of the feoffees named in the King's will,⁵⁸ but he did not live long into the following reign. He had a general pardon in 1510 as a farmer of Eltham and late knight of the Body to Henry VII and exemption from jury service and other duties.⁵⁹ In his last years he married again. His new wife, Joan, was obviously much younger than Risley as she survived him by more than thirty years but she did not give him a child. Her parentage has not been discovered. Risley made his will on 13 September 1511.⁶⁰ It is an interesting document. In it he asks to be buried in the chapel of Our Lady of Barking near the Tower, a small collegiate foundation extensively endowed by Richard III.^{60a} He makes bequests to the churches of Eltham and Greenwich as well as Tottenham and in these later years probably divided his time between these London suburbs. He made small bequests to servants but mentions only one relation, a sister, Margaret. The lands which were at his disposal he ordered to be sold and the money put towards masses and for pious uses, particularly at Barking Chapel. The most interesting bequest, however, is the large sum of £160 towards the making of the cloister and glazing at Jesus College, Cambridge. As Risley also bequeathed any residue from the sale of his lands to pay for a lecturer in divinity at Jesus he obviously had some attachment to the college, founded eighteen years previously by Bishop Alcock of Ely.⁶¹ The residue of all his property he bequeathed to his wife and she was made executor, together with Richard Broke, sergeant at law, John Roper, Edward Skern, William Mariner and John Brown of Eltham.⁶²

The will was proved on 14 May 1512 but the exact date of Risley's death is uncertain, as the *inquisitions post mortem* held in four counties give four different dates.⁶³ It must have been before 17th February when those lands which had been given to Risley in tail male were granted to Henry VIII's much favoured courtier, William Compton.⁶⁴ An act of parliament of 1512 also confirmed to Compton a royal grant of the Tottenham manors and other Middlesex lands the reversion of which Risley had sold to Henry VII five years previously.⁶⁵

Thus Risley, the first of his family to rise to prominence, was also the last. His widow was not left penniless: she may have had lands of her own and she seems to have claimed successfully rights of dower in some of Risley's lands — according to a later statement she had '300 mark lande and a £1000 pownde in her pours, and she had 500 marke in plate'.⁶⁶ She was soon snapped up by

another rising young East Anglian courtier, Christopher Garneys, later appointed knight porter of Calais. Garneys died in 1534; his widow lived on until the reign of Edward VI.^{6 7}

Because he founded no family and left few personal or estate records, John Risley's importance under Henry VII can easily be overlooked. Unlike Lovell, Bray and others of his colleagues on Henry's council he did not fill administrative offices even in the Household, and thus his impact on the affairs of government cannot easily be estimated. His activity as councillor and diplomat, however, and his substantial, though not enormous, grants from the King suggest that, like other courtiers of this and other periods, his influence with the King in a still very personal monarchy could have been a significant force not only in expediting the affairs of his friends and clients but also in the more important business of the kingdom.

Partly the relationship derived, as with such men as Lovell and Daubeney, from his having shared part of Henry Tudor's exile and triumphant return, but his multifarious activities, while holding no office, suggest that it was personality, good judgement and loyalty that attracted the King's favour rather than, as with Bray, Lovell and others, administrative ability. It is to be hoped that intensive study of the records of Henry's reign will one day throw more light on the public career of this still rather enigmatic figure.

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¹The fullest, though brief, account of Risley's life is in J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Biographies* (1936), pp. 717-8. The name is spelled in various ways but is standardised here.

²*Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, ed. N. C. Bayne and W. H. Dunham Jun., Selden Soc. 75 (1958), p.xl.

³*Ibid.*, p.xl; *Hist. Parl. Biog.*, pp. 717-8; S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (1972), p. 112; A. F. Pollard, *The Reign of Henry VII*, ii, 286 and index entry.

⁴*Visitation of Buckingham in 1566*, ed. W. C. Metcalfe, (1883), pp. 34-5.

⁵*Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London, A.D. 1413-1437*, ed. A. H. Thomas, Cambridge (1943), pp. 194, 245; *Cal. Close Rolls 1435-41*, p. 135; *Cal. Patent Rolls 1467-77*, p. 141.

⁶*Cal. Close Rolls, 1435-41*, p. 349, 1447-54, pp. 400-01, 1461-8, p. 247.

⁷*Cal. of Feet of Fines for London and Middlesex*, ed. W. J. Hardy and W. Page, i, 192; *Cal. Close Rolls, 1441-7*, p. 48; P.R.O., King's Bench, Ancient Indictments, K.B. 9/261/29, Plea Rolls K.B. 27/782, plea, rot, xlvi; *Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office*, xlviii (1887), p. 423.

⁸P.R.O., Exchequer, Augmentation Office, Ancient Deeds, E.326/B.7401, B.7372.

⁹There are other places called Risley or Riseley in Berkshire, Derbyshire and Lancashire, and the last two at least produced armigerous families of this name – Burke, *The General Armoury*, 2nd ed. 1884, pp. 847, 858.

¹⁰P.R.O., Common Pleas, Feet of Fines, C.P. 25(1), 162/129. For the Carbrooke commandery see E. Puddy, *The Order of . . . St. John . . . in Norfolk*, 1961. The Risleys may have continued to act as officials of the commandery – in the Poll Tax Returns Richard Risley II was named immediately after the members of the order – P.R.O., Lay Subsidy Accounts, E.179/149/48. I owe this reference to Mr. A. Read.

¹¹*Cat. Ancient Deeds*, i. B.817, P.R.O., Exchequer, Augmentation Office, Ancient Deeds, E.326/B7408, P.R.O., Exchequer, Lay Subsidies, E.179/149/7.

¹²P.R.O., Exchequer, Augmentation Office, Ancient Deeds, E.326/B.7401, B.7372. For Risley's Manor, Great Cressingham, see F. Blomefield and C. Parkin, *An Essay towards a topographical history of the County of Norfolk, 1805-10*, vi. 98 et seq; Norfolk Record Office, Enclosure Map of Great Cressingham.

¹³John Risley is styled 'of Great Cressingham' and Thomas Risley 'of Great Carbrooke' in a deed of 1421 and Thomas's son does not appear to have held land in Cressingham – P.R.O., E.326/B.7387. Both John and Thomas appear on the Norfolk election indenture of 1422 – P.R.O., C.219/13/1.

¹⁴Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Dean and Chapter Records, Cellarer's Rolls; Blomefield, *Norfolk*, vi. 98.

¹⁵Norfolk Record Office, Consistory Court Will Reg. Surflete, f. 140.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Reg. Doke, f. 123.

¹⁷*Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London, A.D. 1458-82*, ed. P. Jones, Cambridge (1961), pp. 24-27., *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, v. 50b.

- ¹⁸ Blomefield, *Norfolk*, x. 440; Cambridge Univ. Lib., Add. MS. 7318, f.43.
- ¹⁹ P.R.O., Exchequer, Augmentation Office, Ancient Deeds, E.326/B.7373.
- ²⁰ Like his cousin, Richard Risley, he was named as an elector at several Norfolk county elections – P.R.O., Chancery, Parliamentary Writs and Returns, C.219/15/6, 17/2 and 3.
- ²¹ P.R.O., Exchequer, Augmentation Office, Ancient Deeds, E.326/B.7366-7, 7388; *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, i, B.819.
- ²² P.R.O., Rentals and Surveys, S.C.11/roll 470.
- ²³ *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, iii, D.489.
- ²⁴ He described himself as fifty-two years and more in a deposition of 1496 – P.R.O., Chancery Files, C.263/2/1, no. 131.
- ²⁵ *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1461-71*, v. 219.
- ²⁶ *Hist. Parl. Biog.*, p. 349; *Cal. Inquisitions post Mortem, Henry VII*, ii, No. 392; P.R.O. Exchequer, Various Accounts, E.101/411/13, f.36.
- ²⁷ *Rot. Parl.* vi. 84. Risley is called 'of the King's Household' in a document of June 1471 – *Medieval Legal Records*, ed. R. F. Hunnisett and J. B. Post, 1978, p. 454.
- ²⁸ P.R.O., Exchequer, K. R. Memoranda Rolls, E.159/256, brevia directa, rot 4., *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1467-77*, p. 534. I am grateful to Dr. D. A. L. Morgan for the former reference and for other useful information.
- ²⁹ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1485-94*, p. 103; *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1471-85*, p. 199.
- ³⁰ P.R.O. Exchequer, Indentures of War, E.101/box 72, f.2/1043. Risley was styled 'esquire for the body' in the 1480 grant – see last note.
- ³¹ See n.24.
- ³² P.R.O., Early Chancery Proceedings, C.1/66/286-7.
- ³³ *Letters and Papers of the reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, ed. J. Gairdner, Rolls ser. 1861-3, i. 5,8.
- ³⁴ *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1471-85*, p. 266; B. L. Harley MS 433, ff. 64d, 285d. He is styled 'one of the esquires for the body of the King' (not 'of Edward IV', as Wedgwood has it) on the pardon roll of 1484 – P.R.O., Chancery, Pardon Roll, C.67/51, m.13.
- ³⁵ P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/908, rex. rot. 8r. I am obliged to Dr. De Lloyd Guth for this reference.
- ³⁶ Thomas Brandon helped defend Hammes Fort against the Calais garrison in January – *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1476-85*, p. 526.
- ³⁷ B. L. Harley MS. 433, f. 199.
- ^{37a} P.R.O., King's Bench, Plea Roll, K.B. 27/908, rex. rot. 8r; 909, rex. rot 20; *Rot. Parl.* VI, 274, 291.
- ³⁸ W. A. Shaw, *The Knights of England*, 1906, ii. 22. He is listed 5th after John Fortescue, in the list of 'knights made by Henry VII' compiled by the herald, Thomas Wall. His crest is given as 'a moriens hede with a scerlet of white roses havng ringes gold at his eerys in a wreth silver and asur manteled over doubled silver', – O. Barron, 'Thomas Wall's Book of Crests', *The Ancestor*, xi, 178-90.
- ³⁹ He was styled 'king's knight' in 1485 and 'knight for our body' in December 1488 – *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-94*, p. 103; *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, ed. W. Campbell, Rolls ser. 1873, i. 33-8; ii 387; T. Rymer, *Foedera* (1704-11), xii, 352-3; *Rot. Parl.*, vi. 274.
- ⁴⁰ *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1485-1509*, no. 28. This was renewed in 1488 and 1506 – *ibid.*, nos. 200 and 836.
- ⁴¹ *Rot. Parl.*, vi. 274, 355. He seems to have regained his farm of the aulnage – P.R.O. King's Bench, Plea Roll, KB 27/909, rex. rot. 20.
- ⁴² *Materials for Henry VII*, i. 561, 581, ii. 259; *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-94*, p. 209; *Rot. Parl.* vi, 487, 531. Risley was granted the issues of many of these lands from August 1485.
- ⁴³ *Cal. Inquisitions post Mortem Henry VII*, i. no. 174. For the Tottenham estates, see D. Moss, 'The Economic Development of a Middlesex Village', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, 28 (1980), pp. 112-114.
- ⁴⁴ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-94*, p. 493, 1494-1509, pp. 643, 645, 650; *Hist. Parl. Biog.* pp. 717-8.
- ⁴⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-94*, p. 503, 1494-1509, pp. 30, 33, 86, 291, 326, 421, etc.
- ⁴⁶ Eyre died late in 1507 – his will mentions Carbrooke lands bought from Sir John Risley as well as his manor of 'Risley's' at Great Cressingham – and in September 1508 at Carbrooke Risley ended some complex transactions by devising the estate to Eyre's widow, reserving £10 p.a. to himself for life and after his death to Margaret Cromer, widow, and Joan Mortimer, widow, for term of their lives – perhaps they were his sisters – P.R.O., Exchequer, Augmentations, Ancient Deeds, E.326/B.7368; *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, iii D489; P.C.C. 16 Burton; Blomefield, vi. 100.
- ⁴⁷ *Cal. Patent Rolls, 1485-94*, pp. 228-9; *Cal. Close Rolls, 1485-1500*, no. 508.
- ⁴⁸ *A Calendar to the Feet of Fines for London and Middlesex, Henry VII to Elizabeth* (1893), p. 13; *Cal. Close Rolls, 1500-09*, no. 755; *Statutes of the Realm*, iii, p. 40 (Statute 3 Hen. VIII, c.18). The act of 1512 makes it clear that the reversionary interest held by Richard Turnant's widow in the lands had eventually to be bought out after Risley's death. Risley was pardoned for the alienation to the king's feoffees in 1507 – *Cal. Patent Rolls 1494-1509*, p. 525.
- ⁴⁹ His will mentions his household stuff 'in the place where I lodged at Eltham' – P.C.C. 8 Fetiplace.
- ⁵⁰ See the memorial inscription for the 2nd duke of Norfolk printed in William Dugdale, *The Baronage of England* (1675), ii. 269-70.

- ⁵¹ P.R.O., E.101/Box 72, file 3, no. 1080; *Hall's Chronicle*, ed. H. Ellis (1809), p. 459.
- ⁵² *Materials for Henry VII*, ii, 387; *Foedera*, xii, 352-3; *Hall's Chronicle*, p.456.
- ⁵³ *Cal. State Papers, Venetian*, i, 183.
- ⁵⁴ *Letters and Papers of Richard III and Henry VII*, ii, 291; *Foedera*, XII, 589, 695; *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, p. 30.
- ⁵⁵ *Letters and Papers of Richard III and Henry VII*, i, 410, ii, 104.
- ⁵⁶ *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, pp. 30, 51.
- ⁵⁷ A. F. Pollard, *The Reign of Henry VII*, i, 153.
- ⁵⁸ *Rot. Parl.*, vi, 444, 510; *Testamenta Vetusta*, ed. N. H. Nicolas, 1826, pp. 26-32.
- ⁵⁹ *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, i.438 (1), m.6; 94(7).
- ⁶⁰ P.C.C. 8 Fetiplace.
- ^{60a} John Stow, *Survey of London*, i, 130-1. Risley was buried there – see *North Country Wills*, Surtees Soc, 116 (1908), pp. 106-8.
- ⁶¹ See *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of England: City of Cambridge*, i.82. Mrs. Freda Jones, the Jesus College archivist, kindly informs me that there is no contemporary evidence of Risley's benefaction but that it was recorded in the sixteenth century that Risley 'constructed the cloister and nave of the church at his own expense and roofed it with lead'. This certainly exaggerates Risley's rôle in the building.
- ⁶² The list of executors certainly suggests that he was resident at Eltham in his later years – Skerne and Roper, as well as Brown, lived there or at Greenwich.
- ⁶³ P.R.O. Chancery, Inquisitions post Mortem, C.142/79/223, 174, 190-1; there is no surviving inquisition for Middlesex or Norfolk.
- ⁶⁴ *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, i, 1062 (58). William Compton was already seised of most of this property at the time the inquests were taken.
- ⁶⁵ Henry VIII, c. 18; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, i, 2055 (130).
- ⁶⁶ *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, v. A. 1292, 13262; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vii, 1539.
- ⁶⁷ B.L. Additional MS. 19131, ff. 119-25; *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vii, 1195, 1277; P.C.C. 13 Powell.

A further example of Risley's diplomatic activities has recently come to light. Near the beginning of Henry VII's reign he was sent to Rome on a mission to the Papacy – *Cal. Papal Registers*, vol. XV, no. 219.

HERBERT ASTLEY, DEAN OF NORWICH,
'A Man of Good Comfortable Spirit'

by Amos C. Miller

SUMMARY

Educated at Cambridge with a subsequent law degree from Padua, Herbert Astley (1622-1681) spent most of the Commonwealth period as tutor and chaplain in France, Italy and the Levant. In 1663 he was made a prebendary of Norwich and in 1670 he succeeded the pugnacious John Croftes as Dean. His capable and tactful administration of the Cathedral is examined, and also the troubles that arose from his wife's domineering temper. A cultivated rather than a learned man, and a friend of Sir Thomas Browne, his gift for friendship is stressed and also his tolerance in matters of discipline and with the Chapter lessees.

Beneath the nave of Norwich Cathedral, lies the grave of Herbert Astley, a man who for nearly twenty years, played an important role in the life of his church and diocese.¹ The black marble slab that once covered the grave gave a brief summary of his career, calling him a faithful subject of Charles I, 'whom he followed amid arms and the unhappy sounds of war as far as the altar of blood' [the King's execution]. It added that Astley had lived abroad for ten years among 'strange Turks and barbarous infidels', and returned to England where he was made Dean of Norwich by Charles II, an office which he held for nearly eleven years until his death in 1681.²

Astley's career illustrates well the problems and responsibilities facing many Anglican clergymen in the seventeenth century. Like a number of churchmen of strongly Royalist persuasion, he chose a life of exile during much of the Civil War and Interregnum. Through numerous documents at the Bodleian and among the records of the Dean and Chapter of Norwich one can trace the methods of local and court patronage by which such a man obtained professional advancement during the reign of Charles II. They also reveal the various tasks with which he had to deal as a clerical official of middle-rank: the restoration and repair of church property, the settlement of disputes between the clergy and municipal authorities, the enforcement of rent claims and entry fines upon lay tenants and discipline on refractory subordinates. In addition, his career provides some evidence concerning the effectiveness with which cathedral chapters fulfilled their duties as ecclesiastical landlords.

He was born in Plymouth in August 1622, the son of Herbert Ashley, who, according to a hostile source, was a mere tailor by profession.³ He belonged, nevertheless, to an old Plymouth family, one of whom had been a member of the town council in 1539, and was related to the Astleys of Melton Constable, a leading family of Norfolk gentry whose name our Herbert Astley later adopted.⁴ Of his early life we know only that he entered Magdalen College, Cambridge, in November 1638 and received a B.A. in the spring of 1642.⁵ Later he became tutor to Richard, the fourteen year old son of the Royalist general, Sir Richard Grenville.⁶ In the winter of 1644-5, while Grenville was besieging Plymouth, Astley and his young charge went to France. There he received from Sir Richard instructions as to his son's education. He was to be taught French, reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as riding, dancing and fencing. Astley was told

that if the boy neglected these directions in any way 'I will never allow him a penny to maintain him, nor look upon him as my son.'⁷

In March 1646, when Astley and his pupil were living in Rouen, Sir Richard arrived in Brittany and sent word to Astley to bring his son to him at once.⁸ On the defeat of the Royalist armies in the West, Grenville had been compelled to flee the country, an embittered and discredited man. During the last year of the war his quarrelling and insubordination had become so intolerable that he had been imprisoned by order of the Prince of Wales.⁹ Grenville now proceeded to set down his version of the events, leading to his arrest in a paper entitled 'A Narrative of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Affairs in the West of England . . .' It constituted a defence of his own conduct and an attack on that of his enemies. There are two versions of this document. The one in the Clarendon MSS published in 1647, contains scurrilous attacks on several Royalist leaders. The other in the Tanner MSS, which does not have some of the more abusive comments found in the Clarendon version, is in the hand of Herbert Astley.¹⁰ Discrepancies between the two documents cannot be explained with certainty. Possibly Astley was with Grenville when he composed his 'Narrative', and persuaded him to write a comparatively moderate statement, a decision which Grenville then regretted with the result that he subsequently revised and published it in a form more pleasing to himself. It is not surprising that the two men soon parted: Astley was a discreet, conscientious man, Grenville the exact opposite.¹¹ In none of Astley's later correspondence is there any reference to their association.

Early in 1646 Astley went to Tunis and took service in the household of Thomas Browne, an English merchant. By this time he had become an Anglican minister and was probably employed by Browne and other Englishmen in Tunis as a chaplain.¹² For more than seven years he lived chiefly in this city but also spent some time in other parts of the Levant and in Italy. In September 1651, he received a Doctorate of Civil Law at the University of Padua; two years later we find him at Legnano, one of the principal centres of English trade in the Mediterranean.¹³ There he corresponded with various friends, including Henry Compton, later Bishop of London.¹⁴ In December 1654 he went to Aleppo where he was elected chaplain to the merchant community employed by the great English trading concern, the Levant Company. He was not actually appointed to the post, however, possibly because he could not reach a satisfactory agreement over his stipend.¹⁵ More than once during the period of Puritan rule Astley returned to live in his own country. He stayed for a time at Sion College, a famous place of study and residence for Anglican clergymen in the City of London.¹⁶ He also took the place of a clergyman named Hill who had been ejected from his living in Bedfordshire; later he became chaplain in the household of the Earl of Northampton, eldest brother of his friend, Henry Compton.¹⁷

Letters between Astley and some of his acquaintances give only slight indication of his life in Tunis which must have been extremely precarious at times, for Browne and other Englishmen there suffered imprisonment and confiscation of their property by the ruler of the city.¹⁸ However, the correspondence does shed light on some amusing aspects of Astley's character. In July 1646 he received a letter from John Rogers, a friend and former fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, who had just arrived by ship in Tunis. Their correspondence is in Latin and written in the high-flown style commonly employed by people of Humanist education. Rogers implored Astley to send him some books: 'little flowers of philosophy from your garden . . . for how sweet is their fragrance,' and he promised to return them unharmed.¹⁹ Astley replied in the same

exaggerated language, consoling his friend over his lack of books but nevertheless refusing the request. He had been compelled to leave most of his books behind at Cambridge; only one philosophical work now remained in his possession, and this he needed for his own use. He also made the practical point that books were likely to 'perish with too much water' during a sea voyage.²⁰

Astley received a far more pathetic letter from Matthias Tolnai, a Hungarian imprisoned by the Turks, begging him to obtain financial assistance from Thomas Browne to secure his release.²¹ Astley had only a lengthy religious exhortation to offer in reply: 'Happy are they who from the bitterness of their disasters know how to extract that panacea, the patience of Christ; who in this valley of tears have learned. . . to bear and support the cross of Christ.' After further comments in this vein, he had the grace to apologize for being too wordy; he pointed out, however, that Browne's own misfortunes had been such that he could give him no help, but promised that Tolnai's letter would be sent on to his parents in Hungary who might be able to raise the necessary funds.²² Whatever view one takes of these letters, they at least display tact and adroitness on Astley's part, but he did achieve a forbidding expertise in rhetoric of this kind. No doubt it was a professional requirement. Later he wrote a letter to the Earl of Northampton congratulating him on his release from prison. He proclaimed his thanks to God for this manifestation of his mercy, and added: 'So shall you stand as a rock against the most insolent and impetuous waves and shine as light in the midst of a crooked and profitless generation.'²³

Astley's character appears in a more amiable light from the comments of some of his other correspondents. Writing to Astley in August 1652, one says: 'Your courteous correspondence sweetens my exile, I had almost said banishes it.'²⁴ Another writes: 'I must truly say that I love you with all my heart, and hope you will give me leave to do so. That love makes me very inquisitive after your welfare.'²⁵ These remarks, and many like them in the letters of other correspondents indicate that Astley was a man endowed with an attractive personality and an unusual gift for friendship.

Such traits were to serve him well in the advancement of his career. Shortly before the Restoration Astley returned to England and once more obtained a place as chaplain to the Earl of Northampton.²⁶ He also established a friendship with Sir Jacob Astley, a young Norfolk gentleman who was head of the 'oldest and most important family of the county.'²⁷ When the latter visited him in London early in 1660, Astley treated him with great kindness.²⁸ Sir Jacob acknowledged him as his kinsman and procured for him the rectories of Foulsham and Themelthorpe in Norfolk.²⁹ The following year he married Sir Jacob and Blanche, eldest daughter of John Wodehouse, member of another old county family.³⁰ By this time Herbert Astley was thirty-eight years of age, and it is interesting to note the extent of his influence over Sir Jacob, who was eighteen years his junior. There survives the draft of a letter by Sir Jacob to Edward Reynolds, Bishop of Norwich, requesting Astley's appointment as an archdeacon written in Astley's own hand. The application was unsuccessful, but Astley was made prebendary of Norwich Cathedral in January 1663, a crown appointment which he doubtless owed to the influence of the Astleys.³¹

As a prebendary, he received a salary of £7/16s/8d yearly plus eight pence a day paid quarterly.³² He was given a house within the Cathedral Close; at the same time he continued to hold his two Norfolk rectories and kept another house at Foulsham.³³ Such pluralism was universal for clergymen in Astley's

position; he was merely fortunate that his livings, unlike those of several other prebendaries, were a short distance from Norwich.

At the Cathedral he became a member of a chapter or deanery employing about fifty people. With five other prebendaries he had the responsibility of helping the Dean supervise its personnel and property. Under their authority were minor canons, lay clerks, choristers, vergers and other officials and servants. The Chapter even paid for the training, weapons and other equipment of a company of militia. Each year certain of the prebendaries were chosen to exercise specific responsibilities in the conduct of Chapter business. During most of his service as prebendary, Astley occupied the posts of receiver general or of treasurer involved in the disbursement of money from and the receipt of funds due to the Chapter from its numerous properties and tenants.^{3 5}

His immediate superior, Dr. John Croftes, Dean of Norwich, had been an ardent Royalist. Expelled from the two Suffolk rectories for 'dangerous sermons' he broke into one of his churches and seized the tithes. On one occasion, he was said to have declared that 'Parliament would soon be tired of sitting if men were not such fools as to part with money to them.'^{3 6} He became a chaplain to Charles I and served him in this capacity during military operations in 1645.^{3 7} Later he suffered imprisonment for his loyalty to the King. He owed his appointment to the fact that his elder brother, Lord Croftes, was a personal friend of Charles and had been in exile with him.^{3 8} By temperament Croftes was a fighting man; it remains to be seen whether such a person was well suited to the quiet governance of an ecclesiastical community.

One of the greatest problems facing the Dean and Chapter was repair of the damage and neglect suffered by the Cathedral during the Civil War. The noted scholar and physician, Dr. Thomas Browne, a good friend of Herbert Astley, describes vividly the desecration committed by Puritan zealots, and another man reports that thieves stole so much lead from the Cathedral that the timber of the walls and arches was left exposed to the weather.^{3 9} In ten years following the Restoration the Chapter spent £2800 for the repair of the Cathedral and cloisters.^{4 0} Both Astley and Croftes were active in the work of renovation. In his *Reperitorium* Dr. Thomas Browne states that 'another fair, well tuned plain organ was set up by Dean Croftes and afterwards beautifully adorned by the care of my honoured friend, Dr. Herbert Astley.'^{4 1}

During these years there is considerable evidence of Astley's activities in letters written to him by his Dean. On 7 April 1663 Croftes sent a courteous letter from London thanking him for his help in some matter of church business. He asked that Astley and two other prebendaries accompany him to Yarmouth to present the Chapter's case against the Corporation in a dispute over the right to nominate a curate there and concluded: 'My love and respects to all our friends . . . in the Close.'^{4 2} Perhaps it was the prospect of a fight that put the Dean in good humour, for his letters usually contain signs of complaint and ill-temper.

In September 1663 he told Astley to have the window in the east end of the choir stopped up with glass: 'I protest that when the cold wind blew from the east and northeast in the winter season . . . it was only that which gave me deafness in my head which I shall never be rid of . . .' He ordered him to pay half a year's stipend to the beadsmen living in London, but added sternly: 'Tell them for the future they must come for it to Norwich or go without it.'^{4 3} Astley himself did not escape reproof. When he complained to Croftes about the expense of sending

an express letter to ask his decision on some issue, the latter replied that Astley ought to have used his discretion without consulting him, but the Dean's subsequent comments show that Astley would have run greater risk if he had dared act on his own initiative.⁴⁴

Because of his legal training Astley had frequent opportunity to exercise judicial responsibilities. Two judges of the Consistory Court of Norwich asked him to preside during their absence, and in their letters paid tribute to his prudence and ability.⁴⁵ He also served as justice of the peace for the precincts of the Cathedral and Close and on the Commission of the Peace for the county.⁴⁶ Churchmen acting in this capacity could easily give offence at a time when Laud's attempt to revive the power of the clergy in the courts and elsewhere was still fresh in people's memories. In the spring of 1666 Astley issued a warrant against the reputed father of a bastard. Unfortunately this man was a servant of Sir Robert Paston, one of the most influential gentlemen in Norfolk. Astley received word from another clergyman that his action had angered Sir Robert's wife who felt that he had not shown the respect to which the gentry was entitled from one of his profession. His friend reminded him of past feuds between the clergy and gentry and 'how great a flame from a small spark kindleth.'⁴⁷ Astley replied that the constable who made the complaint had told him that Lady Paston herself desired the issuance of the warrant and that she had 'detained his wages lest he should go away and not do the parish right, [marry the child's mother or engage to support the child]. In any case, he added, the Clerk of the Peace had told him he had no choice but to issue it.'⁴⁸

Though a man of equable temper, Astley must have suffered intense strain due to the conduct of John Croftes. In an undated document, probably written sometime in 1669, he and three other prebendaries drew up a list of seventeen charges against the Dean, very likely addressed to the Bishop of Norwich. He was accused of being a 'common swearer', even during divine service, and a brawler who fought with brewers and draymen. He struck a subsacrist in the presence of a large congregation and hit a watchman in the mouth, flinging him a coin as an inducement to fight with him. He threatened to strike the treasurer, a man of seventy-three years of age, with a staff and during the yearly audit, 'dragged and shut him out of the Chapter House'. He seized meadows belonging to the prebendaries, entered their pasture grounds and broke their farmers' tools. He even drove off one of their subtenants by threatening him with a bow and arrow. Croftes was also accused of compelling the sextons to shut the gates of the Close 'at unseasonable times' to the great inconvenience of the prebendaries and other inhabitants of the area. The seventeenth century was a tolerant age in such matters, but coarseness and violence on this scale went beyond permissible limits.

Astley and his colleagues further alleged that the Dean kept the Chapter book and other records without allowing the prebendaries to inspect them, received rents and fines without order from the receiver general and employed workmen without permission from the treasurer, actions that were contrary to the Cathedral statutes. They claimed that he refused to seal leases already agreed to by himself and the Chapter, and that he obstructed tenants in negotiations for the renewal of their leases. In addition, he caused much scandal by publicly declaring that all preaching ought to be stopped for a time.⁴⁹

There is evidence that Croftes had refused or delayed the renewal of some of the tenants' leases, and that both they and the prebendaries had considered his action unreasonable.⁵⁰ Yet the Dean's intention was probably to secure higher

rents and thereby recover losses suffered by his Chapter during the Civil War and Interregnum. Inevitably such conduct provoked resentment, but it doubtless served the interests of the Church better than the more lenient attitude of the prebendaries. After examining the dispute many years later, William Lloyd, Bishop of Norwich, wrote that while the protest of the prebendaries was plausible, in matters relating to the Chapter lands it turned 'the whole revenue of the church into a kind of fee farm' [a tenure where the land is held in perpetuity at a yearly rent], 'and then,' he added, 'fare well all hopes of future improvement.'⁵¹ Evidence also exists that the Dean had openly discouraged preaching, as Astley and the other prebendaries charged, but this too was understandable from a zealous high churchman when, in his own words, he recalled how 'the pulpit had been abused' by the Puritans.⁵²

In the summer of 1669 the prebendaries presented further complaints against Croftes to the Bishop of Norwich; the latter's reply makes clear his opinion that the Dean had behaved in a highhanded manner and violated the Cathedral statutes in several respects.⁵³ Croftes simply denied the existence of any dispute between himself and his prebendaries or even that the Bishop was entitled to intervene in the matter.⁵⁴ The conflict was ended by Croftes' death on 27 July 1670. Two days later Dr. Thomas Browne wrote to his son: 'Our Dean, after a languishing sickness of about two years, left this world early on Thursday morning,' and added that he 'died a good Christian and like the clergymen of old, leaving not much more than may pay all the world and pay for his burial which is this evening.'⁵⁵ It seems fairly certain, at any rate, that Croftes did not benefit from his alleged financial exactions and irregularities. The Chapter had to pay over £100 owing to him at the time of his death to the executor of his will.⁵⁶

According to Browne's letter, Croftes' prolonged illness gave numerous people, including several of the prebendaries a chance 'to make for his place.'⁵⁷ Some time before the Dean's death, Astley was in London striving hard for the expected vacancy, and so certain of it that he apparently told his friends he had gained an assurance of his appointment when Croftes died.⁵⁸ But he reckoned without the easy-going procrastination of Charles II in whose hands the final decision lay. On 31 July Astley wrote to his friend, John Hobart, from London: 'I gave you an account yesterday how the King had not yet declared his pleasure, so I shall attend [the court] a little longer, but I think the most prevalent interest is engaged for Dr. Womack [Archdeacon of Suffolk] . . . By your kindness and the extra diligence of your servant I did first start the hare, but so many follow upon the scent that I may lose in the crowd.'⁵⁹

Fortunately Astley had friends both in Norwich and London working on his behalf. One was John Hobart of Weybread, Suffolk, a lawyer, former M.P., and business agent or steward for Norwich Cathedral who was related to the Hobarts of Blickling, a leading family of Norfolk gentry.⁶⁰ Another was the Earl of Northampton, soon to be appointed to the Privy Council.⁶¹ Equally important was Northampton's younger brother, Dr. Henry Compton, a fast-rising churchman who became Bishop of London in 1675.⁶² Nevertheless, the issue remained in doubt for more than a month longer. On 20 August he wrote again to Hobart: 'Every delay to me looks like a denial. Which, the prognostics or the Sybil's prophecy must have the honour I cannot resolve,' but at the end of the letter he added that he had received word from the Lord Keeper that the King had made him Dean of Norwich that very day.⁶³

In April 1671, eight months after his appointment, Astley married Barbara, the only daughter of John Hobart of Weybread. By her he had two sons and a

daughter, all of whom died in childhood except the youngest, a son named Hobart. Of Barbara little is known.⁶⁴ She was thirty-three years of age at the time of her marriage to Astley and the few hints we have concerning her personality suggest that she was a domineering, sharp tongued woman who may have hen-pecked her husband. An anonymous verifier described her in unflattering terms:

From a brazen face and a Beatrice boldsome [Shakespeare's caustic heroine in 'As You Like It.']

A bouncing Virago, nor honest nor wholesome
Cries, when it won't do, away fool to Foulsham⁶⁵

Perhaps Barbara inherited her disposition from Mary Hobart, her mother, who had been convicted of manslaughter about ten years earlier. She and a male servant had beaten a girl in her employ so severely that she had died from the injuries. John Hobart and she petitioned the King for a pardon on the grounds that she had been convicted on false testimony.⁶⁶ The outcome of the petition is unknown, but soon thereafter she ran away from her husband. Though they were subsequently reconciled, their marriage never appears to have been a happy one.⁶⁷

Whatever tensions Astley may have experienced as a married man, he was an excellent choice as Dean, and his promotion must have been a welcome change to those who had dealings with the Cathedral. Unlike his predecessor, he was a sane and conciliatory man, well trained by past experience for the responsibilities of his office. Immediately he was saddled with an arduous task by the Archbishop of Canterbury who asked him to submit an account of money spent and received by the Dean and Chapter since the Restoration. The Archbishop was especially anxious that Astley set down the sums expended for worthy purposes such as rebuilding the Cathedral, for charity and for the redemption of captives enslaved by the Turks. His purpose in this enquiry, he wrote, was to answer those who look upon the clergy with 'an evil eye,' and 'charge us with having much and doing little good. . .'⁶⁸

With the assistance of his prebendaries Astley had the report ready in two weeks' time; then his attention turned to other matters.⁶⁹ He decided that excessive sums were being spent by the Chapter on the private houses of some of the clergy and ordered the treasurer not to pay bills submitted by their workmen unless they were signed by those living in the houses. He directed that material but not labour was to be paid for, that glass was not to be counted as a material, and that the cost of painting should also not be borne by the treasury. The imposition of these economies — that must have been less than welcome to his subordinates — did not cause Astley to neglect improvements which enhanced his own dignity and that of the Cathedral. He ordered a coping and curtain to be set up at the Dean's stall and a curtain at the Vice-Dean's, 'all of which are to be of purpose and set after the manner as it is at the Highminster Abbey Church' [no doubt Westminster Abbey].⁷⁰ In the midst of this strenuous round of activity, came the annual audit of the Chapter accounts. We have the Dean's wine bill on that occasion: it included twenty quarts of claret, ten quarts and a half pint of sack, five pints of Rhenish wine and fourteen of claret costing £2/19s./2d.⁷¹

One of the most exacting tasks which fell to the responsibility of any chapter was that of administering a large estate in land and other property. The Deanery of Norwich leased numerous manors, rectories and farms. Most of this property was in the county of Norfolk and included a Medieval foundation, the Normans hospital in Norwich.⁷² Among the tenants of the Chapter were prominent people

like the Chamberlain of the city of Norwich who had a house in the Cathedral Close. Astley's kinsman, Sir Jacob Astley leased the manor and rectory of Hindolveston eighteen miles from Norwich, his father-in-law, John Hobart, the rectory of St. Giles, Norwich.⁷³ Under the Cathedral statutes Astley, as a newly appointed dean, was required during his first year to travel personally to the 'distant manors' and other properties of the Chapter. Thereafter he or one of the prebendaries had to undertake this responsibility every year. He was to inspect the woods, manors, and the churches belonging to them. Following this inspection it was his duty to see that those individuals who had cut down trees or failed to carry out repairs in violation of their covenants, were admonished to fulfill their agreements. At the same time, with his steward and receiver, he was to attend the courts on lands belonging to the Deanery. There he supervised the collection of rents and profits due to it, settled disputes between tenants, and imposed fines on those delinquent in the performance of their obligations.⁷⁴ During these journeys Astley and his fellow officials were doubtless suitably housed and fed by members of the local gentry, especially when these landholders happened to be lessees of the Chapter.⁷⁵

Even when Astley was not engaged in such travels, he found himself frequently involved in the adjudication of controversies. One of the crying grievances of the Church since the Reformation was the existence of lay impropriations, where the tithes that had once supported the parish priest were transferred to a landlord who paid him a stipend which was usually only a small fraction of the original tithes. Many of the lessees or tenants who held lands from the Chapter were lay impropriators, and Astley had to listen to grievances of clergymen who were compelled to live on these meagre stipends. Thomas Warren, rector of Winesham, sent him an eloquent letter in June, 1671. He said that in addition to his rectory, he had taken on the nearby parsonage of Henley because the entire parish had requested him to do so. They had no church of their own and therefore asked that they might be joined with Winesham since his church was nearest to them. 'With a kind of willing unwillingness' he wrote, he had accepted the offer, but only after he had been assured by the Dean and Chapter that the stipend attached to the living would be continued.

Now however, the lay impropriator who leased the parsonage from the Chapter, refused to pay the stipend claiming that he had received a letter from Astley's treasurer commanding him not to do so because the rector had not properly fulfilled his duties. 'Really, Sir,' Warren protested, 'I was amazed at his words' '... If any pitiful person says that the cure has been neglected by me, I dare appeal to the whole parish, and if one single person will affirm such a neglect, let me then abide your sharpest . . . censure.' He claimed that he had omitted none of the duties of a clergyman and had carried them out even when compelled to travel during stormy weather in the depths of winter. In reply Astley told him that he had sent his treasurer to confer with him and the lessee, and that on the treasurer's return he was sure a just settlement of the matter would be reached.⁷⁶ Whether the Dean's optimism was justified is unknown, for there is no further reference to the dispute.

Sometimes Astley was obliged to help settle differences between a lessee of the Chapter and one of the municipal authorities of the county. On 9 December 1671, the Bailiffs of Yarmouth informed him that Mrs. Gostling who held a lease of the parsonage of Yarmouth had failed to carry out her agreement with the Corporation to pay money due to it and to perform certain repairs in the parish church, so that the steeple was likely to be ruined by decay of the arches

of the middle aisle. They requested his assistance in order that they might avoid taking the matter to court.⁷⁷ In his reply Astley asked 'whether so considerable and worthy a corporation would wish to make use of its power against a poor widow,' but then crossed out this line and merely stated that he had secured her agreement to his proposal that the dispute be submitted to arbitrators. 'Sirs,' he concluded, 'I cannot doubt of the ingenuity of your Corporation's actions . . . but that they will readily embrace such a reasonable and easy method of settling this affair.'⁷⁸

The lot of a mediator is a thankless one; he also received a letter from a kinsman of Mrs. Gostling who was a joint lessee of the parsonage. He roundly denied the accusation of the officials and suggested that Astley was taking the Corporation's side: 'Sir, do not encourage them against us, for they are ready enough of themselves to take all advantages.'⁷⁹ Again, we do not know how the matter was settled, but the lady in question continued to trouble the Deanery. In June 1677 Astley and his fellow prebendaries agreed to take Mrs. Gostling to court if she did not pay her arrears in rent before the next audit, and the following year the Chapter was still demanding £16 from her in unpaid rent. The record states that the demand was made on 29 September at the west gate of the Cathedral and 'was continued until the sun was set.'⁸⁰

Astley could be forceful in his dealings with a delinquent tenant. John Duvall, who leased the manor of Fring in Norfolk from the Chapter, had been £5 in arrears of rent for many years. In October 1678 Astley wrote to him: '. . . I cannot but put you in mind of discharging what is due unto the Dean and Chapter of that manor. Sir, we have treated you with all civil respect, but have been put off with your privileges and other delays. You promised if you could not otherwise satisfy yourself to come to a trial by consent; however, after so many kind intimations, you cannot blame us if we proceed in the obtaining of our right, as prudence and the justice of our cause shall require.' When the tenant continued to evade payment, the Dean had his lawyer, John Rolfe, put pressure on him. Rolfe informed Astley in May 1681 that he was prosecuting Duvall vigorously 'who threatens to do my business and makes great bluster, but his wife, the Countess, is become much more mild and says, "'tis a due debt and must be paid.'⁸¹

In the solution of most problems Astley made every effort to avoid an uncompromising line, but occasionally he showed himself capable of making a firm stand. Shortly after the Restoration, the Bishop of Norwich had obtained the King's approval in the appointment of a man named Mylles as Chancellor of the diocese who had once been an adherent of the Roundhead cause, and had served Parliament as a prosecuting attorney. John Croftes and his Chapter refused to confirm the royal patent for Mylles' appointment. Astley adopted the same view on becoming Dean. When Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington, Secretary of State, inquired as to the reason for the Chapter's refusal, Astley replied that several eminent people had advised against it, and that when Mylles had asked him to justify his action: 'I told him that his hand had been in blood, having condemned to death divers of the King's friends.'⁸² Although Arlington told Astley that 'the Gospel as well as the law bids us forgive and forget,' and the Chapter's refusal was described as 'a very high strain of arbitrary power,' there is no indication that he and the prebendaries altered their position.⁸³

Clashes with authority were exceptional incidents in the life of a busy clerical administrator. Far more common were the routine problems of keeping a large ecclesiastical establishment in working order. Especially important were the tasks of construction and repair. In April 1671 Astley wrote to John Hobart

about his plans for rebuilding the west entrance of the Cathedral. Evidently people of Puritan inclinations had expressed criticism of Astley's concern for tradition in the matter of architectural construction. 'Having considered further since I last saw you,' he said, 'I am more confirmed in not admitting globes which will be like the entrance to a gentleman's house, and I am not much taken with emblems, especially upon bogging at crosses, as not thinking the Cathedral the fittest place for Roundheads. I am plainly for the old way and am resolved they be as like the former as the strength of the pillars will bear, which may easily be restored to their pristine firmness, and if we must . . . make use of good husbandry, it shall be somewhere else than in front of the Cathedral.'⁸⁴ Several years later he had a new bell weighing six hundred and thirty-two pounds delivered to the Cathedral by Edward Tooke, a Norwich bell founder. It was to be installed in place of the third or middle bell in the steeple and cost £32.⁸⁵ A bell only fifty pounds heavier would now cost more than £1300 in London.⁸⁶

Another difficulty was that of preserving order and decorum within the Cathedral. Three years before Astley became Dean, a Nonconformist was imprisoned for disturbing the preacher during his sermon. He refused to procure his release by promising good behaviour in the future because, as he declared in court, he 'did not know what the spirit would move him to.'⁸⁷ Several years later Astley had to order the justices of the peace for the Cathedral precincts to arrest people causing noise and disorder during divine service.⁸⁸ Possibly some of these were Nonconformists as well. Norfolk had long been known for the number of its Puritan and Roundhead sympathizers. The presence of such people in Norwich was encouraged by the lenient policies of Bishop Reynolds after the Restoration, with the result that the city became known as a place of 'comforts and shelter' for Nonconformists who suffered persecution elsewhere.⁸⁹ In 1678 a justice of the peace reported that a Norwich tailor had declared that Cromwell was better bred than the King of England, and in the same year a group of Nonconformists were accused of threatening the life of Reynolds' successor, Anthony Sparrow, Bishop of Norwich.⁹⁰

Astley also had to deal with misconduct of the clergy and laymen under his charge in the Cathedral. He admonished a petty canon and an organ blower for drunkenness. A porter was reprimanded for disobedience to one of the prebendaries. In April 1672 John Coales, a subsacrist, was called before the Dean and Chapter because he had been convicted of adultery with one Ursula Coleman. Astley warned him 'to carry himself more chastely for the future upon pain of expulsion.' Six years later he admonished the same man again, this time for negligence in the execution of his office, for profanity, for insolence in knocking off the lock of a cathedral seat belonging to the prebendaries and for other misdemeanors. When reprimanded by the Dean, Coales made no attempt to deny his action, 'but at the same time behaved himself rudely without any sense of his fault.' Considering the man's present conduct and past record, his punishments seems excessively mild; Astley merely gave him 'a second penal admonition.'⁹¹

Absenteeism on the part of his prebendaries was a frequent problem faced by Astley and one that sometimes impeded the conduct of important business by the Chapter. Under the Cathedral statutes the Dean and prebendaries were required to be resident four months a year, but this rule worked an injustice in some instances. Prebendaries with livings nearby could come to Norwich at little charge while those dwelling at a greater distance found the journey costly and suffered hardship by having to be away from their livings so long. During their period of residence, however, they were allowed to be absent from the

Cathedral for three days a week; on the other four they only had to be present once a day. By various means, they were able to evade even these restrictions, so one is not surprised to read the statement that the keeping of residence by the prebendaries 'hath been very loose.'⁹²

A petition to the King from the prebendaries in the summer of 1674 resulted in an alteration of the statutes that required them, under stricter penalties, to live in residence two months a year without interruption, and each was to perform his duties personally, not in place of one another.⁹³ In theory this reform ought to have brought about an improvement, but it was still permissible to secure absence on grounds of 'unavoidable duty,' and by appealing to the good nature of the Dean.⁹⁴ One of the prebendaries, John Sharp, who held a living in London, sent Astley a charming letter in which he begged to be excused from attending a chapter meeting to elect a proctor to the Convocation of Canterbury. Pointing out that another prebendary was to be let off for sickness, he protested that 'it is not either the trouble or the charge that I value one farthing, but the being absent in the time of Lent when the Bishop of London is to hold a confirmation in my parish. This is that which makes me uneasy. We can easily respite our election a fortnight longer. If the Convocation meets at all, they can do nothing for a good while. Bur Sir, do not laugh at my politics . . . your goodness and perpetual kind usage of me has made me thus bold to you. I would not have written to you after this manner but that I am extremely well acquainted with the obligingness of your temper.'⁹⁵ The result of Sharp's letter is unknown, but the problem of absenteeism continued. Less than two months before his death Astley had to postpone an important matter because there were not enough prebendaries at a chapter meeting.⁹⁶

A dispute involving members of his own family must have caused him considerable embarrassment. In the autumn of 1673 Owen Hughes, Commissary of Norfolk, an important official of the diocese, ordered the removal of a gallery above the chancel in the church of St. George Tombland in Norwich because it blocked the light to the communion table.⁹⁷ Here we find an echo of the religious dissension that plagued Norwich during the Commonwealth. Independents, it was said, took over the church, demolished the ornaments in the chancel, and erected the gallery to admit those 'who flocked from all parts of the city to hear such preaching.'⁹⁸

One of the churchwardens, William Weston, refused to carry out the order. When summoned to appear before the Commissary, he declared that 'he would not pull down the gallery, let us do what we could . . .' Hughes therefore excommunicated him. Weston apologized for his rude words and begged to have the penalty removed, but he still refused to take down the gallery. Instead, he obtained from the Chancellor of the diocese permission that it might remain, since it afforded the only space available for numerous people who wished to use the church. The case then went to the Court of Arches, and while its outcome is unknown the whole episode probably left an aftermath of bitter feeling between Hughes and Weston.⁹⁹

In December of 1676 Hughes informed John Hobart that he had seen a paper of which Hobart was said to be the author containing lies about himself, especially in the matter of a Mrs. Chamberlain. He charged that the paper was being spread abroad by Hobart's 'creature,' William Weston, and that his daughter, Barbara Astley was discussing it at her own table. Hobart replied by demanding that Hughes send him the paper in question, and Barbara also wrote in an angry letter.

'Sir,' she declared, 'what I have said at my own table concerning chaste Mrs. Chamberlain (as you truly term her) I am ready to justify. Make what use of it you please, and if you hear the report spread more abroad than formerly, thank your own imprudence that occasions me to it which, til now, I have been over much your friend in concealing, not only to the world, but to my own husband and father out of tenderness to your reputation and unwilling to give your enemies that advantage against you, but since you think to increase the number of them, I shall submit to your judgement.'¹⁰⁰ Again, we do not know the outcome of this dispute, but it is significant that there is no record of any action or comment about it by Astley. Doubtless he had the wisdom to keep well clear of his wife's disputes.

Barbara's quarrel with Owen Hughes may be revealing in another respect. Hughes mentioned in one of his letters that the 'false and scurrilous paper', which he accused John Hobart of writing, consisted of verses.¹⁰¹ Very likely therefore the lampoon with uncomplimentary references to Barbara Astley was composed by Hughes or someone in his employ. Entitled 'A Litany to be sung in Three Parts'; it was a parody of the Litany in the Anglican service with the verses ending in 'Libera nos domine.'¹⁰² Each was an attack on Hobart, his daughter or her husband. Revenge would have been all the sweeter if it took a form similar to that which provoked it.

Barbara may have been a virago, but there is no evidence that Hebert Astley was not a contented husband. He dedicated to her an undated poem with these words:

Arabia Felix, So thou are to me
 The eastern wealth is trash compared to thee
 Matchless Virtue, honour and true love
 Thy refined soul dwells here but lives above
 The Arabian bird inspire, thy precious name
 shall yield as sweet perfume as bright a flame
 And when the Almighty shall thy ashes raise
 Thou'lt shine a glorious star unto his praise
 Let's both be travelers then, and in our way
 Shake off whatever shall engage our stay
 farewell unquiet world, we find it best
 to follow him who gives eternal rest.¹⁰³

Astley's duties required him to travel frequently to London, on business relating to the Chapter or to attend meetings of Convocation which assembled at the same time as Parliament. During these visits he sent back to John Hobart newsworthy information. In May 1675 he reported that he had attended the House of Commons when proposals were made for the impeachment of the Lord Treasurer, Danby, and for the dismissal of Lauderdale on the grounds that he intended to raise military forces in Scotland 'with a power to march them into England and elsewhere they shall conduce to his Majesty's service.' But Astley was only interested in these issues as they affected the affairs of his own county, where an election was being held. Ever the peacemaker, he declared: 'I shall be very much troubled if this election produce any unkindness in our country [county], and I do not think anything can be offered in this matter [the questions under debate in the Commons] which will countervail the hazard of losing that tranquility and good understanding that hath long time continued amongst us.'¹⁰⁴ The following year he went to London to preach the Lenten sermon before the King. On 17 March 1676 John Evelyn reported

that on this occasion Astley had attacked Beza and Calvin for saying that Jesus 'despaired on the cross but that he was as far pressed as could consist with the dignity of his nature, united as it was with Diety.'¹⁰⁵

When it became clear late in 1675 that Bishop Reynolds did not have much longer to live, Astley wrote to Henry Compton, Bishop of London, concerning the succession to the see of Norwich, and it is evident from Compton's reply that Astley had expressed some hope that he himself might be chosen to fill the vacancy. Compton, however, was compelled to disappoint him: 'I think the King has already pitched upon a very worthy person,' but added kindly: 'It may be you can guess whom I would have had, might I have been the first mover.'¹⁰⁶ When Reynolds died in July 1676, the man chosen to succeed him was Anthony Sparrow, Bishop of Exeter.

Astley's correspondence contains much that reflects the varying responsibilities and obligations of an ecclesiastical official. At the same time it also reveals engaging aspects of his own character. More than once his skills as a mediator were called upon by those who had quarrels with his powerful kinsmen, Sir Jacob Astley and Sir John Hobart of Blickling.¹⁰⁷ Humphrey Babington, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, wrote to him on behalf of a student named William Herbert whom he wished to place as a minor canon in Norwich Cathedral. As a prospective member of the choir, the quality of the boy's voice was a prime consideration. 'His base,' Babington said, 'is good and sweet for this time (for he is but young), and it will mend by his practice every day.' He appealed to Astley's compassion by mentioning that the student's father refused to maintain him in the college any longer, so he was forced to seek immediate employment.¹⁰⁸ Babington's appeal did not go unanswered. A few months later he thanked Astley for his 'great care of and kindness to Mr. Herbert.'¹⁰⁹ In August 1674 Astley received a letter from his friend and patron, the Bishop of London complaining of a dog he had sent him as a gift. It seems that the poor animal was unable to hunt and incapable of learning. He thanked Astley for his good intentions but asked him to procure another dog that was 'good at the sport.'¹¹⁰

Though Astley's correspondence may suggest that the clergy in this period were excessively concerned with property transactions, place-hunting, patronage and ecclesiastical politics of various kinds, an establishment such as Norwich Cathedral did perform some benevolent functions. The Chapter disbursed funds to augment the livings of poor vicars and curates; it also maintained six poor men or beadsmen who were employed to help clean the Cathedral and ring the bells.¹¹¹ Some were ex-military men like Jeffrey Balduc, who was appointed beadsman in March 1670 because of his 'great suffering' and the fact that he had lost his arm in the King's service.¹¹² A document survives setting down several small benefactions: 2s for poor travellers, 1s for an old man, 4s for the boarding out of an apprentice who was the son of a widow living in the Close, £1 to a poor woman so that her son could be 'cut for the stone [gall stones].'¹¹³ The yearly amount or exact proportion of its income the Chapter gave to charity is unknown, but there is certainly no evidence of any outpouring of money for this purpose.

On the other hand, we do have indications of a compassionate concern for the problems of ordinary people. A clergyman in King's Lynn requested Astley's advice about a maid servant of seventeen who wished to be baptized. Although she had fulfilled the requirement of learning the Creed, her intelligence was so low that she was almost unable to understand it. 'She seemeth so sensible of her

own weakness of capacity,' he added, 'but it is accompanied with an extraordinary bashfulness which cannot be removed by the most mild and gentle methods I could make use of.' In reply Astley directed him to baptize her according to the office for infant baptism.¹¹⁴

The narrowness and intolerance of the ecclesiastical establishment is also revealed in Astley's correspondence. Early in 1680 he brought from London orders by William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, instructing the Bishop of Norwich, to take action against Robert Conold, a clergyman, who had written a book which stated that a Mohammedan might not go to hell.¹¹⁵ Under threat of deprivation of his living, he was compelled to retract this 'scandalous' statement. As the poor man himself said, his offence lay in the fact that he would not condemn Mohommedans to 'eternal tortures for no other crime than an unhappy choice which they were powerless to prevent.'¹¹⁶

By the autumn of 1680 Astley who was now fifty-eight years of age, had become increasingly subject to illness; in addition he suffered great personal anxiety because of accusations brought against his wife early the following year. On 15 April 1681 he informed one of the prebendaries, John Sharp, that a man named Vernon had circulated a report which Astley described as 'a transcendant piece of malice,' claiming that Barbara had beaten a young servant so badly that he died shortly afterwards. According to Astley, the truth was that the boy had stolen money from John Hobart, and that Barbara had sent him home to his father 'without any correction or any ill words' [he crossed the last three words]. The boy then fell sick and died in his father's house after several days. A coroner's jury, he added, had declared that the death had resulted from disease and from no other cause.¹¹⁷ It is curious, nevertheless, that Barbara Astley should have been accused of the same crime as her mother twenty years earlier.

Two weeks later Sir Thomas Browne informed his son, Edward, that Astley was suffering from 'a lingering ague and aguish distemper.' Nevertheless, Browne said, the Dean carried on with his duties. He had preached at the Cathedral on the previous Sunday. Presumably on Browne's orders, Astley took the cortex [certain barks used for medicinal purposes], but his illness returned. Despite the deteriorating condition of his health, he went to London to attend Convocation accompanied by his wife and young son. About the middle of May he returned again bringing his friend, Sir Thomas Browne 'the medal of Cosmos, Duke of Florence,' which according to Browne, was 'a good one, but the inscription on the reverse side being altered in the word "vilen" for "vites" make it somewhat obscure.'¹¹⁸

After his return from London Astley's health became rapidly worse. For several months his appetite and digestion had been poor.¹¹⁹ on 8 June he died, probably at his rectory of Foulsham, twelve miles from Norwich. The Chapter Book entry for this date records that he had been Dean for ten years and nine months.¹²⁰ The following day Sir John Hobart informed Astley's father-in-law, who was then living at the Deanery of the death of 'that worthy good man, the Dean,' and added, 'We have endeavoured as much as possible to comfort his disconsolate widow who, I hope, will show herself upon this sad occasion, a good Christian as well as a most affectionate wife.'¹²¹

Astley was survived by his wife, by his five year old son, Hobart, and by his father and mother-in-law, John and Mary Hobart. When John Hobart died in the autumn of 1683 at the age of seventy-seven, he made his daughter, Barbara, executrix of his estate, and gave her all of his considerable properties in Norfolk

and Suffolk. His married son was left with nothing but £15 and a little personal property. His wife received £50 a year income from one of his estates.^{1 2 2} With some reason the anonymous writer already quoted called John Hobart 'an old bitter traitor [he had served in Parliament during the Interregnum] feasted with strife . . . That kisses his daughter instead of his wife.'^{1 2 3}

At any rate, this parental favouritism made Barbara a prosperous widow, and she used her resources to carry on Astley's work of restoring and decorating the west front of the Cathedral. When she died in March 1692, she bequeathed £100 for this purpose as well as other money to purchase property for the Deanery of Norwich. In her will she asked that her body be interred in her husband's grave near the tomb of her noted ancestor, Sir James Hobart, Attorney General and Privy Councillor to Henry VIII. She also left £80 for the erection of a monument to her husband and herself 'as near to Sir James Hobart as it can be placed with conveniency.'^{1 2 4} The inscription thereon described her as a woman of 'utmost piety, prudence and singular humanity.'^{1 2 5} Her son, Hobart, married in June 1694 but died twenty-four years later without heirs.^{1 2 6}

Any assessment of Herbert Astley is bound to be favourable. He enjoyed almost universal respect and liking among his associates. One is impressed by the many letters to him expressing friendship or gratitude for favours. They also show him to have been a man of local importance and influence through his connection with important families of gentry. As an official of the Church, he was an industrious and capable administrator, though perhaps too lenient in matters of discipline.

Whether he was sufficiently rigorous in his dealings with some of the lessees of the Chapter may also be doubted. Christopher Hill generally endorses the contemporary opinion that bishops, deans and chapters 'were easy-going landlords, at least towards their tenants from the aristocracy and gentry . . . with whom they had every reason to wish to maintain a relationship of friendly patronage.'^{1 2 7} The conduct of Astley's Chapter seems to have been in conformity with this policy. In the autumn of 1670 he submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury an account showing that the Chapter had received £6206 in fines for renewals of leases since the Restoration, but that in that period it had given £6000 in 'abatements to tenants in their fines of what might have been taken.'^{1 2 8} Evidence concerning Astley's conduct in relation to tenants is not clear, but it is unlikely that a man of his temperament would have been stern in his treatment of lessees like Sir Jacob Astley and Sir John Hobart, important members of the local gentry who were also his kinsmen. It seems even less likely that he dealt harshly with his father-in-law, John Hobart, who assisted him in the business of the Chapter.

Herbert Astley does not appear to have been an exciting personality, but excitement was probably a condition his subordinates were well content to forgo after their experience with John Croftes. His correspondence conveys the impression of a patient, kindly unruffled character. These qualities, combined with great tact, enabled him to handle skilfully the numerous disputes with which he had to deal. On the other hand, he was probably not a person of outstanding ability. Our malicious versifier suggests Astley's limitations when he calls him

A Dunstable [plain, downright] Dean beneath degree
That can neither pray nor prohesy
And yet he would be at a Bishop's see^{1 2 9}

Though a cultured man, he did not possess scholarly attainments like Edward

Reynolds and Anthony Sparrow, the two Bishops under whom he served.^{1 3 0} Nor did he have the forceful personality of John Sharp, his successor as Dean of Norwich who later became Archbishop of York and chief ecclesiastical advisor of Queen Anne. One can scarcely imagine Astley challenging the authority of his Bishop by forbidding excommunications from the episcopal court of Norwich to be read in the Cathedral, as Sharp did less than a year after Astley's death because, he said, the Bishop had no jurisdiction there or 'over any of its members except as visitor only.'^{1 3 1} Above all, it is difficult to conceive of Astley, like his successor, preaching a strongly anti-Catholic sermon after James II came to the throne.^{1 3 2}

In a quiet way Astley was an ambitious man, willing and able to seize opportunities for advancement. Probably he felt disappointment at his failure to secure a bishopric, but in fact, he was best qualified to fill the position he actually achieved — head of a cathedral chapter. The county historian, Francis Blomefield, called him 'a generous, public minded and most civil man,' but the truest comment came from his old friend, Sir Thomas Browne, who described him as 'a man of good comfortable spirit.'^{1 3 3}

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¹ Francis Blomefield, *A History of Norfolk* (1806), 4, 1096.

² Blomefield, 3, 623-4. Astley's tomb slab is now under the arch of the north arcade of the Cathedral immediately west of the pulpit. The inscription is completely worn away, but the slab can be identified by the arms of the priory impaling Astley at the head of the slab. I am grateful to Mr. Arthur B. Whittingham for this information.

³ *Devon Record Office*, register of St. Andrew's parish, Plymouth. *Bodleian Library*, MS Tanner, 95 f. 121.

⁴ *D.R.O.*, records of the Corporation of Plymouth. Herbert Astley is said to have been descended from William Astley of Cley near Melton Constable, who served under Sir Francis Drake. *Visitations of Norfolk*, 1664 (A. W. Hughes Clark ed.), (1933), 6.

⁵ *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (J. and J. A. Venn ed.) 1, 45.

⁶ Possibly Astley obtained this appointment with the assistance of his kinsman, the noted Royalist Commander Sir Jacob Astley, son of Isaac Astley of Melton Constable. Sir Jacob was appointed governor of Plymouth in 1638. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1, 677-8.

⁷ MS. Tanner 286, f. 103.

⁸ MS. Tanner 286, f. 87.

⁹ *D.N.B.*, 569-70. See also: Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, (1888) book 9.

¹⁰ *Bodleian Library*, MS. Clarendon MS Tanner 13, ff. 245-7.

¹¹ Grenville and his son went to Italy in April 1646; they returned to France the following year and made a secret journey to England. *British Library* E 33 (18), MS Tanner 51, f. 181. Sir Richard who had deserted Parliament in 1644, and would have been hanged if caught, escaped detection. *D.N.B.*, 8, 2. His son was said to have been executed for 'robbing passengers on the highway to relieve his necessity.' *Cornwall County Record Office*, Enys papers. MS D.D. En 2133.

¹² See the letter of John Rogers to Astley, written in July 1646, addressed to 'his most worthy friend. Mr. Astley, theologian at the . . . family of Mr. Brown, most worthy merchant in Tunis . . .' MS Tanner 115, f. 86. I have been unable to discover the date and plate of Astley's ordination.

¹³ Astley received a D.C.L. on 15 September 1651. *Department of Ancient Archives* University of Padua. MS 74, ff. 69-70. John Sancroft, later Archbishop of Canterbury, also attended the University of Padua during the Interregnum. Walter G. Simon, *The Restoration Episcopate* (1965), 24.

¹⁴ MS Tanner 285, ff. 147, 165, 177.

¹⁵ The reason for Astley's failure to take the post is not stated in the records of the Company, but another clergyman, who came to Aleppo shortly before Astley, was rejected by the Council of the Company because he would not accept the annual stipend of 400 dollars. John B. Pearson, *Chaplains to the Levant Company*, (1883), 15.

¹⁶ See the letter of John Spencer, librarian of Sion College, to Astley 11 September 1656 MS Tanner 52, f. 163. Sion College, which formerly was located in Aldermanbury in the City, now stands on the Victoria Embankment.

¹⁷ The clergyman in question was undoubtedly Nathaniel Hill, vicar of Renhold, Bedfordshire who was chaplain to the Levant Company at Aleppo from 1650 to August 1654 a few months before Astley's arrival

there. *Walker Revised* (A. G. Matthews ed.) (1948), Pearson, p. 56. I have been unable to discover exactly when Astley held Hill's living but it is interesting that a devoted Anglican Royalist like Astley was prepared to take the place of an ejected Anglican clergyman during this period. However, the Puritan system of worship was sufficiently moderate that many episcopally minded clergymen were able to accommodate themselves to it. Claire Cross, *The Church in England 1646-1660. The Interregnum. The Quest for Settlement 1646-1660* (G. E. Aylmer ed.), (1972), 106 ff. In his recently published book on the Restoration Church, I. M. Green has pointed out that many of those, like Astley, who were subsequently given ecclesiastical appointments at the outset of Charles II's reign 'lacked a record of consistent loyalty to king and church.' Some had conformed to Puritan practices, others had been sequestered but had later conformed in order to obtain some clerical post during the Interregnum. I. M. Greene, *The Re-establishment of the Church of England, 1660-1663*, Oxford, 1978, 69. On Astley's appointment to Northampton's household, see the letter of Henry Riley to him 22 December 1656, MS Tanner 115, f. 28.

¹⁸ See the letter describing the 'unparalleled oppressions' suffered by Englishmen in Tunis and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. *Public Record Office State Paper*, 97/17, ff. 72, 94.

¹⁹ MS Tanner 115, f. 86.

²⁰ MS Tanner 115, f. 86.

²¹ MS Tanner 115, f. 52.

²² MS Tanner 285, f. 182. Browne redeemed numerous English prisoners from captivity in the hands of the Turks; he later complained to the English government that 'Besides the hazards of this person he lost a very considerable estate.' P.R.O. S.P. 7/26, f. 37. *Dorset Record Office*, 7582. On Browne's career see J. P. Ferris, 'Two Brothers in Barbary.' *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, 30, 164-171.

²³ MS Tanner 285, f. 162.

²⁴ MS Tanner 285, f. 113.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 115, f. 82.

²⁶ In a letter of 17 January 1660 Herbert's kinsman, Sir Isaac Astley, eldest son of Sir Jacob Astley, Baron of Reading, addresses a letter to him at the Earl of Northampton's house. MS Tanner 285, f. 158.

²⁷ Walter Rye, *Norfolk Families* (1913), 8. When Charles II landed in England in May 1660, he appointed Sir Jacob his standard bearer, then knighted and made him baronet the following month. At this time Sir Jacob Astley was nineteen years of age. *Norfolk Archaeology* xxi (1921), 24-25.

²⁸ Sir Jacob Astley's letter of 8 August 1660 thanks Astley for several obligations and civilities received from him while he was in London. MS Tanner 285, f. 140.

²⁹ Blomefield says that Sir Isaac Astley of Maidstone, Kent also helped procure him these positions, but since Sir Isaac lived in Kent, it was probably Sir Jacob Astley who had the decisive influence in the appointments. Blomefield, 3, 624.

³⁰ Blomefield, 11, 558.

³¹ MS Tanner 285, f. 157. *Norfolk Record Office*, Norwich, Dean and Cathedral Chapter Book 3, f. 42.

³² Blomefield, 4, 556.

³³ A friend writing to Astley in May 1669 addressed this letter to the Reverend Dr. Astley at his house in Foulsham. MS Tanner 286, f. 25.

³⁴ MS Tanner 134, f. 196.

³⁵ There are references to Astley's appointment to and activities in these offices. *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3*, ff. 42, 71. His accounts as receiver general during various years. MS Tanner 134, ff. 12, 174, 187, 192.

³⁶ Walker, 332.

³⁷ *British Library* E299 (3), Walker, 332.

³⁸ Blomefield, 3, 623. He was Gentleman of the Bedchamber from 1661 until his death in 1672. *G.E.C., The Complete Pierage*, 3, London, 1913, 544.

³⁹ *Works of Sir Thomas Browne* (Geoffrey Keynes ed.) 3, (1964), 140. *P.R.O. S.P. 29/49*, f. 7.

⁴⁰ MS Tanner 134, f. 139.

⁴¹ Browne, 3, 140.

⁴² MS Tanner 134, f. 171.

⁴³ MS Tanner 134, f. 101.

⁴⁴ MS Tanner 133, f. 141.

⁴⁵ MS Tanner 46, f. 162. MS Tanner 41, f. 164.

⁴⁶ *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3*, ff. 46, 69.

⁴⁷ MS Tanner 285, f. 184.

⁴⁸ MS Tanner 285, f. 184. The draft of Astley's reply is contained in the same sheets as the preceding letter.

⁴⁹ MS Tanner 133, f. 50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 133, f. 58. *Ibid.* 134, f. 154b. *P.R.O. S.P. 29/49* f. 7.

⁵¹ MS Tanner 33 f. 65. Croftes' conduct towards tenants was not consistently harsh. A later document shows that during his tenure as Dean the Chapter frequently granted deductions in fines exacted for the renewal of leases. *Ibid.*, 134, f. 139. Leniency towards tenants seems to have been a long standing policy in the diocese. Richard Montague, Bishop of Norwich, 1638-41, stated that the impoverishment of his see

was largely due to his predecessors' practice of granting long leases and exchanges of land. *D.N.B.*, 13, 716.

⁵²*P.R.O.* S.P. 29/49 f. 7.

⁵³*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Liber Miscellanorum, 4, ff. 24-5.

⁵⁴MS Tanner 134, f. 75.

⁵⁵Browne 5, 49.

⁵⁶MS Tanner 134, f. 167. Croftes' correspondence makes clear his concern to cut expenditure in the administration of the Chapter. Another evidence of his care in financial matters is the statement that the Dean and Chapter had agreed that £500 of Sir Jacob Astley's fine for the renewal of his lease for the rectory of Hindolveston should 'not be divided [between the Dean and prebendaries] as other fines used to be, but shall be expended about the reparations of the Cathedral Church.' *N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book 3, f. 41. Christopher Hill states that 'Ecclesiastical landlords failed to take economic rents. Heavy entry fines were more to their liking which enriched them personally at the expense of their successors who got lower rent.' Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (1956), 7. If it was Croftes' insistence that money from this source be used for constructive purposes, such a change of policy might have provoked as much resentment among the prebendaries as his alleged swearing and violence.

⁵⁷Browne, 5, 49.

⁵⁸On 7 July 1670, twenty days before Croftes' death, the Earl of Northampton acknowledged a letter from Astley with news 'of the change in your condition', which clearly meant promotion to the Deanship of Norwich. MS Tanner 46, f. 56.

⁵⁹MS Tanner 285, f. 178.

⁶⁰*Visitation of Norwich in the year 1563* (G. H. Dashwood and others eds., 2, (1985), 70-1. John T. Evans, *Seventeenth Century Norwich, Politics, Religion and Government 1620-1690* Oxford, 1979, 206, 208-10, 217-19, 221.

⁶¹*The Complete Peerage G.E.C.* 9, 681.

⁶²*D.N.B.* 4, 899.

⁶³MS Tanner 314, f. 1. Astley's warrant dated 20 August 1670 *P.R.O.* S.P. 44/35b, f. 9b.

⁶⁴*Norfolk Record Society*, 27, (1956), 61.

⁶⁵MS Tanner 95, f. 21.

⁶⁶*P.R.O.* S.P. 29/34, ff. 41, 41b.

⁶⁷The individual who achieved the reconciliation was a cousin of Hobart's wife, Sir Justinian Lewyn, a noted lawyer and judge. MS Tanner 115, f. 156. MS Tanner 115, f. 15.

⁶⁸*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book Liber Miscellanorum 2, f. 287.

⁶⁹*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book Liber Miscellanorum 2, f. 296.

⁷⁰*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book 3, f. 100. Chapter Book Liber Miscellanorum 2, f. 308.

⁷¹MS Tanner 133, f. 109.

⁷²Rents from the manors of Amners, Pockthorpe, Thornham and Worstead which had 165 tenants yielded an income of £1105/6s/3d in 1672. *N.R.O.* D.C.C. Liber Miscellanorum 2, ff. 316-322. Blomefield, 4, 556-562.

⁷³MS Tanner 133, ff. 1, 2. *N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book 3, f. 65.

⁷⁴Blomefield 4, 566-7.

⁷⁵A good description of such tours of the Deanery of Winchester Cathedral after the Restoration is given in Florence Remington Goodman, *Reverend Landlords and their Tenants* (1930), 28-32.

⁷⁶Warren's letter and a draft of Astley's reply at the bottom appear in the same manuscript folio. MS Tanner 134, f. 231.

⁷⁷MS Tanner 134, f. 38.

⁷⁸MS Tanner 134, f. 76.

⁷⁹MS Tanner 134, f. 77.

⁸⁰*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Chapter Book Liber Miscellanorum 2, f. 384. D.C.C. Book 3, f. 143.

⁸¹*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Chapter Book Miscellanorum 2, ff. 336-40, 370.

⁸²*P.R.O.* S.P. 29/334 f. 143 I - II. MS Tanner 133, f. 127. That Bishop Reynolds should have nominated such a man may be explained by the fact that Reynolds himself had been 'a moderate conformist' during the Commonwealth. Robert S. Boshier, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement* (1951), 27.

⁸³MS Tanner 133, f. 127.

⁸⁴MS Tanner 285, f. 165.

⁸⁵MS Tanner 134, f. 174.

⁸⁶This estimate was given to me by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry Whitechapel Road, London E.1.

⁸⁷MS Tanner 134, f. 125.

⁸⁸MS Tanner 133, f. 182.

⁸⁹D. Neal, *History of the Puritans* (London 1754), 2, 57.

⁹⁰*P.R.O.* S.P. 29/401, f. 35. S.P. 29/405, f. 123.

⁹¹*N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book 3, ff. 106, 113, 148-9.

⁹²*P.R.O.* S.P. Book 3, f. 125.

⁹³*P.R.O.* S.P. 44/35b, f. 32. *N.R.O.* D.C.C. Book 3, ff. 126-7.

- ⁹⁴ *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3, f. 125.*
- ⁹⁵ MS Tanner 134, f. 194.
- ⁹⁶ *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3, f. 164.*
- ⁹⁷ *L.P.L. Court of Arches Process Book, D1097, ff. 3-4.*
- ⁹⁸ John A. Browne, *History of Congregationalism in Norfolk and Suffolk*, (1887), 257-8. R. W. Ketton-Cremer, *Norfolk in the Civil War, A Portrait of a Society in Conflict* (1970), 257.
- ⁹⁹ *L.P.L., Court of Arches Process Book D1097, ff. 1-15.*
- ¹⁰⁰ Copies of the correspondence between John Hobart, his daughter, and Owen Hughes are written on a single sheet of paper in Hobart's hand. MS Tanner 286, f. 27.
- ¹⁰¹ MS Tanner 286, f. 27.
- ¹⁰² MS Tanner 95, f. 121.
- ¹⁰³ MS Tanner 306, f. 412.
- ¹⁰⁴ MS Tanner 285, f. 153. This election and the division in Norfolk between the Court party and 'Country' opposition after the Restoration are discussed by J. R. Jones in 'The First Whig Party in Norfolk' *Durham University Journal*, 46 (December 1953), 13-27 and 'Restoration Election Petitions: (March 1961), 53. Astley's kinsman, Sir John Hobart of Blickling became a leading member of the 'Country', and later the Whig party in the reign of Charles II. Like Astley's father-in-law, John Hobart of Weybread, Sir John had served in Parliament under Oliver Cromwell. These facts again suggest that Astley adhered to a moderate, temporizing position in both religious and political matters. He was friendly with Henry Compton, Bishop of London, an orthodox churchman and with his brother, the Earl of Northampton, a loyal adherent of the court. He also had a close association with Sir John Hobart of Blickling, an opponent of the court and a man of Puritan sympathies in the past. On Sir John Hobart's career *Norfolk Archaeology*, 27 (1941), 359-77, *passim*. See also Evans, *Seventeenth Century Norwich*, 208n., 224n., 255, 257-8, 260, 268, 270.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Diary of John Evelyn* (E. S. Beer ed.), (1955), 4, 86.
- ¹⁰⁶ MS Tanner 42, f. 210.
- ¹⁰⁷ MS Tanner 286, ff. 10, 96.
- ¹⁰⁸ MS Tanner 285, f. 91.
- ¹⁰⁹ MS Tanner 285, f. 193.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹¹ MS Tanner 134, f. 139.
- ¹¹² *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3, f. 121.*
- ¹¹³ MS Tanner 134, f. 158.
- ¹¹⁴ *N.R.O. D.C.C. Liber Miscellanorum 2, ff. 350-4.*
- ¹¹⁵ MS Tanner 37, ff. 184, 191.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 1.
- ¹¹⁷ MS Tanner 133, f. 10.
- ¹¹⁸ Browne, 6, 219-220.
- ¹¹⁹ Browne, 6, 225.
- ¹²⁰ *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3, f. 165.*
- ¹²¹ MS Tanner 36, f. 39.
- ¹²² *P.R.O. Probate 11/375/114.*
- ¹²³ MS Tanner 95, f. 121.
- ¹²⁴ *P.R.O. Probate 11/409/61.* Astley's widow also gave £10 to a charity for the widows of clergymen and certain plate to the Rural Deanery of Humbleyard. *Norfolk Archaeology*, 17, (1910), 181.
- ¹²⁵ Blomefield, 3, 624.
- ¹²⁶ *Visitations of Norfolk*, 2, 118.
- ¹²⁷ Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (1956), 6, 7-8, 35-8.
- ¹²⁸ MS Tanner 134, f. 139. One must remember, however, that these figures were part of a statement written on instructions from the Archbishop of Canterbury to demonstrate the benevolence of the clergy.
- ¹²⁹ MS Tanner 95, f. 121.
- ¹³⁰ One of Astley's correspondents was Robert Littlebury, a London book seller, who sometimes sent him information about newly published works. In February 1666 he informed him of a book just published which attacked the unorthodox medical opinions of Marchamont Needham, a noted Puritan writer and publicist. MS Tanner 115, f. 146. Some years earlier we find John Spencer, librarian of Sion College, sending him news that he had great hopes of acquiring the works of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, for Sion College library. MS Tanner 52, f. 163. Both Reynolds and Sparrow were theological writers of some note. *D.N.B.*, 16, 927. *D.N.B.*, 18, 721-722.
- ¹³¹ *N.R.O. D.C.C. Book 3, f. 172.*
- ¹³² John Miller, *James II, A Study in Kingship* (1978), 154.
- ¹³³ Blomefield, 3, 624. Browne, 6, 225. Two reminders of Herbert Astley today are his name in the list of Deans on the wall of Norwich Cathedral and the Astley coat of arms above the fireplace in the Dean's lodge.