

# WILLIAM DE AMYAS AND THE COMMUNITY OF NOTTINGHAM, 1308-50

by

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In the first 40 years of the 14th century Nottingham was close to the heart of national affairs. Edward III's seizure of Roger Mortimer from Nottingham castle in 1330, one of the best-known highlights in the town's history, underlines the crucial strategic and political importance of both the town and castle to the government of the day. It was also the dramatic climax to 20 years' struggle between the burgesses of the town and the constable of the castle for the liberties of the borough, which was finally settled in Nottingham's favour by the charter of 1330.<sup>1</sup> The permanent backcloth to the events of these years was the Scottish wars of independence, and Edward II's inability to defend the northern parts of his kingdom from Scots' raids. This in its turn was a consequence of his deficiencies as a ruler and the state of near and actual civil war which existed in England from 1310 to 1330.

Soon after his accession to the throne in 1307 Edward spent a week in Nottingham castle and ordered that two new chambers be built.<sup>2</sup> On this occasion Edward was accompanied by Thomas earl of Lancaster, later his chief rival. Dr. Madicott has shown that the bulk of Lancaster's lands lay in south Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, and it was within this area that his chief castles of Pontefract, Tutbury, Donnington, Leicester and Melbourne were situated.<sup>3</sup> Of greater immediate significance was Edward's replacement of the constables of the more important royal castles by his trusted knights. Nottingham castle, along with the keepership of Sherwood Forest, was granted to John de Seagrave,<sup>4</sup> and the acrimony which grew up between Seagrave and the burgesses of the town shaped profoundly both Nottingham's development as a borough, and the relationship between the government and the town. Thus Nottingham castle was a royalist outpost in a predominantly Lancastrian area, and the activities of its constable ensured that the townspeople, if not actually Lancastrian in sympathy, were anti-government and connived at the social disorder which was one of the characteristics of the period. This habit of lawlessness far outlasted Edward II's death in 1326, and remained a problem to the government down to and beyond 1350. Professor Stones and Dr. Bellamy<sup>5</sup> have worked on two of the most famous of the gangs which roamed the north Midlands after 1326, the Folville and the Coterel gangs, and have shown clearly that in each case the principals belonged to that class which a later generation would have described as gentry, and that their immunity from arrest and successful prosecution depended upon the support of their neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup>The 1330 charter is printed in *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* (referred to hereafter as *R.B.N.*), 1, pp. 102-7.

<sup>2</sup>R. A. Brown, H. M. Colvin, A. J. Taylor, *History of the King's Works*, 11, p. 761.

<sup>3</sup>J. R. Madicott, *Thomas of Lancaster* (1970), ch. 1, pp. 8-39.

<sup>4</sup>*Calendar of Patent Rolls* (referred to hereafter as *C.P.R.*) 1307-13, pp. 73, 206.

<sup>5</sup>E. L. G. Stones, 'The Folvilles of Ashby Folville, Leicestershire and their associates in crime, 1326-1347', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser. vii, (1957), 117-36. J. G. Bellamy, 'The Coterel Gang: an anatomy of a band of 14th century Criminals', *E.H.R.*, LXXIX (1964), 698-717.

This social anarchy was not merely the result of political events; of equal, and perhaps of greater, significance was the creation of bands of vagabonds and outlaws in Sherwood and other forests<sup>1</sup> as a direct result of the Scots' raids and the famine of the years 1315-16.

Although no Scottish raid ever penetrated as far as Sherwood, the effects of the wars were felt in Nottinghamshire. These raids were often timed to coincide with the harvest, and, as Dr. Scammell has shown,<sup>2</sup> were designed to secure the maximum return in money and supplies for the Scots, and the maximum damage to the English. From 1314 the fear of invasion dominated the lives of everyone north of the Humber. Although it suffered less than Northumberland and Durham, Yorkshire was not immune from attack. In 1319 an army of 'hobelars',<sup>3</sup> under the Earl of Moray, slipped past Edward II and his army at Berwick, and came through Swaledale towards York, where it met and defeated an army raised by the mayor of York at Myton.<sup>4</sup> In July 1322 the Scots, this time led by Bruce, burned Preston and Lancaster. As a reprisal Edward II led an army into Scotland as far as Edinburgh, but was forced to retreat without meeting a Scottish army or taking any booty. The result was another Scots' raid in September of that year, which narrowly missed capturing Edward at Northallerton, and then crossed the Wolds to Beverley, reiving as it went.<sup>5</sup> Professor Miller has stated that in 1319 40 villages in the West Riding were too ravaged to pay taxes, and that in 1322 120 villages in the North Riding came into the same category.<sup>6</sup> As the North grew steadily more impoverished, the burden of supplying the English armies, and victualling the towns of Berwick and Newcastle fell increasingly heavily on the Midland counties. The crown's main agent for this task in Nottinghamshire was John de Seagrave. The difficulties which the latter encountered trying to victual his own castle, and levy men and supplies to support an unpopular government accounts very largely for the conflict between the town and the castle.

The floods and famine of the years 1315-16 were part of a European-wide phenomenon, but the effects on Nottingham can be traced easily, and the results far outlasted the immediate impact. According to an eye-witness, John de Trokelowe,<sup>7</sup> it began to rain on 11th May 1315 and did not stop throughout the summer and autumn. The Trent overflowed its banks and caused severe damage to the roads and bridges in the area, as well as ensuring that crops could not be gathered. In England as a whole the grain crops failed almost entirely. Trokelowe states that such wheat as could be gathered was of very poor quality, and that a 4d. loaf was not sufficient to supply a man's daily needs.<sup>8</sup> To make matters worse there had been a series of bad harvests prior to 1315, and this, combined with the government's demands for supplies, pushed up grain prices from 1313. Thorold Rogers has calculated that in this year the average price of wheat was 4s. 0d. a quarter (approximately 4½ cwt). This figure compares very well with that calculated by Dr. Pelham for the price of wheat purveyed in Lincoln for the 1301 parliament.<sup>9</sup> By the late spring of 1315

<sup>1</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 691-2.

<sup>2</sup>J. Scammell, 'Robert I and the North of England', *E.H.R.*, LXXIII (1958), 385-403.

<sup>3</sup>'Hobelars' were basically mounted infantry, a technique of fighting which proved very effective against the French in 1345. The best account of the Scottish Wars is G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, (1965).

<sup>4</sup>See Barrow, *op. cit.* <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* <sup>6</sup>E. Miller, *The War in the North*, (1960), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>H. S. Lucas, 'The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316, 1317', *Speculum*, V, (1930), 343-77.

<sup>8</sup>Lucas, *op. cit.*, 355, quoting Johannes de Trokelowe, *Annales, Rolls Series*, (1866), pp. 92-4.

<sup>9</sup>R. A. Pelham, 'The Provisioning of the Lincoln Parliament of 1301', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, III, (1951-2), 20.

wheat was selling at 20s. 0d. a quarter, and by midsummer the price had risen to 40s. 0d.<sup>1</sup> Some idea of what this price rise must have meant to the Nottinghamshire peasant can be gained from the wage evidence printed in the *Victoria County History*.<sup>2</sup> In Gringley about 1297 a free tenant's ploughing was reckoned at 3d. a day, and villein's at 2d. both also received four loaves of bread a day. At Wheatley in Edward II's reign the use of an eight-ox plough was reckoned to be worth 8d. a day, and the ploughing of an acre worth 1s. 0d. The impact of this catastrophic price rise upon the ordinary people is very well described in the *Nottingham Date Book*:<sup>3</sup>

Nottingham, at this time, along with the rest of the kingdom was grievously affected with famine . . . . children were stolen and converted into food, and prisoners newly brought into jails, were, in several instances, torn to pieces by the previous inmates, and eaten half alive . . . .

This graphic entry is not entirely inaccurate, and certainly the effects were beyond the control of any government of the period. Even the King had difficulty getting food for his court at St. Albans in the autumn of that year.<sup>4</sup> To most people the famine and the disease which followed were attributable only to God's wrath. This was followed by a murrain on sheep and cattle. It is probably not overmuch of an exaggeration to assert that in this year Nottinghamshire, an overwhelmingly agricultural county, suffered something approaching complete economic catastrophe. On the other hand, recovery seems to have been extraordinarily rapid, and the worst appears to have been over by 1317.

The physical damage caused by the flooding in the Trent valley took much longer to eradicate. In 1317 Kegworth and Claypole bridges were under repair, and the building of Hethebeth bridge and the causeway from the town to it, undertaken by Alice le Palmer in 1311, had to be begun again. Special provision was made for Alice's maintenance while she undertook this charitable task.<sup>5</sup> The prospect of new floods clearly caused severe worry. As early as February 1316 a royal commission was issued to survey the bridges and causeways on the King's highways, and also the banks of the rivers flowing into the lower Trent, and if need be arrange for the beds to be scoured.<sup>6</sup> John de Seagrave further damaged his reputation in 1317 by cutting trenches and dykes through the King's meadows at Nottingham, thereby flooding Wilford Meadows and threatening the village.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the precariousness of life for the ordinary man in these years, there were also a few men who were in a position to profit from these circumstances, and turn others' misfortunes to their own financial advantage. Among these was William de Amyas, or de Mexborough as he was called with equal impartiality down to 1327, who was one of Nottingham's leading merchants, and was mayor four times, in 1316-17, 1324-25, 1328-29 and 1333-34.<sup>8</sup> He is probably remembered now only as the founder of the Amyas chantry in St. Mary's Church in Nottingham.

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<sup>1</sup>Lucas, *op. cit.*, 351.    <sup>2</sup>*V.C.H. Notts.*, 11, p. 271.    <sup>3</sup>*Nottingham Date Book* 850-1884, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Lucas, *op. cit.*, 351.

<sup>5</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 316, 394, 430, 511; *C.P.R.*, 1317-21, pp. 1, 150; *C.P.R.*, 1321-4, pp. 49, 129; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, (hereafter *C.C.R.*), 1313-17, p. 449.

<sup>6</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 430-1, There was also some attempt to strengthen the banks of the River Trent. In 1346 John Sutton of Averham, and others broke the palings strengthening the banks, and made trenches and ditches, which lowered the summer level of the river and prevented navigation. See *C.P.R.*, 1345-8, p. 237.

<sup>7</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 430-1; *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, 1307-49, p. 840.

<sup>8</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, pp. 423-4.

The records which survive are not sufficient to give any personal impression of Amyas, and even his public transactions must be assembled from hints rather than detailed and exact evidence. Insofar as he was more successful than most of his contemporaries William de Amyas cannot be regarded as a typical representative of his class. Little is known about the merchant class in towns such as Nottingham, and it is therefore not possible to compare Amyas with his contemporaries in other boroughs. He was not in the same financial league as the de la Pole family of Kingston upon Hull, but by 1327 he was Nottingham's second citizen, and undoubtedly one of the wealthier English merchants. In the subsidy assessment of that year, rated by Parliament at one-twentieth of all moveables, he was assessed at 40s. 0d. for his possessions in Nottingham, and 7s. 0d. for those in Watnall. Although Walter de Lincoln had a higher assessment,<sup>1</sup> Amyas' was twice that of his nearest competitor John le Colier. One of the most fascinating things about Amyas is that he was an incomer to the town, who had made his fortune by 1327, but whose children disappear from the *Borough Records* as suddenly as he appeared. Unlike Ralph Bugge a century earlier he failed to establish his family among the county gentry.

William de Amyas, as his other *alias* suggests, was a Yorkshireman, and was in all probability related to the Amyas family of the city of York, who appear regularly in the city records of the period as ship owners and merchants,<sup>2</sup> and whose descendants were settled at Horbury, Sandal and York two centuries later.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that William first came to Nottingham as their agent. At any rate, by 1311 when his name first appears in a Nottingham deed he was well established in the town. His marriage to Margery, daughter of John and Alice le Palmer,<sup>4</sup> emphasises further his acceptability to the ruling burgesses of the town, and his social standing within the community by this date. William de Amyas' assets were that he was a shipowner, corn and wool dealer, and it was on this secure foundation that he was able to build up his fortune, and later become a rural banker and money lender. In fairness it must be pointed out that credit transactions were a normal part of a merchant's business, but, as will be shown, Amyas' lending was of a very different order.<sup>5</sup>

In the years around 1300 Nottingham's most widely acclaimed product was its leatherware. A list from about this date mentions that Nottingham was famous for its *boves*,<sup>6</sup> and an undated deed, of about a similar date, contains one of the earliest mentions of tanning on Leenside.<sup>7</sup> The only other major industry was cloth making, which Nottingham had been granted as a monopoly earlier in the 13th century.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that this trade was in decline, since it is rarely mentioned as a trade in Nottingham deeds of the 14th century. On the other hand, in an agreement between the Borough of Nottingham and the prior of Lenton Priory, Nottingham mercers and cloth-merchants were assigned booths at Lenton Fair.<sup>9</sup> However, it would appear that the bulk of Nottingham's outward trade was in

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<sup>1</sup>Public Record Office, E/179/159.

<sup>2</sup>See *C.P.R.*, also 'Yorkshire Fines', ed. M. Roper, *Yorks. Arch. Soc. Rec. Series*, CXXVII, (1965), 318, 338.

<sup>3</sup>*Testamenta Eboracensia*, V, *Surtees Society*, LXXIX, (1884), 17-8.

<sup>4</sup>John le Palmer was mayor of Nottingham in 1302-3, and 1311-12.

<sup>5</sup>See below, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup>C. Bonnier, 'A List of English Towns in the Fourteenth Century', *E.H.R.*, XVI, (1901), 501-3. I am grateful to Dr. R. L. Storey for drawing my attention to this.

<sup>7</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, p. 369.   <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.   <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

agricultural produce and wool. Nottinghamshire wool was of medium quality, and in 1337 was rated for purveyance at  $8\frac{1}{2}$  marks the sack for the best quality, while the finest wool from elsewhere was rated up to 12 marks the sack.<sup>1</sup>

The main downstream trade routes from Nottingham are fairly easy to trace in Edward II's reign. Much of the produce required by the crown was shipped either to York, or out through the port of Hull to Newcastle and Berwick. In the particular case of the wool trade Boston and Hull appear to have been used by Nottingham merchants with equal frequency. Produce appears to have been brought overland to Nottingham from Derby and elsewhere, to avoid the shallows and rapids in the river between Sawley and Wilford. From Nottingham it was carried to a wharf east of Trent Bridge, hence the desirability of a causeway, and from there dispatched downstream. In very dry weather, and possibly every summer, produce had to be loaded at Colwick<sup>2</sup> to avoid the rapids. For wool going to Boston there appear to have been two major routes: either downstream to Newark, where it was loaded onto carts or packs, then overland through Claypole and Sleaford; or, alternatively, along the Trent as far as Torksey, then along the Fosse Navigation to Lincoln, and down the River Witham. There is some doubt about the navigability of the Fosse in this period. In 1304 the sheriff of Lincoln was asked to send four tuns of wine from Torksey to Lincoln, and his claim for expenses included the cost of loading the wine onto carts, and carriage by road to the city.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, there is a report of piracy in August 1316 on a ship going from Doncaster to Boston *via* the Humber.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in December 1319 the route through Lincoln and Torksey was taken by two boats going from Cambridge to York.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Preston has suggested that the ambiguity of evidence may reflect seasonal fluctuations in level,<sup>6</sup> but what is certain is that this route became increasingly difficult and was not possible by 1335.<sup>7</sup> Trade with Hull and York was almost entirely river-borne, since the unsettled state of the country north of Nottingham added to the normal difficulties and greater expense of road transport through Sherwood Forest and Hatfield Chase. In short, the Trent was the only reasonably safe communication route between the Midlands and the north in this period. In May 1315 one of Amyas' boats was hired to carry grain and the subsidy collected in Nottinghamshire to York.<sup>8</sup> It was not completely safe. In 1322, the year of the battle of Boroughbridge, Lancastrian rebels operating from the Isle of Axholme were able to block the river and dislocate trade,<sup>9</sup> and two years later a special commission was appointed to ensure that all obstructions, such as chains and piles, which blocked the river were removed.<sup>10</sup> Nottingham merchants were placed in a very favourable position for this trade. They were exempt from tolls on the river as far as the Humber,<sup>11</sup> and the position upstream was secured by agreements with

<sup>1</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1334-8, p. 481.

<sup>2</sup>This was a source of friction between the burgesses and the lord of Colwick, which was usually settled by agreements, most of which are enrolled. See *R.B.N.*, 1, p. 108-15. Also *C.P.R.*, 1313-17, p. 430-1.

<sup>3</sup>Preston, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, p. 585.

<sup>5</sup>W. W. Rouse Ball, 'A Christmas Journey in 1319', *Cambridge Papers*, (1918), ch. 9.

<sup>6</sup>See footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1334-8, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup>*C.C.R.*, 1313-7, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1321-4, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1324-7, pp. 74-5.

<sup>11</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, p. 11. The burgesses were exempt from tolls at Torksey, and this was confirmed in 1342. See *op. cit.*, p. 139.

Lenton Priory and the borough of Derby.<sup>1</sup> William de Amyas, and the other Nottingham shipowners, possessed a virtual stranglehold over the trade of Nottinghamshire, and parts of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and north Warwickshire.

There is no way of assessing the total volume or value of the river trade. Much of it must have been then, as later, of a purely local nature. However, the wool exports of Nottinghamshire merchants can be traced from the port books and customs accounts of Boston and Hull,<sup>2</sup> while a certain amount of information about the purveyance and carriage of grain from Nottingham to York and the north can be culled from some of the surviving accounts<sup>3</sup> and related documents. In 1308 the counties of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire were required to supply 300 quarters of wheat, 200 quarters of barley malt, 300 quarters of oats and 200 hogs for provisioning Berwick.<sup>4</sup> At least some of this went astray since in 1310 a commission was issued to enquire which of the merchants had supplied the Scots with arms and victuals<sup>5</sup> since the previous August. Later in the same year Nottinghamshire was again required to supply food.<sup>6</sup> This trade was very regular, and William de Amyas was in effect a government contractor. On the other hand, payment was irregular and the cause of complaint. In an undated petition William de Amyas requested that he be paid for the carriage of provisions to the north parts.<sup>7</sup> It was not only as a carrier that Amyas could make a good profit. He possessed warehouses and therefore could store up grain for sale. In 1317 Seagrave bought wheat from him for provisioning Nottingham castle for the visit of the King and council for their meeting with Thomas of Lancaster.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, grain was purchased from Amyas for the 1336 Great Council, which also met in Nottingham.<sup>9</sup> By 1316 he was the possessor of at least three ships. In each case they are described as *navis*, which implies a large sea-going vessel rather than a barge for river-trade.<sup>10</sup> In 1327, with one of his fellow burgesses, Hugh Dammeson, he was granted a year's protection for carriage of victuals to Newcastle.<sup>11</sup> Some idea of the cost of river transport can be gained from a complaint of 1316, in which Robert de le See stated that he hired one of Amyas' ships for two days to carry grain from Adbolton to Gainsborough, and that the cost of hire was 20s. 0d.<sup>12</sup> Later in the same document it is stated that the cost of hiring a boat to go from Nottingham to York was 40s. 0d., and a reasonable inference would be that the journey would take four days.

It is, however, in the famine year of 1315-16 that one must suspect that William de Amyas' fortune took its most dramatic leap forward. There is no direct evidence, so the point must remain a conjecture. However, in 1316 William de Amyas was one of the merchants licensed to go to France to bring back grain for the counties of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire,<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>*P.R.O.*, Exchequer Enrolled Accounts, Customs (E 356) concerned with totals, see also *C.C.R.*, 1313-17, p. 500. For accounts of the customs system see E. M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, *England's Export Trade, 1275-1547*, (1963), and R. L. Baker, *The English Customs System 1307-1343*, (1961).

<sup>3</sup>*P.R.O.*, E 101/16/36; E 101/25/18; E 101/580/1-35; E 101/25/8.

<sup>4</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1307-13, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 321, also *P.R.O.*, S.C. 1/29/15.

<sup>7</sup>*P.R.O.*, Ancient Petitions 6323.

<sup>8</sup>*C.C.R.*, 1313-7, p. 513, contains the order.

<sup>9</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1334-8, p. 362, contains the order.

<sup>10</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1327-30, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup>See footnote 10.

<sup>13</sup>*C.C.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 368-9.

a happy coincidence of public utility and private profit. Even without thinking the worst of the man, that he hoarded corn and speculated in possible price rises, it is very difficult to see how he could have avoided doing very well. There are a series of licences on the Patent Rolls to York merchants permitting them to go to Nottinghamshire and buy corn,<sup>1</sup> and Amyas was the obvious agent. It is therefore not surprising that it was in 1316 that his pre-eminence was acknowledged by his fellow burgesses and he was elected mayor. It is also from this date that Amyas appears as a moneylender and land investor. Finally in 1318 he was summoned to a parliament, as one of four Nottinghamshire merchants.

It must also be pointed out that William de Amyas' financial success depended upon his neutrality in the conflict between the burgesses and John de Seagrave. The story has been told in part elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> but there are some additional points to be made. John de Seagrave appears to have been a singularly grasping and tyrannical constable, one might almost say the archetypal sheriff of Nottingham. Robert de Pierrepont was dismissed from the office of verderer in Sherwood Forest on the grounds that he had not sufficient income,<sup>3</sup> and Seagrave managed to secure the outlawry of Robert Jorz of Burton Joyce on the grounds that he had illegally hunted in the royal forest. Jorz and his family were closely related to many of the burgesses and he was protected by them.<sup>4</sup> As stated earlier, the Clifton lands in Wilford were threatened by Seagrave's activities,<sup>5</sup> and his method of levying corn and wheat for purveyance was a constant theme of complaints against him.<sup>6</sup> His conflict with the town was basically over the right of the town to have its own gaol, and imprison those who committed offences within its bounds. The matter came to a head after the murder of the mayor, Walter de Thornton, in 1313.<sup>7</sup> It was a premeditated act. The culprit, Roger le Orfevre, was imprisoned in the castle, and the burgesses attempted to rescue him. They entered the castle through a passage, overpowered the guard, and committed various other outrages. The results were that Roger le Orfevre was still in prison in 1315, when he was bailed pending the first assize, and a commission of enquiry was issued which re-affirmed the borough's gaol rights, which were once again embodied in the charter of 1314.<sup>8</sup> In April 1315 some of the burgesses rang the common bell of the town, laid siege to the castle for eight days, and would not allow any soldiers or supplies in or out.<sup>9</sup> Later in the same year the Nottinghamshire levy proved more than usually reluctant to go to war, and in fact bribed its captains to be allowed to return home.<sup>10</sup> Seagrave's activities were finally the subject of a commission of enquiry in 1317, but the outcome is not known.<sup>11</sup>

In 1328 the liberties of the borough came under attack once more. The immediate cause, according to the *Nottingham Date Book*, was a violent affray between the townspeople and some of the French soldiers quartered in the north of the town.<sup>12</sup> There was considerable slaughter.<sup>13</sup> The borough charter was suspended, and for the next two years the officers

<sup>1</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 373, 379-80, 383, 540.

<sup>2</sup>*V.C.H. Notts.*, 11, pp. 328-9.

<sup>3</sup>*C.C.R.*, 1313-17, p. 351.

<sup>4</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, p. 316.

<sup>5</sup>See footnote 7; p. 70.

<sup>6</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 308, 311, 685; *C.C.R.*, 1313-17, p. 460.

<sup>7</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, pp. 62-3; *C.C.R.*, 1313-17, p. 141.

<sup>8</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, pp. 77-81. The borough paid a fine of 200 marks for this charter.

<sup>9</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1313-17, p. 314.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>11</sup>See footnote 6.

<sup>12-13</sup>*Nottingham Date Book* 850-1884, pp. 49-50.

of the borough were nominated by Mortimer and Queen Isabella. It was during this period that Amyas served his third term as mayor. Queen Isabella, in her role of lord of the manor of Mansfield, attempted to build up the privileges of that town, as a counterweight to Nottingham.<sup>1</sup> However, in 1329 the whole position of the borough of Nottingham was put before the Justices on Eyre, who were empowered among other things to enquire into liberties.<sup>2</sup> In September 1329 Hugh de Stapleford and John de Driffild were commissioned to survey Nottingham castle, and prepare the Great Hall of sessions for the Justices Itinerant.<sup>3</sup> Very little is known at present about this session,<sup>4</sup> but one of the more important results was the restoration of the borough charter of Edward I, with two changes.<sup>5</sup> The mayor was to be elected from the burgesses by the burgesses, and instead of two bailiffs being appointed from each of the two boroughs within Nottingham, they were to be chosen from among the most sufficient in the town. There was a petition from the burgesses requesting this alteration on the grounds of the poverty of one of the boroughs. Unfortunately, it does not specify which<sup>6</sup>. The effect of this charter, as Professor Owen pointed out 20 years ago, was to give legal blessing to the system whereby the election of the borough officers became vested in the hands of a very few people,<sup>7</sup> and it also hastened the decline of legal differences between the English and French boroughs, although certain aspects of borough English lasted many years longer. The conflict between the town and the castle was very largely solved after Mortimer's capture in 1330. William de Eland of Algarthorpe, the architect of this *coup d'état*, was granted the keepership of the castle and the forest.<sup>8</sup> He was a local man and thereafter it was usual for the constable of Nottingham castle to be chosen from among the local gentry.

The evidence of William de Amyas' activities as a wool merchant before 1330 is very slight, but thereafter proof is more definite. In 1321 a commission of Oyer and Terminer was issued to John de Charleton, mayor of the staple, to enquire into the theft and embezzlement of money and wool<sup>9</sup> throughout England, but particularly in the east Midlands. Amyas' name is mentioned, but no successful prosecution can be found. In 1336 he attended the Great Council which met at Nottingham, and which agreed to grant Edward III 30,000 sacks of wool.<sup>10</sup> In practice the merchants lent Edward £200,000 against the security of this wool. A scale of wool prices for purveyance was drawn up and commissioners appointed in each shrievalty to levy the wool.<sup>11</sup> William de Amyas was one of the four appointed for Nottinghamshire.<sup>12</sup> His participation in the Dordrecht scheme, as it is known, was not altogether successful. Most of the commissioners made up their quota partly from purveyed wool, and partly from their own resources. William de Amyas

<sup>1</sup>*Nottingham Date Book* 850-1884, pp. 49-50; see also W. H. Groves, *History of Mansfield* (1894), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>*P.R.O.*, Just. It. 1/684.

<sup>3</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1327-30, p. 441.

<sup>4</sup>*P.R.O.*, Just. It. 1/682-8.

<sup>5</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, pp. 102-7.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 107-9, see also *C.P.R.*, 1327-30, p. 522.

<sup>7</sup>L. V. D. Owen, 'The Borough of Nottingham, 1284-1485', *Trans. Thoroton Soc.*, L, (1946), 28.

<sup>8</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1330-4, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1317-21, pp. 498, 529.

<sup>10</sup>For a complete account of these proceedings see 'The estate of Merchants, 1336-1365', in *Finances and Trade under Edward III*, ed. G. A. Unwin, also E. B. Fryde, 'Edward III's War Finance 1337-41, Transactions in Wool and Credit Operations', ch. 11, unpublished Oxford D. Phil, Thesis (1947).

<sup>11</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1334-8, p. 481. <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*



contributed 118 sacks 36 stones and 2 pounds of his own wool to the scheme,<sup>1</sup> and when Edward III confiscated the wool and the scheme collapsed he suffered considerable immediate loss. He is recorded in the Close Rolls as having 'lent' the King £1,075.<sup>2</sup> This figure works out at the average of just over £9 a sack, and assuming the wool to have been the best quality he stood to make a profit of about £2 a sack after one has deducted the cost of carriage from Nottingham to Dordrecht. He had to petition for payment of his debt,<sup>3</sup> and he was paid by Exchequer tally to be drawn on the lay and clerical taxation of 1339. Thereafter William de Amyas took no major part in Edward III's financial schemes, unlike Robert Stuffyn (or Scuffyn) of Newark, another of the 1336 commissioners, who was owed £1,251 by the crown. In 1339 Amyas is recorded as having lent the King a further £300,<sup>4</sup> and in the same year Robert Taverner, wool collector in the county of Nottingham, bought two sacks of wool from Amyas for 17 marks,<sup>5</sup> and used one of his storehouses in Bridlesmith Gate to store the bulk of the wool. One might reasonably ask where Amyas was to buy his wool in the quantities required for the 1336 scheme. It would seem that Amyas was the agent used by Lenton Priory for the disposal of the bulk of their clip, particularly that portion which was the tithes of flocks in the High Peak.<sup>6</sup> This connection was strengthened in 1347 by the prior securing a royal licence to lease or sell part of the High Peak lead tithes for a period of 16 years.<sup>7</sup> Although it is no more than a hint, it suggests that Amyas was prepared to pay a capital sum to the Priory for this privilege.

William de Amyas began to purchase tenements within Nottingham soon after his arrival in the town. The possession of burgage tenements was a necessary pre-condition of his election as a burgess and later mayor of Nottingham. Miss Walker in a topographical description of medieval Nottingham has given a detailed description of the extent of Amyas' possessions within the town.<sup>8</sup> They were set in a square around St. Peter's Church, bounded by the present-day Bridlesmith Gate, Low Pavement, Wheeler Gate and South Parade. Many of the properties used to support the Amyas Chantry were situated in the English borough, that is St. Mary's Parish, so one may assert that Amyas' town properties were very extensive and that these purchases continued throughout his life. Many of the deeds for these properties were enrolled in the *Borough Records*, and have been calendared.<sup>9</sup> There is no evidence about the purchase of his Watnall lands, save that they were in Amyas' possession by 1327. The only other areas where one can definitely trace Amyas' activities are in Carlton, Gedling and Stoke Bardolph (at that time one parish) and in Beeston.<sup>10</sup> In both cases, much, though not all, of the land belonged to the de Jorz family, whose tribulations have been mentioned earlier. By 1320 they appear to have been in great financial difficulties and borrowed money from both Walter de Lincoln and William de Amyas. In the first instance repayment seems to have been made by assigning the rental of *Esthalle* croft in Beeston. In 1323 William, son of Robert le Jorz, granted Amyas 28s. 0d. out of

<sup>1</sup>P.R.O., E/358/10, quoted in Fryde, *op. cit.*, 11, table 1, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>C.C.R., 1337-9, p. 427.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O. S.C. 3/167.

<sup>4</sup>C.P.R., 1338-40, p. 377. <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>6</sup>Nottingham University, Middleton Mss., Mi D 1052.

<sup>7</sup>C.P.R., 1345-8, p. 347.

<sup>8</sup>V. W. Walker, 'Medieval Nottingham', *Trans. Thorton Soc.*, LXVII, (1963), 28-45.

<sup>9</sup>R.B.N., 1.

<sup>10</sup>The Carlton, Gedling and Stoke Bardolph deeds are also enrolled in the Borough Records and calendared.

this message,<sup>1</sup> and a year later granted the manorial dues pertaining to this message for a term of 20 years.<sup>2</sup> In effect, Jorz had mortgaged his properties. Three years later this was converted into a definite grant, at the rent of a rose for the first 28 years and thereafter at a rent to the de Jorz family of 100s. Od. in perpetuity.<sup>3</sup> In 1328 William de Jorz quit-claimed all his rights in the Beeston properties.<sup>4</sup> A similar process occurred in Carlton.<sup>5</sup> From the base of the de Jorz lands William de Amyas began to buy up many of the smaller freeholds, and then often re-lease them to the original owners for a definite term of years and an annual rent. This process went on throughout the 1330s and 40s. Rarely is there any clue to the amount that Amyas actually paid, but one deed does contain the significant phrase: 'a sum of money given me in my great necessity'.

William de Amyas cannot have been a popular figure. In 1333 he was the target for blackmail by one of the gangs operating in Nottinghamshire,<sup>6</sup> and had to pay £20 to '*la compagnie sauvage*', or risk seeing his property outside the town's walls go up in flames. Possibly his greatest personal tragedy occurred in 1343, when John, his only surviving son, was murdered in Nottingham.<sup>7</sup> However, Amyas himself was not above using violence to achieve his objectives. In 1319 he had been involved in an affray in York,<sup>8</sup> and in 1348 he, along with Nicholas de Crophull and others, attacked Richard Hegham, who had been appointed to purvey oats for Queen Philippa's horses.<sup>9</sup> Amyas died before the case was heard. Unfortunately no will can be traced, so we can know very little about his bequests. The chief beneficiary was his daughter Joan who had married Hugh le Spicer, another Nottingham burgess, and the executors were John de Crophull and William Beckford, vicar of Beeston. Apparently Amyas' son-in-law was not content with his share and carried off (from his mother-in-law) 24 oxen and six cows worth £20, and six statutes staple and other muniments worth £200.<sup>10</sup>

William de Amyas began to be concerned about his soul in 1324, when he paid 5 marks for a licence for alienation of land in mortmain.<sup>11</sup> An inquisition had been held before this was granted, which returned that the grant would not affect the crown's rights in any way.<sup>12</sup> Presumably from this date mass was said daily for Amyas and his family, but it was not until 1339 that the Chantry was founded on a formal and permanent basis.<sup>13</sup> There was a further licence for alienation of land in mortmain in 1341.<sup>14</sup> The first chantry priests were Gervase and William de Holbeck, and they were granted an annual income of 5 marks and 16 pence, and a house in High Pavement to be used as their residence.<sup>15</sup> The election of the chantry priest was vested in the vicar of St. Mary's, the mayor and three upright men of the parish. The Archbishop of York confirmed the terms of the grants,<sup>16</sup> which were

<sup>1</sup>Middleton Mss., Mi D 79.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Mi D 80.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, Mi D 80/2, 80/4.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, Mi D 80/6.

<sup>9</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1343-50, p. 175; *P.R.O.*, Just. It. 1/1405 m 124.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>11</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1324-7, pp. 76, 80.

<sup>12</sup>Notts. I.P.M., 1321-1350., *Thoroton Soc. Record Series*, VI, (1939), 95-6.

<sup>13</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, pp. 130-7.

<sup>14</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1340-3, p. 343.

<sup>15</sup>See footnote 13.

<sup>16</sup>*R.B.N.*, 1, pp. 138-45.

<sup>5</sup>See footnote 10; p. 76.

<sup>6</sup>Bellamy, *op. cit.*, p. 706.

<sup>7</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1343-5, p. 292.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 1317-21, p. 306.

that mass was to be said daily for the souls of William de Amyas and his family, and that on Sundays and feast days a six-pound wax candle was to burn on Amyas' tomb while mass was in progress. The chantry was not William de Amyas' only benefaction to Nottingham. After his mother-in-law Alice le Palmer died, he undertook the completion and maintenance of the Hethebeth Bridge and the causeways to it.<sup>1</sup> This task must have been completed by 1340, but by 1349 the maintenance of the bridge and the collection of the tolls had been granted to the town council,<sup>2</sup> and thereafter the bridgemasters' accounts become a regular feature of the *Borough Records*.

By 1340 France had replaced Scotland as the focus of Edward III's attention, and although the Scottish Wars continued in an irregular fashion, towns as far south as Nottingham ceased to be of such crucial strategic importance to the government. Nottingham's merchants also slipped back into a more modest, if none the less profitable, role, and it was not until the late 15th century that the borough produced a merchant who could rival William de Amyas in wealth and in the range of his financial activities. Until more is known about Thomas Thurland, any comparison between the two would be invidious and not very useful.

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<sup>1</sup>*C.P.R.*, 1334-8, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 1348-50, p. 295.