

# THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HISTORY LECTURE 2009

## STEVENSON REVISITED: A FRESH LOOK AT NOTTINGHAM'S BOROUGH RECORDS, 1400–1600

by

JUDITH MILLS

For anyone working on the history of Nottingham its published *Borough Records* are an invaluable and accessible introduction to the town's administrative documents.<sup>1</sup> There are nine volumes in total; the first four, published between 1882 and 1889, were edited by W.H. Stevenson and comprise documents from the years 1155–1625. William Henry Stevenson was the eldest son of William Stevenson, one of the original members of the Thoroton Society and its Vice President in 1904.<sup>2</sup> He became Research Fellow at Exeter College, Oxford, and as well as editing Nottingham's borough records contributed to the publication of other local record collections, including those of Gloucester and Leicester,<sup>3</sup> edited the Close Rolls of Edward I, II and III, and published work on many subjects including King Alfred and Harold Harefoot.<sup>4</sup>

Nottingham's borough records are extensive and, inevitably, Stevenson could not include everything. As a result, some documents are published in full, some only in small extracts and some are omitted completely. In the Introduction to Volume 1 Stevenson gives his criteria for selection as being:

not only what is of interest to the curious, but whatever seemed to be of value for the history of the town, its institutions, customs, etc.; and this must be the excuse for the publication of much that may appear dry and worthless to the general reader...The selection of such matter must always be an invidious task, much being omitted that it were, perhaps, desirable to have included, and *vice versa*.<sup>5</sup>

Another factor which he seems to have taken into consideration, although he does not explicitly state it, was the quality and quantity of the available records. In the earlier volumes, when the range of

documents is limited, he drew heavily on royal charters, manuscripts relating to St John's Hospital, and from the records of the Borough Court, which begin in 1303. In the later volumes he was able to publish Sessions court records, mayor's and hall books, financial accounts, town ordinances and even some parish records that had become part of the borough archive.

Stevenson, of course, was not writing a history of Nottingham and therefore was not required to interpret or analyse the documents in great detail, but he was a man, and a historian, of his time. His measure of what was of interest tended towards the 'constitutional' – that is to say, the town's relationship with the crown, government, local administration and customs. This interest is reflected in comments made in the introductions to the four volumes he edited. For example, when commenting on the scarcity of records between the years 1455–81 and c.1555 to the late 1580s, Stevenson laments the lack of information about the Wars of the Roses and the Spanish Armada, but is rather less concerned that information might be missing about Nottingham itself. Furthermore, he devoted eight pages of the Introduction to Volume 4 to describing the evolution of the town's council and what he described as:

the long contest between the Common Council and the commonalty of the town, the Council endeavouring to exclude the burgesses from all control over their constitution, and the burgesses constantly opposing these attempts.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, to Stevenson, the documents of interest and therefore worthy of publication related to central and local government, the legal process

and application of law, and what he perceived to be a rift between an oligarchic council, on one side, and a body of honest burgesses on the other. This is something which will be returned to later.

Stevenson's analysis focused on the institutions of local government. Current research on Nottingham's borough records, on which this article is based, has taken a different approach and focuses on the people of Nottingham – what they did, where they lived and how they related to each other. This article will look at three examples drawn from this research which illustrate how this approach can lead to a new understanding of the town and people of Nottingham in the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as its institutions. Before turning to those examples, though, it is perhaps worthwhile to review the different types of document which comprise the borough records and explain how they have been used.

### Borough Court rolls and books

The earliest set of documents available to historians studying medieval Nottingham is the Borough Court rolls and books. The series begins in 1303 so these are probably the most extensive series of documents in Nottingham's archive. Between 1303 and 1455 the records are in the form of rolls and written in Latin. The valuable work of Dr Trevor Foulds in translating these rolls must be acknowledged and the fact that these are now available on-line is most welcome.<sup>7</sup> Dr Foulds has also published an explanation of the court process which is of great use to anyone unfamiliar with medieval court procedure.<sup>8</sup>

As Stevenson's interest was constitutional, he claimed that the early rolls were 'next in importance'<sup>9</sup> to the royal charters. By the time he was editing Volume 4, however, he regarded the later books as being of little value because changing clerical styles meant they gave very little detail. The Borough Court dealt with civil pleas mainly for debt – both small and large sums – but also categories of trespass, including assault, breach of contract and so forth. New suits were recorded at the end of each roll and were sometimes followed by agreements

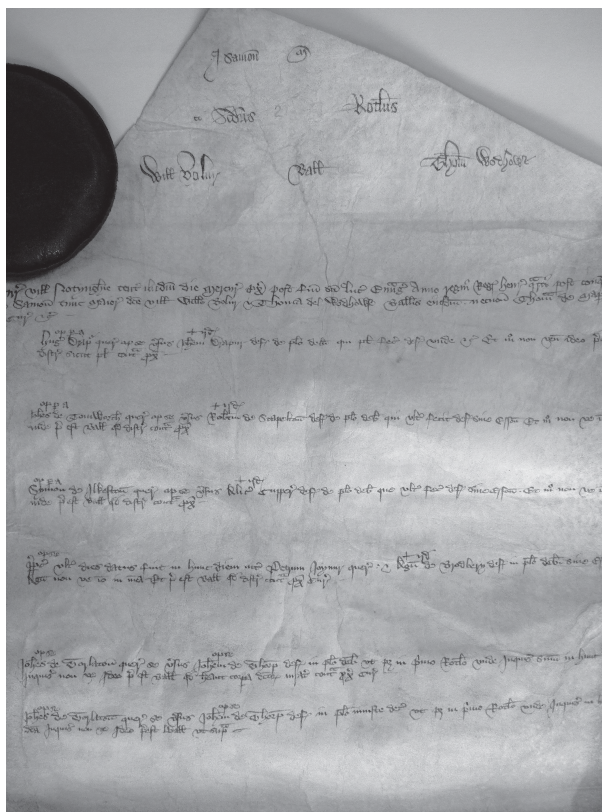


PLATE 1: Borough Court Roll 1407–8  
(Nottinghamshire Archives, CA 1304).

relating to property transfers which had been brought to the court to be registered or 'enrolled' in the court roll. The work of this court was divided according to whether the parties were burgesses or not. If both plaintiff and defendant were burgesses, the case was heard in the Burgess Court, which sat every other Wednesday. If one or more of the parties were not burgesses, the case was heard by the so-called 'foreign' Pleas Court, which sat on a different set of days.

From 1450 the quality of the rolls becomes rather poor and the series stops in 1454–55 except for some fragments. It then recommences in 1481, but this time in book form and a different style. The details of court procedure were omitted, as were the enrolled documents. Instead, new suits were entered under the court date and about half a page left blank for the plaintiff to be entered when the case was finally heard. Quite often the plaintiff was not entered at all,

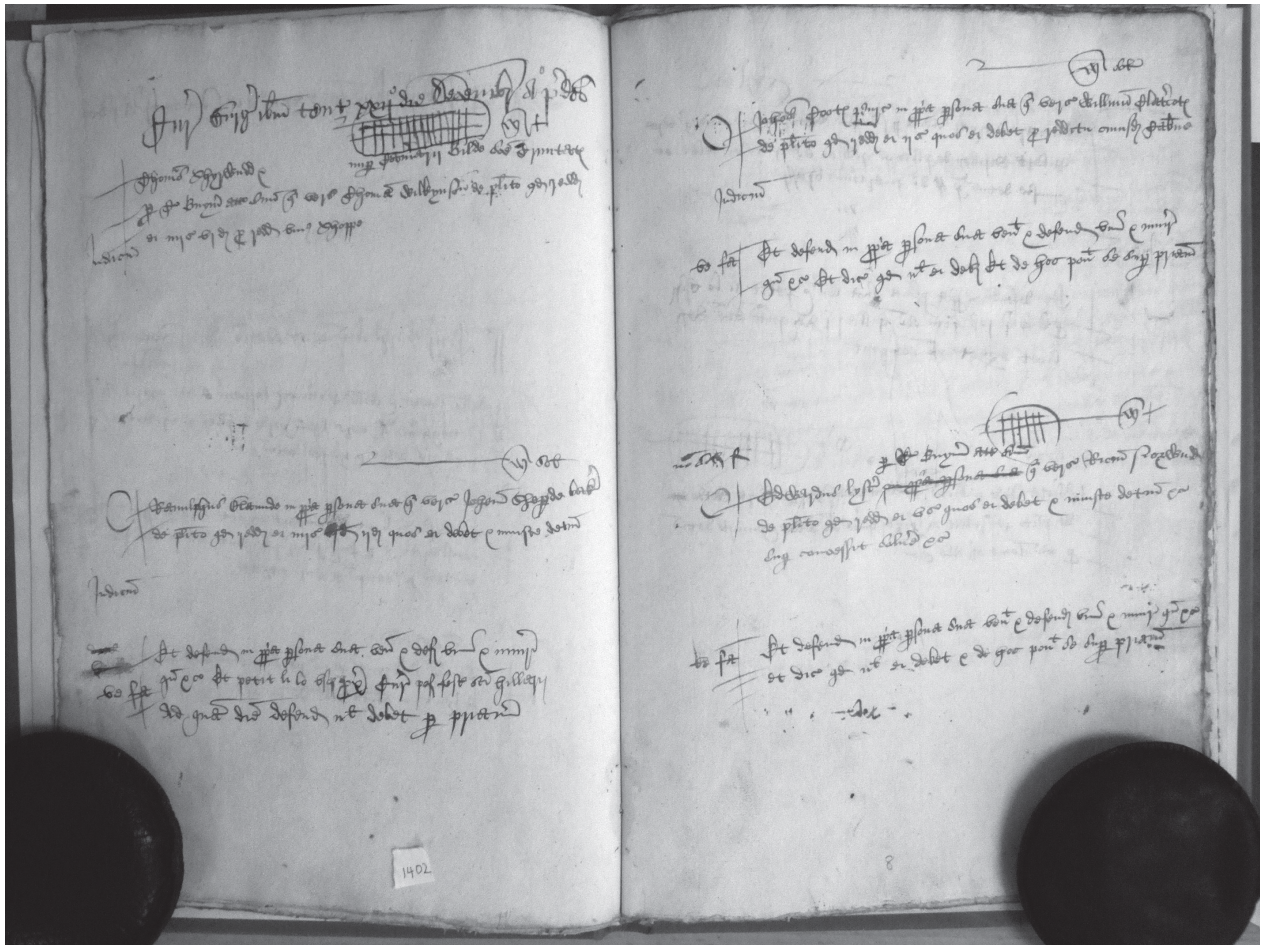


PLATE 2: Borough Court Book 1530-31 (Nottinghamshire Archives, CA 1402).

sometimes because a separate bill of complaint was produced and a few of these are bound into the books. Also bound into some of the books are financial statements, often for everyday commodities such as fish or bread, presented as proof of the debt.

Stevenson used the Borough Court records extensively in the first two volumes of the *Borough Records* because, apart from town charters, there were not many other documents to choose from. He drew, however, mainly from the foreign pleas rolls, because the cases are on the whole more interesting than the endless claims for small debts that were usual in the Burgess Court and which comprise what he referred to as 'dry' legal matter. His purpose in publishing these cases, apart from there being few other documents to include, was

probably to indicate the range of business brought to the court and the application of law in Nottingham. Their wider value to historians is illustrated by two recent research projects, one by Dr Richard Goddard on the medieval economy<sup>10</sup> and one by Dr Catherine Casson on the social and economic concerns of civic authorities raised by cases of forgery.<sup>11</sup>

The details of court cases in the Borough Court rolls and books are a rich source of information about people; not just the names of the men and women who brought suits to court, but also their occupations, business and family relationships, guild membership, parochial responsibilities and civic office and, when suits are brought by executors, approximate dates of death.

## Quarter Sessions

Another court which features prominently in Stevenson's volumes is the Sessions, later referred to as the Quarter Sessions. It was founded in 1449 when Nottingham received its Charter of Incorporation, which appointed all the aldermen as Justices of the Peace, authorised to hear cases of felony – murder, treason, etc. – in the Sessions Court. It sat at least every three months and, despite its potential to deal with the most serious cases, the majority of its business comprised hearing reports of misbehaviour from three juries or panels of burgesses: one from the east side or English borough, one the west or French borough and one made up of the town's constables. Together they reported on social misdemeanours – brothel keeping, unruly behaviour, market offences such as tanning sheep and horse skins (thus supplying poor quality leather) or lodging vagabonds. Later in the Reformation they also reported on non-attendance at Church and in the 1590s on men for leaving town during an outbreak of plague.

Stevenson drew heavily on the lists of misbehaviour, called presentments, particularly those dating from the end of the 15th until the middle of the 16th centuries, and published almost all the presentment lists. Later sets of presentments are featured less intensely, probably because they become repetitive, but also because other documents were becoming available. Again, his interest was probably the application of law but the lists of complaints undoubtedly give some flavour of life in Nottingham in this period.

Another institution whose presentments Stevenson published almost in full is the Mickleton Jury. As the Leet court of Nottingham (roughly equivalent to a manorial court) it was one of the oldest institutions of the town and its ancient foundation may well have been one of its attractions for Stevenson. As a body, it was responsible for reporting problems of concern to the community such as breaches of the peace, illegal market trading and the maintenance of the highways to the *Magnum Turnum* or Great Tourn (Court). The jury also called for improvements to the town: they requested, for example, a new school usher, the purchase of more land for the

benefit of the town and new buildings on Timber Hill.<sup>12</sup>

The Sessions juries and the Mickleton Jury together were responsible for raising issues of public order and town management – they both made presentments about people fighting, abusing the assize of bread and ale, fouling or blocking the streets, encroaching on common ground, illegal trading, gambling, brothel keeping, vagrancy, not going to church and leaving town during times of plague. They were, therefore, an arm of local administration – a means of ensuring that the town was properly managed – and their members were active participants in town government. Stevenson did not publish the many jury lists associated with these two bodies, which is understandable as in isolation they would have been dull. As bodies responsible for controlling the behaviour of townsmen and women, however, the Sessions Court and Mickleton juries were integral to the town's administration and the composition of these juries allows us to assess burgess participation in local government.

## Financial documents

Many of the documents in Volume 4 of the *Borough Records* relate to Nottingham's financial affairs, which reflects that fact that these become more numerous as the other records become repetitive. The chamberlains' accounts come in two parts; a summary, written in Latin, and a detailed cash book in English, but there are few years when both parts have survived. The accounts of the bridge wardens and school wardens also survive in greater numbers for the end of the 16th century, as do the lists of property owned by the town and rented out. This property included houses, gardens, lime pits and the various stalls and shops in the markets. A unique document which Stevenson accidentally or deliberately overlooked is a list of the men and women who in 1558–59 rented stalls in the Shambles, Drapery and Spice chamber adjacent to the Saturday Market.<sup>13</sup>

The publication of accounts though may say something about Stevenson's editorial viewpoint.

For example, the chamberlains' account for 1495–96<sup>14</sup> is published in full because it is an early example of its type. Later accounts are published only as extracts and by the 1580s perhaps only six or seven entries are reproduced, even though the complete accounts contain extensive lists of payments to the poor and lame who passed through Nottingham, including to maimed soldiers coming from the wars in Ireland and Flanders. They are poignant indicators of the social and economic circumstances of the later 16th century possibly overlooked by Stevenson because he undervalued financial records and his interests lay in the political, rather than social, arena.

Another highly informative set of documents in Nottingham's borough collection is tax lists. There are several held in Nottinghamshire Archives and Stevenson published two complete lists, one for 1472–73, one for 1523–24 and a partial list for 1595.<sup>15</sup> Unpublished lists include a levy dated approximately 1473–79 and another subsidy list dated about 1500.<sup>16</sup> There are also many Exchequer tax lists relating to Nottingham held at The National Archive.<sup>17</sup> Some of these refer only to 'aliens' – that is, resident men and women who were not English – although they also include list of burgesses who sat on the jury which certified the names of these aliens.<sup>18</sup> Others list all tax payers; unfortunately, some are badly damaged.<sup>19</sup> An interesting set of tax lists relate to the lay subsidy collected in 1523–25. This was the most extensive tax of its time and, owing to confusion, the instructions about how the tax was to be assessed had to be issued twice.<sup>20</sup> There are, consequently, three extant versions of this assessment. The first, held in Nottingham, lists all tax payers by street and the amount of tax they paid. The second, held at The National Archive, is a similar list, but slightly longer and lists both assessments and the amount of tax paid, many of which are considerably higher than in the Nottingham version; John Alanson's tax, for example, rose from 12s to 40s. The third, also held at The National Archive, is incomplete.<sup>21</sup> One major anomaly is that John Rose, one of Nottingham's aldermen, is shown as living in Long Row on the Nottingham list, Hen Cross in the incomplete list and is omitted completely from the revised list. Although tax lists are not part of the *Borough*

*Records*, they were created in Nottingham, by Nottingham officials and are about Nottingham people, and so their inclusion in research on Nottingham is justified. Stevenson himself included documents which are not strictly part of the *Borough Record* such as the 1449 Charter of Henry VI and some documents from the Stretton Collection.<sup>22</sup> Tax lists not only indicate who were the richest people in the town and sometimes give occupations, but they are often organised by street and thus are a valuable contribution to the assembly of information about individual men and women who lived in Nottingham in the 15th and 16th centuries.<sup>23</sup>

What the discussion so far has probably made clear is that, although all the documents (both published and unpublished) contain a lot of information, each one only provides a snippet about specific individuals. These have, however, been gathered together in a database which currently comprises information on more than 6,700 townsmen and women from the period. The three examples which follow are intended to show how, by interrogating and analysing this personal information, it is possible to discover new things about the town, people and administration of Nottingham in the 15th and 16th centuries.

### **The individual viewpoint**

The most obvious candidates for examination are the ruling elite of the town who, of course, do appear in the records with some frequency, but it has also been possible to piece together information on quite ordinary individuals and family groups and so 'people' the streets and buildings of the town.

John Aldesworth, for example, was a walker or fuller, which means he cleaned and treated newly woven cloth before it was dyed. He probably hired himself out for piece-work as in 1402 he sued John Ingham for 18d for his hire (i.e. wage), 36d for fullers earth, 4d for a loan and 10s damages. In return, John Ingham made a counter claim against him for 2s 10d plus 10s damages.<sup>24</sup> Aldesworth was married to Tibot and together, in 1400–01, they were sued for debt by a man called Stapleton, and in

the same year Aldesworth's goods were twice seized and appraised or valued *in lieu* of a fine.<sup>25</sup> The following year he was sued by Thomas Dayne for 2s rent on his house.<sup>26</sup> Between 1400 and 1410 he was prosecuted at least a further nine times for debt.<sup>27</sup> While these cases were passing through the court he also took on some minor civic responsibility. In 1400, 1404 and 1407 he is listed as an affeerer; that is he, with another burgess, decided on the amount guilty parties should pay as a fine.<sup>28</sup> In 1407, 1410, and 1413 he acted as an appraiser for the Borough court, valuing the goods of burgesses seized *in lieu*.<sup>29</sup>

Later in the 15th century, Thomas Marriot was presented in 1482 by the west side jury (with seven others including one woman, Joan Kell) for keeping a disorderly house, playing dice and 'receiving men's servants'; that is, entertaining them, probably late at night with drink and gambling, and so distracting them from their duties.<sup>30</sup> In 1485 he acted as a messenger for the town by riding to Derby to call Nottingham's Recorder (or legal adviser) to a meeting with the mayor, for which he received 8d. in expenses.<sup>31</sup> In 1495 he sued William Johnson, a butcher, and while this case was passing through the court system he sat on three Borough Court juries, hearing a total of nine suits.<sup>32</sup> In the same year he was a town constable and so was part of the jury which presented Joan Hunt for receiving stolen goods and Robert Wales and John Rose for selling oxen and sheep to London butchers instead of marketing them in Nottingham.<sup>33</sup>

Women do appear in the town records, but information about them is generally limited to a single snippet, as Joan Kell and Joan Hunt mentioned above both illustrate, but sometimes it is possible to find out a little more. Joan Maltby, for example, was presented by the constables in 1511 for keeping a bowling alley in Broadmarsh. She was the wife of Christopher Maltby, who was a glover.<sup>34</sup> There was a second bowling alley in Broadmarsh, kept by Christopher Knipe, who was a tanner,<sup>35</sup> so it is possible that the two Christophers had business links. Joan's husband died in 1518 or shortly before, as in that year she twice appeared in the foreign pleas court as a widow, suing Thomas Richardson, a glover, and Richard Kay, a weaver, both for 10d

each;<sup>36</sup> she was probably pursuing her husband's debts through the court.

At about the same time, another glover, William Mabson, sued William Holden, a fisher, for 2s 10d.<sup>37</sup> He was a burgess, and although following the same trade as Christopher Maltby, he was wealthier; in 1524–25 he lived on High Pavement and was assessed as having goods worth £20 on which he paid 20s tax.<sup>38</sup> Also in 1518 he sued Thomas Clark, who may have been a capper, for 27s 10d, and Ralph Bulkley, a weaver, and John Marshall, a carver, jointly for 16s.<sup>39</sup> In 1515 he had been a member of the east side jury of the Sessions Court and was presented by the same jury for supplying sheepskin for tanning and so producing sub-standard leather.<sup>40</sup> As a relatively wealthy man, he probably employed glovers to work on his behalf while dabbling in leather production and possibly other trades.

Inevitably, because much of the information is garnered from court records, there is significantly more about those people who appear in court most frequently. Bartholomew Chettel is a good example. Bartholomew was the town paver who, in 1558, received 6s 8d for his fee plus a livery.<sup>41</sup> His father Henry Chettel had also been town paver.<sup>42</sup> Henry's executor was Thomas Townrow and Bartholomew was married to Thomas's daughter.<sup>43</sup> His wife's name is not known but they had a daughter called Emma.<sup>44</sup> In 1524, Bartholomew paid 4d tax and lived in Low Pavement. He was also a churchwarden of St Nicholas's church, although Low Pavement is in St Peter's parish not St Nicholas's and the connection is unclear.<sup>45</sup>

Bartholomew was presented to the Sessions Court in 1523–24 for not cleaning the streets and crossings<sup>46</sup> and again in April 1553 by the Mickleton Jury, with his wife, for taking excess toll, not requisitioning sand and stone from the chamberlains to carry out repairs to the streets, and for 'misbehaving himself' against the mayor and burgesses 'for hys offyce ys very profytable and he doth nothyng fore hytt'.<sup>47</sup> He spent a few days in the lock-up on Chapel Bar sometime before 1530.<sup>48</sup> Between 1528–40 he was a plaintiff in the Borough Court nine times pursuing money or goods owed to him, including suing his father-in-law three times, possibly trying to retrieve

goods belonging to his father.<sup>49</sup> He was also a defendant in the Borough Court on sixteen occasions between 1533–49, including being sued three times by his father-in-law.<sup>50</sup> On one of these occasions his father-in-law's bill has been preserved in the Borough Court book (Plate 3).

One final example is Henry Stepar. Like Bartholomew, Henry lived on Low Pavement but as a mercer<sup>51</sup> was rather wealthier, paying 3s tax in 1524.<sup>52</sup> In 1538, he rented a house from Richard Willoughby for 20s although his rent was in arrears.<sup>53</sup> He was a chamberlain (treasurer) of St George's guild at St Peter's church and executor of William Hegyn junior.<sup>54</sup> William Hegyn senior had been alderman of the same guild and also Mayor of Nottingham.<sup>55</sup> In 1500, he was probably the richest man in Nottingham, having goods valued at 300 marks and paying 50s in tax,<sup>56</sup> and owned tenements in Castle Gate, Friar Row, Swine Green, Stoney Street, Bridlesmith Gate, Wheeler Gate, Hen Cross, Fletcher Gate, Walser Gate, by the town Dyke and at the Tithebarns as well as four acres of arable land.<sup>57</sup> His son William junior, unfortunately, died before he had time to come to the same prominence. Stepar was also the executor of John Horsely, a butcher, and Reginald Marshall, Rector of St Nicholas's<sup>58</sup> – yet another connection between Low Pavement and St Nicholas's parish which cannot easily be explained. He also stood surety for John Bowl, a pewterer, when he became burgess in 1513.<sup>59</sup> He sat on both east and west side juries of the Sessions Court.<sup>60</sup>

Like Bartholomew, he appeared frequently in the Borough Court. He was sued for debt on twenty occasions between 1511 and 1538, including by Bartholomew Chettel as one of the Churchwardens of St Nicholas, and in his capacity of executor of William Hegyn, by Christopher Hegyn.<sup>61</sup> In the same period he brought fifty three suits including counterclaims against Christopher Hegyn, the Churchwardens of St Nicholas and the executors of John Plough senior (Rector of St Peter's).<sup>62</sup> As a mercer, though, it would not be unusual for him to pursue debt through the Borough Court on a regular basis but his frequent appearances imply that much of his business was local, between burgesses, rather than national.

In April 1516 he was presented by both the east and west side juries for taking the livery of the Prior of Lenton,<sup>63</sup> and in July of the same year the west side jury accused him of attempting to assassinate the mayor, Thomas Mellers, in the house of John Williamson, alderman, and in the presence of the Abbot of Dale and the Prior of Lenton. He had wounded Mellers and then claimed sanctuary in St Peter's Church.<sup>64</sup>

There is no record as to whether Stepar paid a fine for his act, or was found not guilty or even obtained a pardon, but as his many appearances in the Borough Court testify, he continued to be commercially active for at least another twenty years. Why he made this attempt is open to conjecture, but it may be because of business associations with Thomas Mellers. It was not unusual in the Borough Court for the defendant in a case of debt to raise a counterclaim for trespass. In 1422, for example, Henry Beaufrey and his wife sued Henry Bladesmith for debt and for trespass and, in retaliation, Bladesmith counter-sued for the same offences.<sup>65</sup> Thomas Mellers was particularly litigious, appearing as plaintiff in the Borough Court on ninety one occasions, including prosecuting Henry Stepar for trespass in 1512 (that is four years before the assassination attempt) and again in 1523, and for debt in 1518.<sup>66</sup>

These brief examples illustrate how much information can be assembled from a range of documents, and give some insight into personal and business relationships in 15th century Nottingham. However, interesting and amusing though they are, they do not say a great deal about how the town functioned.

### **Weekday Market and Saturday Market**

Map 1 shows the street plan of Nottingham in the late medieval period. The layout of the streets is recognisable, even today, although some of the street names have changed. Wheeler Gate was Wheelwright Gate; South Parade was Timber Hill and Fletcher Gate was Fleshhewer (Butcher) Gate. The exact line of the boundary between the English borough or east side of Nottingham and the French





*Transcript of Bill (Plate 3)*

Memorandum that thes bene the p[ar]cells that Bartolmew chettelle

howthe to thomas townrow his ffad'

Inp[ri]mis I lentte to the same beyrtellmew

Chettell that tyme that Mayst[er] Meyllars

xld

seytte him the bars

It[e]m I payd to John Harden for

a load of colls

xld

It[e]m I lente hem in Jebbes the coblehrs dor'

iiijd

It[e]m a nod' tyme I layntte when I schold [sold]

my leyde [lead]

iiijd

It[e]m I peyd for hem to Rachard tomleson

ijd

Item he howthe me my wagh for breygeng [breaking]

up the pa[ve]me[n]t in Kow lane

ijs iijd

It[e]m for ten dossen collars [coals] that he sold of mynd

ijs

It[e]m for a payment to his wyffe

vd

s[um]ma xjs xjd

And thes his a trew made belle and that I

welle make my howthe owne hit as a trew

crysten schould do



borough or west side is unknown but it was probably slightly to the west of St Mary's Parish boundary.<sup>67</sup>

The Saturday Market is something of a landmark in Nottingham. Its size makes it an area of importance, as attested to by the frequency with which it has been discussed by historians of the town.<sup>68</sup> Less frequently mentioned, though, is the Weekday Market. This was situated close to the border between the English and French boroughs near the Guildhall and at the end of Fletcher Gate where it met with Middle Pavement; there was a shambles (or meat market) here in the 15th and 16th centuries. Mentions of a shambles in Nottingham records are usually taken to refer to the shambles in the Saturday Market but some may actually mean the Weekday Market. The chamberlains' accounts for 1485, for example, show a payment of 4d for repairs to a shop 'at the westende of the Shamulles late in the holdyng of John Howett'.<sup>69</sup> In 1478–79, John Howett was the decennary or constable for Middle Pavement,<sup>70</sup> to the west of Weekday Cross, and therefore west of the Weekday shambles.

Although butchers sold all types of meat, it is possible that this market specialised in the sale of beef as the town's bull ring also abutted onto Weekday Cross. In 1580, Laurence Worth was paid 3s 6d for mending the bull ring and a further 2d for letting the bull's blood, and John Oakland, the town's neat or cow herd, received 3d for 'dressyng the bulle aft[er] the dog'.<sup>71</sup> Presumably the bull ended up in the butchers' stalls in the Weekday Market.

Using information collected about individuals and cross referencing this with tax records organised by street name it appears that in 1473 there were at least three butchers living in Fletcher Gate, there were also three in 1571 and four in 1582 and three more on Weekday Cross itself in the same year. Both Fletcher Gate and Middle Pavement were omitted from the extensive 1524–25 lay subsidy, but there were three butchers living in Low Pavement which joins Middle Pavement and the two streets may have been listed together.<sup>72</sup> There were also butchers in Stoney Street and Bridlesmith Gate in 1473 and one in Walsar Gate in 1524. In 1582 there was also one butcher in St Mary's Gate

and another in Stoney Street. All these streets are close to the Weekday Market so the presence of the shambles there seems to have resulted in a concentration of butchers in the surrounding area. In fact, the only butchers not found living around the Weekday Market were Thomas Buttrey, who in 1544 lived in Castle Gate,<sup>73</sup> and James Rawlinson who lived in Chapel Bar in 1582.<sup>74</sup>

The Weekday Market was also conveniently close to Narrow Marsh, an area well known for its tanneries, particularly in the caves.<sup>75</sup> A similar analysis shows that in 1473 three barkers or tanners lived in Narrow Marsh, in 1524–25 one tanner lived in Broad Marsh and a further seven in Narrow Marsh.<sup>76</sup> In 1582 eleven tanners who lived in The Marsh were listed as paying St Mary's parish rate.<sup>77</sup> Tanners are found in other parts of town but, like butchers, in smaller concentrations: John Bate lived in Swine Green in 1446<sup>78</sup> and in 1524 William Atkinson and Richard Andrew both lived in Castle Gate, near if not next-door to Thomas Buttrey, butcher.<sup>79</sup> People with other trades did live in the streets surrounding the Weekday market but they were outnumbered by butchers and tanners. What this comparatively simple cross-referencing of occupations with streets shows is that the Weekday Market was in the centre of a system which brought meat for consumption into the shambles and its side-product, hide, into the tanneries for processing.

What is perhaps surprising is that, although there was a sizeable shambles in the Saturday Market, the same analysis shows that in 1473–79, 1524–25 and 1571 tax payers who lived in Timber Hill on its southern border included cordwainers, drapers, tailors and mercers, together with their apprentices, but no butchers. To the north of the market, on Long Row, there were bakers, barbers, cordwainers, drapers, fishmongers, mercers and tailors, together with vintners and inn keepers, and at the end of the sixteenth century, ropers and ironmongers, but again no butchers are recorded. Only two tanners can be found living around the Saturday Market: William Cook senior, who in 1577 paid St Peter's parish rate, lived in Timber Hill,<sup>80</sup> and William Cook, junior, who lived across the market place in Long Row where he paid St Mary's parish rate in 1582 rate.<sup>81</sup>

This raises the question of who traded in the Saturday Market shambles? The records contain some hints. In 1577–78 the butchers presented a set of rules to the Council intended to control their trade, and two of the clauses specifically mention ‘cuntrye’ butchers.<sup>82</sup> In the same year, the Mickletorn Jury called for a cover at the end of the Shambles ‘for the bucschers of the co[n]tre that they may stand drye vpon the Sayterdayes’.<sup>83</sup> Finally, a list of stall holders dated 1558–59 named fifteen men who held butchers’ stalls.<sup>84</sup> Six of these are noted elsewhere in the borough records as butchers, a seventh may have been the Mayor’s cook, and another is found in other borough records with no occupation given. The remaining seven, however, are not found in any other borough records. It is possible that the Weekday Market, which as its name suggests, traded everyday except Saturday, was used by local, Nottingham butchers, while the shambles in the Saturday Market was at least partly tenanted by men from the county who came to town to trade, some standing outside and some renting more permanent stalls. This is not only an interesting observation but also a highly informative insight into the commercial life of Nottingham in the 15th and 16th centuries.

### Relations between Burgesses and Council

The final example of how information derived from the borough records (both published and unpublished) can be analysed to give a greater understanding of Nottingham concerns the relationship between the burgesses and the council referred to earlier.

Stevenson’s contention that the burgesses were in opposition to an oligarchic council has already been mentioned. David Marcombe also describes the Mickletorn Jury as being capable of waging ‘effective guerrilla war’ against the Common Council.<sup>85</sup> Nottingham’s local administration was undoubtedly oligarchic. After 1449, the town was governed by a group of seven aldermen who took turns to be mayor, supported by six common councillors, all of whom were appointed for life. In addition, there were two chamberlains and two sheriffs, appointed for one year only, but after their

year in office they became responsible for electing all new town officers. There were, then, just a few men who dominated all areas of government, but this was no different from any other medieval community. Furthermore, there is some debate amongst historians about the degree of conflict in medieval towns, some seeing it as limited to complaints against individuals whilst others perceive towns as inherently factious due to the steep social divisions that existed.<sup>86</sup> Some historians of the early modern or pre-industrial period also argue for a conflicted society due to the social and economic pressures of that time,<sup>87</sup> but recent work on what are described as the substructures of local government in London has suggested that elite groups were in fact flexible and co-operative.<sup>88</sup>

Both the Sessions Court and the Mickletorn Jury criticised members of the council from time to time, and it is these criticisms that Stevenson interpreted as signs of conflict in Nottingham society. Undoubtedly, some members of the council abused their position. In April 1512, the Mickletorn Jury presented the mayor, John Howett, for ‘occupying’ or employing the town’s Common Sergeant for his own interests, so that the Sergeant was unable to perform his duties and consequently ‘eyu[er]e q[ua]rt[er] of the towne ys corupte’.<sup>89</sup> Later in the presentments, Howett was named for selling herring while, in his role as Clerk of the Market, he excluded other traders who would have sold the fish more cheaply.<sup>90</sup> In the same set of presentments, William Barwell, the Mayor’s Clerk, was accused of not being a good servant of the town and maligning the burgesses and commons, whilst the mayor and aldermen were taken to task for allowing 22 marks which Brian Clapham, the former Sergeant for the Commons, had held for the town to be retained by his executors.<sup>91</sup>

There were more problems in 1527 when a letter or petition was addressed to the mayor and his brothers by the Mickletorn jurors listing seven complaints against some of the aldermen.<sup>92</sup> Three, John Williamson, John Rose (missing from one of the tax lists) and Thomas Mellers (the target of Henry Stepar’s assassination attempt), were accused of by-passing the election process to

contrive the appointment of two new aldermen, of not holding the assize of bread, and for embezzling their tax returns. The two new aldermen were considered to be unsatisfactory because, as victuallers, they were prohibited from holding the assize of bread and ale. In 1553, the aldermen were accused of appointing Humphrey Quarneby as School Warden although he was disqualified because he was married to a granddaughter of Agnes Mellers, one of the school's founders.<sup>93</sup> Other Mickletorn Jury rolls and the Session Court rolls include complaints against individual aldermen for having too many beasts in the common fields, sub-letting to foreigners (i.e. non-burgesses) and leasing town property without the consent of the commons.<sup>94</sup> They were also presented for forestalling the market, building sub-standard houses, tanning sheep and horse skins and leaving the town in times of plague.<sup>95</sup> All these complaints, though, are about specific men and incidents and not against the council as an institution. Also, they are a very small proportion of the total number of complaints made by these juries and, therefore, they fit more closely with the argument that conflict was limited to complaints against individuals and not symptomatic of a continuous rift between council and burgesses as Stevenson and Marcombe imply.

The Sessions and Mickletorn juries though were integral to constitutional changes at the end of the 16th century. These began in 1577 when an agreement was made between the mayor, aldermen and Common Council and forty five former chamberlain that the Common Council should be expanded from six to twelve individuals.<sup>96</sup> After 1577, both the Mickletorn Jury and the Sessions Court at various times called for the Common Council to merge with former chamberlains and sheriffs to form an enlarged council of forty eight men to support the seven aldermen. The principle seems to have been accepted, but there were protracted negotiations about the exact number of men who should form the new body so that the reformed council did not meet until 1606. The steps along the way could easily be interpreted, as Stevenson appears to have done, as a small oligarchic group resisting the burgesses' calls for a greater say in the government of the town. It is,

therefore, worth considering who comprised the Mickletorn and Sessions jury and what their relationship with the council actually was.

There are only six surviving lists of Mickletorn Jury members in the 16th century. The first dates from 1553<sup>97</sup> and the most complete are those from 1577–78 and 1579–80, when lists for both the Easter and Michaelmas juries were entered into the Hall books, and 1587–88, when the lists were included in the Session roll for that year.<sup>98</sup> Table 1 lists all the members of the Mickletorn Jury of 1577–78, the year the Common Council was expanded to twelve. What it shows is that twenty four of the forty six Mickletorn jurors had been, or were to become, sheriff or chamberlain and of these, five would become common councillors.

The 1579–80 list shows a similar relationship, with twenty six of the forty five jurors holding the office of chamberlain or sheriff or both, and three who would progress to be mayor. The other jury lists follow a similar pattern: twenty two of the forty three Mickletorn jurors in 1587–88 were chamberlain or sheriff, five of whom went on to become common councillors and one to be mayor, and there were twelve chamberlains or sheriffs in the jury of twenty four in 1593–94, including three future common councillors.

It has already been suggested that the Sessions Court and Mickletorn Jury were a branch of local administration because of their role in managing the town's affairs. As former or potential chamberlains and sheriffs and candidates for more senior office, the majority of the Mickletorn and Sessions jurors were already part of the ruling elite of Nottingham. Any criticism of individual members of the council therefore originated not from a group of common burgesses but from men who were at the top of the social structure of the town. Moreover, any change in the structure of the council was beneficial to the former chamberlains and sheriffs. The expansion of the Common Council in 1577, for example, resulted in the promotion of six former sheriffs to common councillor and two of these later became aldermen. The calls for a reconstitution of the council, then, were more likely to be motivated by the need – or desire – to recognise the status of these men and

TABLE 1  
1577–78 Mickleton Jury members.

<i>Forename</i>	<i>Surname</i>	<i>Civic Office</i>	<i>Sessions Jury</i>
Nicholas	Alvey	1572–73: chamberlain 1575–76: sheriff 1577: common councillor	1573, 1574
Richard	Askew	1554–55: sheriff	1560, 1566, 1574, 1575, 1576
George	Balderston	1566: constable	
Thomas	Barwell	1568–69: sheriff	1573, 1574, 1575, 1576
John	Bayarde		
Michael	Bell	1571–72: chamberlain 1573–74: sheriff 1577: common councillor	1560, 1566, 1574, 1575, 1576
John	Birchell		
Robert	Briggs		1566, 1575, 1576
Henry	Brightmore	1571–72: chamberlain 1573–74: sheriff	1574, 1575, 1576, 1594
Edmond/Edward	Burton	1574–75: chamberlain 1576–77: sheriff	1566, 1575, 1576
Stephen	Carver		1566, 1576
John	Collinson		1574, 1575, 1576
William	Collyshaw	common serjeant at mace	1587
John	Crewe		
John	Curson	1576–77: chamberlain 1578–79: sheriff	
Peter	Daniel		
Gutlake	Dankes		1573, 1574, 1575, 1576
Thomas	Dunncliffe	1574–75: chamberlain 1576–77: sheriff	1575, 1576
Robert	Hallam	1581–82: chamberlain 1581–82 and 1583–84: sheriff	1573, 1574, 1575, 1576, 1587, 1588, 1593
Thomas	Huthwatte	1582–83: chamberlain 1584–85: sheriff 1594: common councillor	1587, 1588, 1593
Laurence	Hynde		1587, 1593
Anker	Jackson	1582–83: chamberlain 1584–85: sheriff 1587: common councillor 1598–99: mayor	1593
Edmund	Jowett	1589–90: chamberlain 1591–92: sheriff	1573, 1593, 1594, 1595

TABLE 1: Continued

<i>Forename</i>	<i>Surname</i>	<i>Civic Office</i>	<i>Sessions Jury</i>
William	Lynacre		1573, 1574, 1575, 1588, 1593
John	Marshall		1560, 1566, 1573, 1574, 1575, 1576
Francys	Metham		
Thomas	Nix	1596–97: sheriff	1573, 1574, 1575, 1576
John	Noden	1585–86 chamberlain 1587–88: sheriff	1593, 1594, 1599
Edward	Pendleton		1588, 1493, 1594
Robert	Phypps	1574–75: sheriff 1577: common councillor	1573, 1576, 1593
William	Piggen	1579–80: chamberlain 1581–82: sheriff	1566, 1573, 1574, 1575, 1576, 1587, 1588, 1593
Simon	Pykard	1580–81: sheriff	1587, 1588
James	Rawlinson	1561–62: sheriff	1566, 1574, 1575, 1576
Robert	Reve		1573
Henry	Richardson		
Lawrence	Roberts		
Robert	Smales	1581–82: chamberlain 1583–84: sheriff	1566, 1573, 1574, 1575, 1576, 1587
Hugh	Smith		
Richard	Toste		
John	Whiting		
George	Widowson	1576–77: chamberlain	1574, 1575, 1576, 1587, 1588,
James	Williamson		1575, 1576
Edward	Wilson		1573, 1574, 1576
Simon	Wilson	1565–66: sheriff	1573, 1574, 1576
Roger	Wood	1579–80: chamberlain 1581–82: sheriff	1566, 1573, 1574, 1576
Robert	York	1580–81: sheriff	1576

their work than direct opposition to the council and its members.

It should also be realised that the pattern chosen for the new council was similar to that which operated in towns such as Leicester,<sup>99</sup> Northampton<sup>100</sup> and York which were ‘closed’ administrations; that is to say, burgess participation

was very limited.<sup>101</sup> The enlarged council of forty eight men cannot, therefore, be interpreted as an extension of democracy or an attempt to include a wider range of burgesses, but rather as a move by the Sessions and Mickletorn jurors to restrict participation by burgesses not of their status. With this in mind, it is possible to reinterpret the calls for reform not as symptoms of conflict but as a co-

operative effort between the aldermen and the next tier of local government to revise an outdated, medieval council structure to one more suited to a late 16th and early 17th century town, albeit one that was more hierarchical and closed than the original.

This discussion of the relationship between the Sessions and Mickletorn juries and the council has brought this article full circle. It has also produced a

different interpretation of events from that offered by Stevenson. This, however, does not undermine the value of his work in translating, transcribing and publishing collections like the *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* which have made them so accessible to many people. Indeed, it is only because of the efforts of Stevenson and his contemporaries, at the turn of the 20th century, that modern historians are able to take a 'fresh look' at borough records at the start of the 21st.

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