

AYLESBURY IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY A BAILIFF'S NOTEBOOK

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AT the beginning of the reign of Edward IV, John Balky, bailiff of Aylesbury, was keeping a notebook¹ in which he entered current business in English. All other records of his term of office have disappeared, leaving about a hundred pages of accounts, sewn into a rough calf cover. It is not difficult to suggest a reason for their survival. The earl of Wiltshire, lord of Aylesbury, had been one of the principal supporters of Henry VI and his queen Margaret of Anjou. In 1461, after escaping from the battle of Towton, he was captured and executed, and his estates were forfeited to the crown. Aylesbury was granted by Edward IV to the earl of Essex and remained in his family for twenty-five years. During this period its administration was no doubt carried on in the customary manner, though the Latin records are missing. They may well have been kept with the other Essex muniments and not handed over to Thomas, earl of Ormonde, brother of the earl of Wiltshire, when he regained the family estates on the accession of Henry VII. The notebook, however, probably remained in private hands. The earl's staff would have been glad to take it over, in view of the valuable information which it contained. It was placed with his official records and with them has survived.

Taken alone, it is rather a confusing document. Dates from the first to the seventh years of Edward IV's reign occur, but not in chronological order. Markets, the rabbit warren, river banks, repairs to buildings and many other items are mixed up with farming and rent collection. We have to go back to the Latin records of the earl of Wiltshire to find out the extent of the bailiff's work and his place in the organisation of a great estate—how the routine business was carried out, what special orders he might have to attend to, and how the accounts were checked. We find the bailiff of Aylesbury not only occupied with his duties there, but obliged to ride to London three times a year with the fee farm of the town, to go to Coventry in the autumn for the audit, and to make other business journeys. He had to be a man who could deal with all sorts of people, not only in Aylesbury, but in a wider world.²

A John Balky had been one of two bailiffs mentioned in the account roll of 1447 to 1448, but held no official position from 1452 to 1454. Later account rolls for the reign of Henry VI are missing. Who the earl of Wiltshire's bailiff was on the eve of Towton we do not know. If it was John Balky, the new

lord was fortunate to be able to retain his services; if not, Balky must have been chosen as a man of standing in the town with previous experience of the post.

THE HOME FARM

The bailiff was responsible for the home farm and for letting the lord's pastures and meadows. In the notebook there is one set of accounts for Walton, where the farm was situated, and four sets for agistment and sales of hay. It looks as though the farm accounts were usually entered in another book. This notebook is like many another; the owner knew his way about it and marked almost every entry with a symbol of some kind, whose meaning is lost to us. However, although our information is incomplete, we learn about farming at all seasons of the year.

Walton was a hamlet on low-lying ground on the road from Aylesbury to Wendover. One of its most valuable crops was rushes which were used for thatching, the most common roof covering at that time. There were two fees in Walton: the one in the hands of the lord of Aylesbury was Stoners, as we know from an entry in the notebook: *Item for expenses of let cort (leet court) of Stoners fee for ye dyner (the dinner)—xv d. ob. (15½d.)*. In the rental, John Baldwin heads the list, paying a quitrent for Bawds, the other fee, and 8s. 11¾d. for other land. The bailiff had to see that the manor house, Walton Court, was adequately protected against thieves and armed bands. All old buildings were timbered, with wattle and daub walls—bricks, as we shall see, were beginning to be used in Aylesbury—and were only secure when surrounded by a hedge or stockade and, if possible, a moat.

Item payed to Kampyonn greythyng³ of ye mote ij d.

Item payed to Robertus Vord for ye stokces (stakes) iijs. iiij d.

Item payed to Johannes Smeht (Smith) for ij lodes of thornes to Waltun corte ij s. viij d.

Item payed to Thomas Bladen for ye dykyng of ye cort - - - banke iij s. iiij d.

Item payed to Johannes Smeht for ij lodes ij s. viij d. (73a)

Probably these stockades made of thorns interwoven with strong stakes were an addition to quickset hedges, which tend to get thin at the base, unless carefully maintained.

Richard Sharpe, the reeve, was in charge of the farm at Walton. He was not a native of Aylesbury, for the bailiff *payed onto Ricardus Sharpe at Shroftyd wane he rode home—iijs. iiij d.* Another time he was paid £13 8s. 7d. There must have been farm hands boarded in the house; one was James who received a lump sum of £3 13s. 4d., and another was *Thomas yowr man*, who was provided with a pair of shoes at 7d., a pair of hosen at 1s. 2d., occasional small payments and 10s. 3d. for his wages. Richard Sharpe was allowed a certain amount of discretion; he collected some of the rents and sometimes engaged outside help of which a great deal was needed. Many of the tenants of Walton manor appear in the accounts with their families, and men from other parts of Aylesbury and even outside the town were employed, especially for work requiring skill or equipment.

Item payed to Johannes Venches wyfe for vj galos of alle (for 6 gallons of ale) vjd.

Item payed to Katren Lene for bred iiijd. (73a)

Item payed to Willelmus Shafford for greythyng³ of ye lordes barly be ye beddyng of Sharpe (working on the lord's barley by the bidding of Sharpe) xxs. (73b)

Item payed to Johannes Venche for heryng and sowynge of ye lordes lond (harrowing and sowing of the lord's land) xijs. ix d. ob. q. (12s. 9½d.).

Item payed to Willelmus Lane for thressyng (threshing) of iij quarters of beans ix d.

Item payed to Robartus Kechelle for flesche yt Sharp bowt of heme (that Sharp bought of him) xxd.

Item payed Willelmus Forest for iiij dayes and alfe a day iijs. ijd. (74b)

For mony ressyfed be Johannes Broke for ye fellyngge of ye wote (For money received by John Broke for the felling of the wood) viijs.

Item to ye same Johannes for iij dayes be for vjd.

Item Johannes Deradent and Willelmus Samwell for ye makynge of ye flages redy to ye kart (making the flags ready to cart) iijs. iiijd.

Item for v acres of flages vjs. viijd.

Item mony payde to Willelmus Naxse for thechyngg (thatching) iiijd.

Item to Thomas yowre mann xijd.

Item to Johannes Nawger of Stok (Stoke) for karyngge (carrying) of xj lodes of benes xxijd. (81b)

Item to Willelmus Daffers of Jhessame (Chesham) for ye karyng of ix bohssels benes ix d.

Item delyferd to a karter of Rekmanesworht (delivered to a carter of Rickmansworth) v quarters.

Item to ij menn of Astun (Aston Clinton) iiij quarters.

These sums must have been entered when the men came for payment, but occasionally we are given a picture of a complete farming operation. Whatever was done needed the co-operation of several families. Haste was necessary to take advantage of good weather for harvesting and haymaking. Moreover, most of the workers were not farm servants, but had holdings of their own to look after as well as working for the bailiff. Early in the notebook there are consecutive haymaking accounts. Cutting the hay—nearly fifty acres—was done by John Holler, James Benet, William Samwele, John Dokat, John Balky and John Holbron. Margaret Strot and Joan Ward made most of the hay *redy to ye kart iiijd. an acre* (between them). Thomas Vaws carted hay for four days and John Balky *for ij days weht hes kart*. Richard Dyker and his man were paid 5s. 8d. *for to kepe ye reke mettles*; presumably they worked on the rick meatless, i.e. providing their own meals. Thomas Strot worked for a day for 5d. and a man employed *for to rake after ye kartes for ij dayes mettles* was paid 8d. There is a short account of the harvesting of William Hales' crops for which the bailiff was responsible. John Sawnders who had a cart was in charge, assisted by William Samwell, William Berad, William Sawnders and Thomas Smeht; some of the land may have been inclosed, but twelve lands or selions lay in the open fields.

In the notebook, payments for meadow and agistment are grouped with the profits of the demesne lands. The mead lay in Heydon Field, Aldenham, the Neyt Fields, Donsam, Stok or Stoklade Field and Dokmore; some of these were grassland, others arable fields with balks, roads and marshy parts given up to hay. Meadow was valuable and people from neighbouring villages as well as inhabitants of Aylesbury rented it. *John Gorney of Astun Clenton and John Karter of ye same towne* agreed to pay 7s for three acres of mead, 3s. 6d. when the deal was made. Thomas Vaws took two acres for 2s. 4d., while John Roos rented Honyam Moor and the Warner Hook in Kingsmoor for 15s. These lists and the entries for agistment cover many pages. From them we learn the names of large numbers of people living in Aylesbury and the country round about.

The information about prices and wages is scattered and incomplete. Generally we do not know how long a man worked, whether he was given meals or how skilled he was. In piece work, lands and leys often take the place of acres. Agistment payments probably covered the period from May Day to Michaelmas, during which a cowherd was employed to look after the beasts for a wage of 30s 10d. Workers were usually paid by the piece. The men harvesting William Hales' corn were receiving 11d. an acre, 5d. a land. William Samwell was paid 7d. an acre for haymaking; for flags 9d. was paid. Thomas Strot was paid 5d. a day at harvest time and the man who raked after the cart 4d. We want to be sure what *mettles* means before we can compare the two. There is an entry showing dyking paid at the rate of 9d. a day and another at 5d., while for mending the fence of the pinfold a man received 4d. a day. The rent of arable land was 8d. an acre, meadow 1s. or much more, and flags 2s. 4d. These figures can only be used to give an indication of prices and wages at the beginning of Edward IV's reign.

FAIRS AND MARKETS

The notebook tells us little about the fairs. No details are given, simply total receipts: *Ressyfed for tolle and stondyngges opon ye feyre day xvs. iiijd.* The provision of a pen for the livestock of farmers and dealers attending fairs and markets was profitable. Under the heading *for the folde*, marked with three trefoils, is entered:

For ye follde in ye vij yerē of K E ye iiij (Edward IV)

Jacobus Towrsey for xij nytes (nights) vjs. (Above-soll' vjs. to Hary)

Johannes Godman for vj nytes iijs.

Johannes Godman for ij acres di' (half) and a rod (rood) iijs. viijd. with fifteen more similar entries. The six shillings paid to Harry appear in the bailiff's account with Harry Cotes later on in the notebook.

There are two lists of payments *for ye market* by outsiders who had to pay tolls from which most of the inhabitants of Aylesbury were free. The first list is quoted, being the longer.

Ricardus Warde fehsser (fisher) ijs.

Robartus Braun de Letun (Leighton Buzzard) xijd.

Johannes Kembell de Resborow (Risborough) xijd.

Robartus Stresener de Amatsham viijd.

Johannes Ofyhet de Wodnesdon (Waddesdon) viijd.

Willelmus Mondy de Wykombe xijd.

Johannes Halse de Lectun xijd.	Willelmus Mede de Jhessham (Chesham) viijd.
Johannes Penne de Wycomb xijd.	Willelmus Hawthorn de Jhessam viijd.
Willelmus Karter de Wycomb xijd.	Ricardus Glofer de Lectun viijd.
Johannes Haxby de Letun xijd.	Radulphus Hashtun viijd.
Water Mondy de Wycomb xijd.	Willelmus Hardeslee viijd.
Edeuardus Mede de Claydon xijd.	Willelmus Browne de Chessam viijd.
Thomas Glofer de Aylesbury xd.	Johannes Gerrard xijd.
Johannes Dymex de Ametsam (Amer-sham) vjd.	Johannes Grenbow de Trengre (Tring)
Thomas Stresener de Amatsham viijd.	Johannes Efyecht of Resborowe
Johannes Barns de Ametsham viiijd.	Symod Dally of Wenslow vjd.
Johannes Glofer de Horsyngdon viijd.	Robartus Dalton (21b)

Piepowder Courts⁴ were held in Aylesbury, as elsewhere, to settle disputes between traders, but they are not mentioned by the bailiff, as courts were the business of the steward of the manor.

TWO UNUSUAL ENTRIES

Before going on to the accounts for repair and maintenance, two exceptional entries should be noticed. The lord of Aylesbury had the right to waifs, that is goods and livestock abandoned by their owner. Under the heading of Walton, there is a short inventory of clothes and household goods.

Item for ye godes yt (that) were weyfed preysed (priced) be Johannes Venche, Ricardus Kampyon, Ricardus Warde, Robartus Resnyng and Johannes Hempman, Willelmus Halyer on Saynt Loyes Day in ye vj year of K E ye IIII now reynyng (reigning)

In primis for a cape and a glos (?) perys (price) iiijd.

Item for a gown and jakat ye prys xd.

Item for viij peses of lenon ragges (linen rags) ye preys iiijd.

Item for ij toron coferlytes (torn coverlets) ye preys iiijd.

Item for iij shetes ye preys iijs.

Item for j scelat (skillet) ye preys ijd.

● Item for ij platters and iij desshes jd.

Item j payed for her (their) costes xijd. (61b)

The other entry relates to a false moneyer:

Item for dyfers (divers) costes and exspenses yt wer done abowte ye thefe yt made and coyned selfer:

Ferst for ye karynge of hes godes xijd.

Item for ye keynge of heme and hes wyfe iij dayes and iij nytes for iij men iij nytes iijs.

Item for mete and drynk xijd.

Item for ye karynge of ye pale and ye dolle to ye more be my lordes commawndment and my costes ijs.

Item for my costes to Breykelle (Brickhill) xijd.

Item to ye gaylers fee. vd. (89a)

The carrying of the pale and *dolle* to the moor is obscure, but may relate to the penalty for forging the currency—hanging, drawing and quartering. One meaning of *dole*, given in Halliwell's *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words*, is the entrails of a deer.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Naturally the bailiff's notebook contains many payments for fencing, hedging and ditching. Keeping the pinfold in order was a constant expense. A typical entry follows:

Of ye penfold to Robert Kechelle for xv poles for ye pene xvd.

Item for ye karyagee to ye pene vijd.

Item to Ricardus Meller for ij days for to mende ye penfolde viijd.

Item to Johannes Holborne for a day to mende ye penfold abowt iiijd. (84a)

The rabbit warren was surrounded by a ditch, a hedge and a palisade of thorns. Within a few folios we have these entries:

Item payed onto Ricardus Dyker for dykyng and quekset (quickset) abowt ye ij conynggers for v xx (five score) perche xxxiijs. iiijd. (58a)

Item payed to Johannes Smeht for iiij lodes to ye konynger vs. iiijd.

Item payed to Willelmus Heglyntun for ij lodes to gonnyngger ijs. viijd.

Item payed to Johannes Smeht for j lod of thornes xvid.

Item payed Willelmus Hasle for tynyng of xj lodes thornes ijs. viijd. (60a)

The river had to be dredged and the banks kept in order:

Item payed to Ricardus Dyker for ye drawyng of ye brok fro Honyam Vord (Honyam ford) onto Colferhows med for iij scor perche and iiij (64 perches) in party of paymente ijs.

Item to ye same Ricardus ijs. (59b)

Regular maintenance of buildings seems to have been neglected, and, when at last repairs were undertaken, they often amounted to rebuilding. To understand the work which John Balky was responsible for, it is advisable to go back to his predecessors' accounts in the reign of Henry VI. From them we gain a better idea of the buildings themselves and the way they were built. The Spittle Mill came into the hands of the earl of Ormonde, when he acquired Ludsfee in the early fifteenth century, and had to be extensively repaired. Thomas Russell, the carpenter, and two mates worked for ten and a half days upon a new platform for the waterwheel and beneath the outer wheel of the mill, for which they received 6d. a day, in all 5s. 3d. Two sawyers were paid 2s. 11d. for sawing 250 foot of board at 14d. the hundred. Adam Dyker received 3s. 4d. for the work of stopping up with clay and dung (fimo) round the new platform and forebay, including carriage of the materials. Nails bought for the carpenters cost 5d. A total of 11s. 11d. was certified by John Clerke, the apprauator, in 1447/1448.⁵ Five years later, the mill was bringing in a rent of 70s., 10s. being abated from the usual payment. The lord's mill needed attention; the carpenters were busy putting in new groundsills and repairing the outer wheel. At the same time, it was rethatched with rushes. The work cost 11s. 5d.⁶ In the next year, the same reduced rent was received for the Spittle Mill which again needed no repair. Various works were done to the lord's mill and its pool at the cost of 37s. 1d., Elys Dycher being paid 33s. 4d.⁷

The notebook records repairs to the Spittle Mill and the windmill:

Item for ye makyng of melle welle (mill wheel) and ye ij water gates to Johannes Jhesses for timber and workmanssep of ye spetelmelle xxxiijs. iiijd.

Therof ressyfed of Thomas Alen (the tenant) xs.

Item of me ressyfed vjs. viijd.

Item for a hunderd bord to ye waterwall ijs. viijd.

Item for naylls to ye same werke ijs.

Item for ramyng of ye same werke xvjd. ijd. (sic)

Item ressyfed of me anoder tym vjs. viijd.

Item for viij karfoll (cartloads) of clay for dykyng and karyage vjd. (21a)

This entry and an earlier one recording the payment by Alen of 13s. 4d. for the windmill are undated, but on folio 40a there is a dated account :

Ressyfed of Thomas Alen for ye rent of ye spetelmelle and of ye wendmelle for ye terme of Mechelmas laste paste in ye vj yer of K E ye iiij xvjs. viijd.

and soo alowed for ye reperasyon of ye spetelmelle and of ye wendmelle vijs. vd.

Item ressyfed of ye same Thomas for rent for Seynt Mary Day be for paste xxs. ye xxiiij day of Jenner' and soo remayneht be heynd at yt day (so remaineth behind at that day) iiij marks iijs. iiijd. (40a)

Further small repairs to both mills are recorded :

For dyfers reparasyons done abowte ye wenmelle in ye vij of K E ye iiij

Ferst for a peyr of armes to ye welle (wheel) xvijd.

Item for ye makyng of ye same

Item to ye carpenter for iiij days ijs.

Item for hes mete for iiij dayes viijd.

Item to ye smeht for mendyng of iiij steropes vjd. (Stirrups: rings or iron bands that bind the shanks of the wheel. Halliwell)

Item for nayles iiijd.

Item for bendes of jron viijd.

Now for ye costes of ye watrmell.

forst for ye makynge of an hope of tre (hoop of wood) abowt ye stone iijs. iijd.

Item for an jron spendelle xijd.

Item for ramynge ijs. vjd.

Item for herht (earth) for to rame vjd.

Item for ij bordes vjd. (57b)

Towards the end of the book come further repairs and a reckoning made with the tenant. It is dated the fifth year of Edward IV, whereas the one thirty folios earlier is dated the sixth year, proving that the entries were made haphazardly.

Item reparasyons of spetelle melle

For magyng of ye spendelle xijd.

Item draynge (dredging) of ye broke xijd.

Item for a bond for ye wenmelle xijd.

A reconyng mad be twene Thomas Alen and me ye xxviiij day of May in ye v yer of ye K E ye iiij for ye rent of Mechelmas term be for passed and for ye hors payed and soo remayneht be heynd of ye same term iiijs. iiijd. (cancelled)

Item for ye melle hame (meadow) at Heydon iijs.

Item for Seynt Mary Day rent xliijs. iiijd.

Item ressyfed of Thomas Alen xxs. (88b)

THE MOOT HALL AND THE BULL INN

The lord of Aylesbury was responsible for the repair of the Moot Hall which stood in the market place. In the account roll of 1452/1453, some minor works are recorded, entitled *Reparacio de le Motehalle*. A translation follows.

Item with various costs this year incurred and enjoined in the repair of the

building of the Moot Hall in the town of Aylesbury, as in groundsills of a door and two shutters and with the foundations of the walls, with plastering and daubing and with lathes collected for it, and likewise with hooks, nails and a bar, also with various other things bought, scheduled and transported, as contained in the bailiff's two invoices 11s.⁹

No repairs are recorded in the notebook. The earl of Wiltshire had spent considerable sums on his Aylesbury estate, so his successor probably did not find it necessary to undertake much building work.

One of the most valuable properties which he took over was the Bull Inn, the lord's hospice. Very extensive repairs and rebuilding took place there from 1447 to 1448, and again from 1452 to 1454—in fact, the work may have been continuous, but the record is lost. When we come to the 'sixties and consult the bailiff's notebook, we find minor repairs, but they have the interest of being in English. All the earlier accounts are in Latin, except for an agreement with a carpenter, made in 1447 and attached to the compotus roll of 1447 to 1448.

The covenant of Thomas Deynte the Carpynter of Aylesbury for the makynge of a hous of v bayes with iij shutters yn the yn of the hole Boole (inn of the old Bull) to teke for every baye viijs. iiijd.—and the lorde to fynde tymber and cariage

The said Thomas schalle groundesulle the Crossechamber and make odo (other) dyverse Carpentrye Works of the saide Chamber and take for his hire xxiijs. iiijd.

Item the said Thomas schalle take downe the longestabulle and he schall newe Groundesulle the hous of iij bayes that standys alonge by the highe wey and he schalle dryve hit and sette hit a longe there as the olde stabulle stondys and with the tymber of the olde stabulle he schalle make ij bayes to enlarge the said hous with odor werks &c. and take for hys labor xls.

Item John Joyner tyler schalle take downe al the tyle of the olde stabulle and of the hous by the heyghe wey and of the kechyn bakhous and maltehoue and schalle type agayn the said houses and he schalle have for takynge downe and leyngge agayn of every m or vm (5000) xiiijd. and the lorde schalle fynde lyme sonde stone and tylepynnes.

In short, Thomas Deynte was to improve the stables which lay on the highway by pulling down the long stable and using the material to extend the other stable. The Crosschamber was to have new sill beams and other attention to its woodwork. The tiler was to strip tiles from all the buildings and retiling the new stable and the kitchen, bakehouse and malthouse. No doubt there were a number of separate buildings, or houses, as they were called in the Middle Ages, grouped round a courtyard. The fine range of stables soon proved useful. About 1450, sixty-five horses and hackneys belonging to the earl and his servants, with a squire and fifteen grooms in charge of them, lodged at the Bull for twenty-nine days; geese, capons and chickens had to be delivered to feed them there. The steward asked for an allowance of £15 6s. 1d. to be made for the cost. A contingent of retainers must have visited Aylesbury.¹⁰

Between 1452 and 1454 all the old buildings were done up and new rooms were added, brick being used for the first time. The beams in the hall and the old chamber were coloured red, and outside stood a fine new sign of

The Bull. A summary of the accounts for 1452 to 1453 follows:

- Paid for 3000 bricks bought from William Alred to build 2 chambers, 8s. a thousand with carriage—24s.
- Paid for 4 quarters (of a cwt.) of lime to plaster the walls of the hall and various chambers, 1s. 4d. a quarter—5s. 4d.
- Paid William Skete and William Haseley for plastering and daubing the walls of the hall and 8 chambers; for the job by agreement with the bailiff—12s.
- Paid for digging and carriage of 4 cartloads of sand to mix with the lime for plastering, 1s. a cart—4s.
- Paid William Skete and his mate for their labour repairing and in part new-building the old walls of the hall and chambers, and in plastering and daubing, where necessary, by agreement with the bailiff for the job—8s.
- Paid John Bailly for the stodynge (studding) for the old walls before plastering and daubing, for the job—1s. 8d.
- Paid for 4 pieces of timber bought from Richard Bochor and Thomas Norman to make stodes for the above work—2s.
- Paid to William Skete for plastering and daubing the old walls of the stable, by the job—3s. 4d.
- Paid John Hanse for gathering and carrying rods for the repair of the old walls, for the job—2s.
- Paid John Geffes Carpenter for making new stairs to a chamber within the inn and boarding the solar of that chamber, and making 9 doors and 12 shutters for the old buildings in the inn and for the kitchen, 8 days at 6d. a day—4s.
- Paid for 300 foot of elm board bought from Robert Wright to make the doors and shutters, 2s. a hundred—6s.
- Paid William Andrewe for iron hooks and hinges for the 9 doors and for hanging them, for the job—5s.
- Paid for 1000 bordenailles and - - - Haichenailles for the doors and shutters and for making the solar—6s.
- Paid for 800 foot of oak board bought at Leighton Buzzard to make windows and doors for the inn, and to make the solar, 2s. 6d. a hundred—20s.
- Paid to John Clerke with his cart and horses carrying the said boards from Leighton Buzzard to Aylesbury, for the job—3s.
- Paid to John Clerke for a cartload of oak timber bought from him for *fleyles* and *chekes posts* of the door of the inn—10s.
- Paid to John Reddelle and Austyn Warrewyke for cutting down an elm at Burcote for the repair of the postern, 10 days at 4d. a day—3s. 4d.
- Paid to John Reddelle for barking (*shrudanti*), cutting off the branches, 6 days at 4d. a day—2s.
- Paid to Clerke with his cart and horses carrying the elm from Burcote to Aylesbury, 14 cartloads at 6d. a load—7s.
- Paid for 6 locks with keys for 6 doors, 6d. each—3s.
- Paid for 6 rings with 6 latches tinned with white iron, bought in London—2s. 8d.
- Paid to William Perkyns for making the timber of the old hall and chambers red, together with other things bought for the same work, for the job—
- Paid to Richard Rose thatcher for reroofing the grange of the Bull, 7 days at 5d. the day—2s. 11d.
- In 4 cartloads of flags bought for the work, each cartload 2s. 2d.—8s. 8d.
- Paid Emmot Plummer drawing the flags and serving thatcher, 7 days at 4d. a day—2s. 4d.

Sum £7 11s. 3d.¹¹

The account of the next year's work is unfortunately less detailed, in spite of costing almost as much. William Perkins, who painted the old timbers inside the inn, painted the bull on the new sign. The translation runs:

Repairs in the hospice called the *Bull*.

And paid for divers repairs made in the lord's hospice at the *Bull* this year: in carpenters' work making privies and other necessaries there, for masons making an oven and a bakehouse, and also for the work of Thomas Whitloke (above: 20s.) making the sign of the bull for the said hospice and the work of William Perkyns (above: 20s.) painting the sign, as appears in the bailiff's bills attached to this account, examined and containing in all £6 3s. ½d.¹²

John Balky in his notebook only records repairs to the barn of the *Bull*. The door, and the wattle and daub walls needed attention and the roof had to be rethatched.

Item J mad covinant weht Johannes Franklyn for to theche ye bolle berne for limynge and roddes yt longeht to ye same berne sofesintly for to thechet and to bynde het for xs. therof ressyfed in party of payment xxjd. (In modern English: Item I made covenant with John Franklyn for to thatch the Bull barn for liming and rods that belong to the same barn sufficient to thatch it and bind it for 10s., thereof received in part payment 21d.)

Item payed to ye same Johannes ijs. viijd.

Item payd to Mawd Denys ijd.

Item payd to ye same Johannes ijs. ijd. (44b)

The rest of the repairs are listed a few folios further on.

For dyfers reparasyons don at ye Bolle in ye vij yer of K E ye IIII ferste for a dore to ye berone and for hokes and yenges and nayles and for tember xxijd.

Item for rodes and stodes for to mend weht ye wolld walles viijd.

Item for iij lodes of herht iijd.

Item for weydinge (? weaving) and dawbeynge viijd.

Item for a carpenter for iij dayes xvd.

Item for iij lodes of thornes iiijs.

Item for ye tynynge of heme xijd.

Item for tembar to ye pale iijd. (57a)

(Modern English: For various repairs done at the Bull in the seventh year of

King Edward IV:

First for a door to the barn and for hooks and hinges and nails and for timber 22d.

Item for rods and studs to mend the old walls 8d.

Item for 3 loads of earth 3d.

Item for weaving and daubing 8d.

Item for 3 loads of thorns 4s.

Item for entwining them 12d.

Item for timber for the fence 4d.)

Behind the inn, there was a close, surrounded by a palisade of thorns.

THE PEOPLE OF AYLESBURY

It is easier to find out about the buildings of the fifteenth century than about the people—some of their houses and nearly all their churches still exist, though much altered and disguised. The bailiff's notebook undoubtedly brings us closer to the inhabitants of Aylesbury than the legal documents in which we usually find the doings of medieval people recorded. We know how they

spoke and something about their dealings with each other. On the other hand, when we want to know what property a man held, where he lived, and what his status was, we have to go to the standard sources. In the Hampton Collection, there is a fine series of deeds of Edward IV's time, and a rental for the beginning of Henry VII's reign.¹³ It is very detailed and, being only twenty years later in date, supplies useful information about families and places.

The deeds show that property was nearly always conveyed to feoffees or trustees. One object was to avoid the dues payable on the death of the owner. The other was to prevent the forfeiture of the property, if, as was likely in troubled times, the owner happened to be on the losing side and was found guilty of treason. An examination of the names of feoffees shows that men of standing in Aylesbury and its neighbourhood were continually performing this service for each other. They put up a smokescreen through which it is difficult to penetrate and discover what was really going on. They seem to have combined to preserve their lands and to have been more anxious to advance their own families than to make sacrifices for the houses of York or Lancaster. They were also closely associated in the administration of the town and of the Fraternity or Guild of Our Lady, the hub of the religious and social life there.

Aylesbury was far from being a remote provincial town. The steward—Ralph Verney almost certainly was steward—made a fortune in the City of London of which he became lord mayor; the bailiff, sub-steward, and other officials frequently rode to London on the lord's business and no doubt contrived to do some of their own at the same time. Heavy goods could be sent to the capital by cheap water-carriage.¹⁴ Aylesbury was the centre of a rich agricultural district and its markets and fairs were attended by people from a wide area. There must have been many opportunities for men of all ranks to engage in trade and the inns of Aylesbury—two at least recently rebuilt in a lavish style—bear witness to the prosperity of the town. The basis of it all was the land. In those days everyone who prospered invested in it. Almost every inhabitant had a holding of some sort and was engaged in farming on his own account.

Some of the most charming and valuable entries in the notebook are the bailiff's notes of the reckonings which he made by word of mouth. Sometimes the debts were easy to work out and a simple entry under the receipts records their payment. Other accounts were more complicated, running back several years, with one thing set against another, until at last a conclusion was reached with *Soo remayneht to me at yt day clerly* such a sum, or words to that effect. It was not the amount of money involved which made the reckonings difficult to arrive at, but the number of transactions. The accounts with Harry Hardy and Harry Cotes are examples of the bailiff's dealings with two men who worked on the farm for an annual wage and had substantial holdings of land of their own as well. Most of the people mentioned in the book have latinised christian names, so the name Harry Hardy—often Arry Ardy—brings the man to life. The accounts with him are difficult to unravel and spread over many years. With Harry Cotes a fairly straightforward reckoning was

made, showing that Cotes owed the bailiff and his wife 16s. 8d. He owed for his house and land, food eaten at the George and in the bailiff's house, a debt settled for him, and a rent collected for use of the sheepfold. On the other hand, he had bought hurdles to fence the fold, he had kept the bailiff's swine for two years and was owed a year's wages.

A reconyng be twene Harry cotes and me ye xj day of Desseber in ye vij yer of K E ye iiij alle thengges record be twen heme and me, safe for ye herdels yt wer at Heydone and for ye wode and ye hogges of Bonses Parke, and soo Harry hoseht (oweth) me and my wyfe clerly xvjs. viijd.

For ye dewtes (debts) yt he hosed mee
Forst for Bonses Cloos (Close) iijs. vjd.
Item for hes hows iijs. iiijd.
Item for ye wolde corte (old court) for shepe xxd.
Item for ij lodes of thornes ijs. viijs.
Item for ye mony yt I payed to Robartus Vord for heme vjs. viijd.
Item for iij halfe acres of layes xvjd.
Item for ij acres of lond xvjd.
Item for brede yt at ye Gorge xvijs.
Item for brede at my howse xiijs. vjd.
Item for Jacobus Towrsey for ye volde vjs.
For my dewte hosyng to heme
Item for xx herdeles xxd.
Item for xxvj herdels iiijs
Item for hes heyer ys yere xxxs.
Summa xljs. viijd.

The reckoning with John Ingram shows the bailiff dealing with one of the most important residents of Aylesbury. He held the courts in the absence of the steward and went to London to carry out the legal business of the manor. He occurs in deeds from 1455 to 1481, usually as feoffee, but also holding jointly with his wives, first Isabel and secondly Agnes. He had a lease of the Prebendal Manor and was concerned with tithe collection; he also rented St. John's Hospital land. The account runs over three years, beginning with a payment made in Ingram's own house; another was made at Westminster and 27s. 4d. was received in silver. Payments made on ten separate occasions added up to £6 19s. 5½d. and, when set against debts for rent and agistment, *so remayneht to my lord clerly for to pay iijl xjs. iijd. ob.*

We are dealing with influential and wealthy families, rising in the world. The fortunes of the Verney family were founded at this time by Ralph Verney,¹⁵ citizen and alderman of London; he became one of the sheriffs towards the end of Henry VI's reign, and lord mayor in 1465. The City played an important part in putting Edward IV on the throne. The king recognised the value of Verney's support which helped him to regain the throne, when he was driven abroad in 1471. Though Ralph Verney can seldom have been in Aylesbury in the early years of Edward IV's reign, his influence must have been very great. He held his old family estate at Fleet Marston and Middle Claydon recently acquired; in 1465 he was granted the forfeited estates in Aylesbury, Burcote and Bierton of William Wandesford who had served in the household of Margaret of Anjou. These estates included the King's Head

which had been bought by Wandesford in 1455 and immediately granted to Ralph Verney and other feoffees.¹⁶ Verney was, therefore, one of the titular owners of the King's Head and perhaps the rest of Wandesford's Buckinghamshire property, when it was forfeited. In 1465, these lands were granted to him, as from 1461, and Wandesford renounced his rights in them. The King's Head probably served as Verney's headquarters in Aylesbury. The great hall had recently been built with kitchen and private rooms behind—the glass in the windows of the hall showing the arms of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou would have been stored in Edward IV's time. It was a suitable residence for Verney when he visited the town, and provided ample room to house and entertain his supporters and servants.¹⁷ In 1455 it was described as three tenements. A rambling medieval house was easily divided up into separate apartments—it was not considered a unit, but a series of *houses*. Though nowhere in the notebook called steward, Verney appears to have held that office. Balky usually refers to him as *Mayster Verney* or *My Mayster*, and received payments of fees and servants' wages from him. Probably the earl of Essex left control of Aylesbury to him and never came to the town which was an addition to his vast estates. There is no reference in fifteenth-century documents to a manor house; previous lords of Aylesbury may have stayed for short periods in their own inn, the Bull. Similarly, the Crown, once described simply as *Baldwins*, as well as being an inn, may have been their family home. No other is known.

John Balky, the writer of the notebook, gives no hint of where he lived. He owned a house at Green End, but had property in other parts of town.¹⁸

Only a wealthy man of standing would have been appointed bailiff of Aylesbury. He belonged to a family long established in the town and had served as master of the Fraternity of Our Lady.¹⁹ His activities, like those of Chaucer's reeve, were wide and various:

Wel coude he kepe a gerner and a binne;
 Ther was noon auditour coude on him winne.
 Wel wiste he, by the droghte, and by the reyn,
 The yelding of his seed, and of his greyn,
 His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,
 His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye,
 Was hoolly in this reves governing,
 And by his covenaut yaf the rekening

He was used to reading Latin rolls, as is shown by his use of the Latin forms of christian names and phrases, such as *soll'* for *paid* and *eodem* meaning *for the same*. His hand is not a good one, but, with a little practice, it is quite easy to read. His spelling does not vary much; the reader has to accustom himself to frequent inversion of letters, *wiht* for *with* and *csor* for *score*. When the entries are read aloud, most of the difficulties can be resolved. Compared with the writer of the agreement with the carpenter, Balky is unpolished; he was a practical man of affairs rather than a professional lawyer. His methods are difficult for us to follow, for we cannot interpret the signs which mark almost every entry. He seems to have been master of his job—attending to details himself and well able to deal with people of all sorts. He made a reckoning

with John Ingram in his *awen hows*. Thomas Smeht of Hocot sent his wife to Aylesbury *Saterdag sesennyt befor Creystemas Day* to pay him 11s. and *so remayneht beheynd for rent* 3s. 4d. He went to Walton to pay 3s. 4d. to *Jhone yowr mayde bey wettnes* of William Harrys. Wherever he happened to be, he was on business, and, when he came home, he emptied out his money bags, made a reckoning with himself, and entered it in his notebook.

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NOTES

(Abbreviation: H.C. Hampton Collection in Birmingham Central Public Library)

¹ Worcester Record Office: reference 705/380. The notebook is part of the Hampton Collection which is divided between Worcester, Birmingham, Lord Hampton's muniment room and the Bucks. Record Office. The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society has a microfilm. The book consists of 106 leaves, measuring 5¼ inches high by 4 inches wide, in 6 gatherings, sewn into a rough calf cover with a flap. A thong may once have been threaded through a hole in the flap. Three paper slips with notes in another hand and pieces of black thread and yellow silk mark some entries relating to agistment.

² H.C. 504039, 504040 and 504041 are account rolls, 1447 to 1448, 1452 to 1453, and 1453 to 1454. I have photocopies of these documents and have made transcripts of all the passages mentioned.

³ *To greithe* means *to prepare*; the sense here is *working on*.

⁴ H.C. 504041.

⁵ H.C. 504039. Appendix 1.

⁶ H.C. 504040. Appendix 2.

⁷ H.C. 504041. Appendix 3.

⁸ H.C. 504040.

⁹ H.C. 504039.

¹⁰ H.C. 504040 and 504041.

¹¹ H.C. 504040.

¹² H.C. 504041.

¹³ H.C. 504913.

¹⁴ H.C. 504040: a boar given by the rector of Hulcote to the earl of Wiltshire was sent from Aylesbury by Reading to London, *A Aylesbury usque Redynge usque London*. British Museum, Cott. i. 4., a 16th-century rental of Aylesbury, fo. 11b.: in connection with a search for coal, it is stated that Aylesbury is within 12 miles of the river *Teame*, by which supplies could be sent to the City of London.

¹⁵ Ed. John Bruce, *Letters and Papers of the Verney Family*, gives Ralph Verney's career and his relations with Sir Robert Whittingham.

¹⁶ H.C. 494987. Thomas Wandesford occurs in several H.C. deeds.

¹⁷ Ed. E. M. Jope, *Studies in Building History*, chapter 9, W. A. Pantin, *Medieval Inns*. Mr. Pantin finds three ranges of buildings. He considers a hall of 5 bays, suggested in the *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments* as the probable original length, unlikely in an ordinary inn of the period.

¹⁸ H.C. 504913.

¹⁹ H.C. 494397.

APPENDIX

1. H. C. 504039.

Reparacio molendini

Et solutum Thome Russelle et ii socijs carpentarijs per x dies dimidiam inter se operantes super nouam tabulacionem de le Water Weghl ac subtus rotam exteriorem molendini vocati Spitemulle quolibet eorum per diem vjd.—vs. iijd. Et solutum ij sauratoribus saurantibus ccl pedes tabuli ad idem opus captum per centena xiiijd.

ijs. xjd. Et solutum Ade Dyker laborario cum luto et fimo obstupanti circa dictam tabulacionem ac circa le forebay in grossis ad tascum cum cariago luti et fimi ad idem opus iijs. iiijd. Et in c clavis emptis ad opus dicte tabulacionis vd.

Summa xjs. xjd. per Johannem Clerke.

2. H.C. 504040.

Reparacio molendini

Et solutum pro reparacione molendini domini ibidem ut in groundesyllinge cum reparacione carpentrie rote exterioris eiusdem ac in coopertura tecti cum flaggis ad idem emptis sicut continetur per parcelas ballivi super hunc compotum examinatas in se continentes xjs. vd.

Summa xjs vd.

3. H.C. 504041.

Reparacio molendini

Et in diversis operibus factis super reparacionem molendini domini ibidem et stangni eiusdem ut patetur per parcelas predicti ballivi computantes cum xxxiijs. iiijd. solutis Elys Dycher pro inundacione stangni ex convencione secum facta in grosso xxxvijs. jd.

Summa xxxvijs. jd.