

THE HOUSEHOLDS OF THE BISHOPS OF BATH AND WELLS IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

BY R. W. DUNNING, B.A., PH.D.

The formality of ecclesiastical records in the century before the Reformation creates an almost impenetrable shield behind which the personalities of both bishops and clergy are all too often obscured. Their official appointments and activities can often be traced in remarkable detail, but of their private actions and interests little enough can be gathered. The gloom may sometimes be pierced by examining the composition of the households of bishops in an attempt to discover the kind of men a diocesan gathered around him to help him transact details of administration, to advise him on legal matters, to write his letters, and to provide him with conversation. Unfortunately the sources for such examinations are not plentiful, particularly for the bishops of Bath and Wells. No household accounts have survived from the later middle ages¹ which give a list of the bishop's entourage, and therefore the main sources must be the witness-lists of episcopal acts. These are not altogether reliable at best,² since the principles on which they were drawn up varied, the position of individuals in the household is often not given, and many are not complete. They cannot, therefore, be used as a quantitative guide. In any case, witness-lists become rare in episcopal registers by the fifteenth century, either because they were no longer included in the original document or, more likely, because writing clerks inevitably preferred the phrase *multis aliis* to the tedium of copying a long list of names. For the present survey an analysis has also been made of the frequent appearances of individuals as proctors at institutions, since they almost certainly owed their appointments to their proximity to the bishop. The evidence of the bishops' wills has proved of the utmost value. The appearance of an individual only once, either as witness or proctor, has precluded him from the present survey unless other evidence is available.

It is clear, on further examination, that by far the most constructive evidence is for the pontificate of Thomas Bekynton (1443-65), whose writing clerks, under the scrupulous supervision of himself or his registrar, included witnesses to acts, if not on the scale common in earlier centuries, certainly with an amount of detail unusual for the time. A few individuals can be placed with some certainty in the households of other bishops, but only under Bekynton can a fairly complete picture be drawn.

* * * *

By the beginning of the fifteenth century a distinction can be seen in the administration of the diocese between the senior members

¹ There is, however, a household roll of Ralph of Shrewsbury for 1337-8, printed in *Collectanea I* (Somerset) Rec(ord) Soc(iety), 39, 85-157. I am indebted to Professor F. R. H. DuBoulay for reading this paper and for helpful suggestions.

² C. R. Cheney, *English Bishops' Chanceries, 1100-1250* (Manchester 1950), 5.

of the bishop's staff and the members of the bishop's immediate household. Following the lead of the archdeacons, the vicar-general, the official principal and the commissary-general had moved away from the immediate surveillance of the diocesan; their offices were tending to become more permanent, the occupants less likely to change with successive bishops.³ Remaining with the bishop, and in many cases following him on his continuous moves about his diocese, were the spiritual chancellor, the registrar, the apparitor-general, together with the clerks of the writing office, notaries, domestic chaplains, menial servants, and certain members of the bishop's temporal administration.

THE SPIRITUAL CHANCELLOR. Originally the head of the bishop's secretariat, the chancellor had, by the fifteenth century, ceased to exercise these duties.⁴ He still retained the bishop's seal under which formal letters were issued, but this was a survival from the original office. William Felter was appointed chancellor by Bishop Bubwith in 1422 "with all and singular the things belonging to such office of chancellor", and the seal *ad causas* was delivered into his custody, in a formal ceremony in the large chamber in the bishop's manor house at Wookey.⁵ There is no further evidence to show that he was in any way directly involved in secretarial work.

The chancellor certainly still enjoyed a high place in the household, and invariably headed witness-lists when he was present. His position seems to have been at the head of the bishop's *jurisperiti*, the senior legal counsel, whose activities were "hardly distinguishable from those duties of an auditor of causes in the Court of Audience".⁶ All the fifteenth century chancellors were lawyers, and at least three—Thomas Stevens, John Storthwayt and Hugh Sugar—held the office of official principal at the same time.⁷ They were thus well qualified to advise the bishop on matters of law and legal procedure, though how important such a task was when a bishop such as Bekynton was himself a competent lawyer is open to question. Hugh Sugar, Bekynton's second chancellor, was certainly active in his office, but only noticeably so after 1459, when age must have confined the bishop's own activities. Sugar's duties reveal the legal side of his office: he conducted a heresy trial, proceeded in the business of uniting two benefices, and frequently assigned pensions, collated and

³ See generally for this process A. Hamilton Thompson, *The English Clergy* (Oxford 1947) and R. L. Storey, *Diocesan Administration in the Fifteenth Century* (St. Anthony's Hall).

⁴ Cheney, *op. cit.* 43; R. L. Storey, *Thomas Langley and the Bishopric of Durham* (S.P.C.K., 1960), 169.

⁵ *Register of Nicholas) Bubwith* (Som. Rec. Soc. 29, 30), 1068. References throughout to printed episcopal registers are to entries.

⁶ Cheney, *op. cit.* 40.

⁷ See appendix.

inducted at the bishop's order, and examined ordinands.⁸ John Wells, Bubwith's chancellor and commissary, heard a matrimonial suit, presumably brought to the court of audience, while he sat in *quadam capellula infra et prope ostium occidentale ecclesie cathedralis Wellensis ex parte boreali eiusdem situata*, which must have been the chapel of the Holy Cross where the consistory court sometimes sat.⁹ John Storthwayt occasionally acted for Stafford at institutions. But in these particular cases the chancellor acted on the specific authority of the bishop, a fact which suggests that such duties were not normally part of the chancellor's work, but were given to him because he was near at hand.

The chancellor was also frequently involved in visitations and other business connected with the bishop's jurisdiction over monastic houses. Stillington headed a commission of visitation to the canons of Bruton in 1445 and was sent to explain his master's position to Abbot Frome during Bekynton's quarrel with the monks of Glastonbury.¹⁰ Similarly William Felter was commissioned to examine and confirm the election of a master of St. John's Hospital, Bridgwater.¹¹ He also took a leading part in the Confirmation of the Election of John Stafford as dean of Wells in 1423, when he produced "very many arguments and objections" against the "allegations and persuasions" of John Storthwayt who supported Stafford.¹²

The chancellor was usually a richly-beneficed cleric, often supported by benefices in the bishop's gift such as prebends in the cathedral and other offices in the administration. William Bildeston, a civil lawyer, who was acting for Bowet in 1401¹³ already held benefices in the dioceses of Lincoln, London and Winchester.¹⁴ By 1406 he had risen in the hierarchy, holding a canonry in St. Martin's le Grand; he was also provided to a stall at Wells, but, although he was pardoned for accepting provision, he does not seem to have obtained the prebend.¹⁵ John Wells, doctor of Canon Law and chancellor to Bubwith, accompanied the bishop to the council of Constance in 1414 and died there three years later. He had been appointed a canon of Wells by the bishop in 1413, and before he left

⁸ *Reg(ister of Thomas) Bekynton* (Som. Rec. Soc. 49, 50), 1276, 1529.

⁹ *Reg. Bubwith*, 390; the consistory court was held there while the Lady Chapel in the east cloister (Stillington's Chapel) was being rebuilt 1477-88: *Proceedings of the Som(erset) A(rchaeological) S(ociety)*, 106, 49.

¹⁰ *Reg. Bekynton*, 175; *Official Correspondence of Thomas Bekynton*, ed. G. Williams (Rolls Series), i. 259.

¹¹ *Reg. Bubwith*, 1279.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1280.

¹³ *Reg(isters of Walter Giffard and Henry) Bowet* (Som. Rec. Soc. 13), 3.

¹⁴ For a biography, omitting his appointment as chancellor, see A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge 1963).

¹⁵ He will appear in due course in the addenda to the new edition of Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, 1300-1541.

the diocese he was also the bishop's official principal.¹⁶ His successor as chancellor, Thomas Stevens, a civil lawyer, was already a canon of Wells and Exeter before his first appearance as chancellor in 1418. By that time he, too, was official principal, and had already had experience as an advocate in the Court of Canterbury and as a royal envoy to Burgundy.¹⁷ Bubwith appointed him to the livings of Dogmersfield in 1414 and Ashbury in 1419. Bubwith's third chancellor was William Felter. A native of Bristol and trained in Civil and Canon Law, he was appointed in 1422. After the bishop's death in 1424 Felter left the diocese and became chancellor to Archbishop Kemp at York. He amassed a large number of benefices in the north, finally obtaining the deanery of York, to which he was appointed in 1436.¹⁸

No further trace of a spiritual chancellor has been found until 1439, when John Storthwayt was holding the office.¹⁹ Successively succentor (1419), precentor (1427) and chancellor (1440) of Wells cathedral, he had been registrar to Bowet, commissary-general to Bubwith and official principal to both Bubwith and Stafford, and held this last office from 1422 until 1445. In 1440 he was appointed to a royal embassy to the archbishop of Cologne, and at his death held the rectory of Lympsham and the prebend of Bathwick in Wherwell Abbey. His successor as chancellor to Bekynton was Robert Stillington.²⁰ From 1448 when he went on an embassy to Burgundy, most of Stillington's energies must have been spent in royal service. In 1449 he became a member of the Council, and after the Yorkist victory at Northampton he held the offices of Keeper of the Privy Seal (1460-67) and Chancellor of England (1467-70, 1471-73). In 1466 he was consecrated Bishop of Bath and Wells and ruled the see, usually from London, until his death in 1491.

Stillington's successor as chancellor to Bekynton was Hugh Sugar.²¹ He was probably appointed about 1448, but is first called chancellor in 1454. He was an advocate in the Court of Arches in 1450 and from 1458 until his death in 1489 was official principal successively to Bekynton and Stillington. From 1466 until his death he was also vicar-general to Stillington.

Until the death of Stillington in 1491 there is no definite trace of another spiritual chancellor. Robert Wilson, a lawyer from Yorkshire frequently headed the lists of witnesses to Stillington's *acta*²² from

¹⁶ He was in office by 5 July 1414 (*Reg. Bubwith*, 716).

¹⁷ A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to 1500* (Oxford 1957-9) (hereafter Emden, *Oxford*), *sub nomine*, where, however, the date of his office is given incorrectly.

¹⁸ Emden, *Oxford*.

¹⁹ *Register of John Stafford* (Som. Rec. Soc. 31, 32), 730; Emden, *Oxford*.

²⁰ Emden, *Oxford*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² British Museum, Additional Manuscript 41503; this is a formulary of ecclesiastical deeds drawing extensively on Stillington's episcopal records. For Wilson, see Emden, *Oxford*.

1470 until 1478, though he was never called chancellor. He held a canonry at Wells in 1471 and became chancellor of the cathedral in the following year.

The careers of these men suggest that the office of spiritual chancellor, though high in the household, was merely one step in the hierarchy of episcopal administration. It was, however, by no means an unimportant one, as their subsequent careers show. The legal adviser to the bishop was, and still is, an important man. Appointment to the office was the personal choice of the bishop, and none seems to have employed his predecessor's chancellor. That Sugar was a Wykehamist, Wilson a Yorkshireman and Felter a local man was therefore important. The chancellorship was a valuable opening for a competent lawyer with the right connexions; it could lead at least to a number of valuable benefices if not always to a deanery or bishopric. It could almost certainly lead to higher offices in the administration which carried with them a comfortable living and some considerable local eminence.

THE REGISTRAR. Soon after his appointment to Wells in 1408, Bubwith issued a commission for the recovery of the episcopal muniments which had been stolen by "unknown sons of iniquity".²³ The importance of these records to the bishop was clearly very considerable: his muniments contained not only the sole record of incumbents and their benefices, but were also a valuable series of precedents and legal claims belonging to his see. Without evidence of the claims and practices of his predecessors he stood to lose from unscrupulous landowners, jealous patrons or independent-minded heads of religious houses.

The office of registrar of the episcopal chancery must therefore have been a key appointment in the administration of a medieval diocese. The registers, the results of the work of the registrar, are of the utmost importance to the historian; without them the state of a diocese and details of administration could never be reconstructed. The registrar supervised the bishop's writing office and archives, though in theory he was subordinate to the chancellor. Under him the work of the registry would be carried out by a number of notaries and scribes, employed in writing letters and drawing up legal documents as well as enrolling 'issues' and 'receipts' and other relevant business in the registers. These registers would not be in book form originally; what we know as a register began as separate quires, some of which were devoted to particular types of business. The main register was a sort of day-book containing information about benefices and other matters relating directly to the clergy. At times it appears to have been an index to other sections of the writing office, containing summaries of letters to be found elsewhere on the files. When Edward Gotfray was instituted to the

²³ *Reg. Bubwith*, 238.

church of Middle Chinnock, the files were consulted for the details of the deprivation of his predecessor, John Stone.²⁴ Bonds to preserve the bishop from possible lawsuits arising from disputed presentations were also kept on these files.²⁵ Under Bekynton, and probably under his predecessors, these were compiled by date rather than by subject: a bond deposited in the registry in February 1457 was "on the file of the said time of year", and another was "on the file for 1458".²⁶ Under Stillington special files were kept for institutions.²⁷ Only one of these original documents has survived from the fifteenth century; it owes its existence to the fact that it was cut into strips to strengthen the binding of a consistory court book, now the earliest surviving.²⁸ It is the deed of presentation of Denys Galhon to the church of Butcombe by the master and convent of St. John's Hospital, Bristol. A note of the institution is recorded in the register.²⁹ It is interesting to observe in passing that Galhon was presented in December 1475, but was not instituted for seven months. Although now defaced, the deed does not show signs of piercing; such documents may have been kept in bags or boxes and not threaded on strings.

As the bishop's chief writing clerk the registrar would generally be in constant attendance on his master. Certain rooms in the episcopal manor houses were set aside: at Wookey it was "a low chamber or house of the registry", and in London simply "the registry".³⁰ When the bishop was absent for long from the diocese such a system was unsatisfactory. John Shirford accompanied Bubwith to the council of Constance where he died; in his absence John Roland, the vicar-general, acted as temporary registrar and keeper of the registers.³¹ Under Bowet and Stillington, who spent little time in Somerset, the registrars remained at Wells, while a notary travelled in the bishop's entourage: Henry Ayra, who witnessed *acta* for Stillington in London, and who accompanied him on his visitation of Bath Abbey, must have acted in such a capacity.³² At the same time the registrars remained in Wells to carry out their duties beside the vicar-general.

The registrar could not be expected to write every document himself, and several clerks must have been employed under him. During the term of office of John Storthwayt (c. 1405), at least one entry was made in the register by William Donham, a notary, while

²⁴ *Reg. Bekynton*, 989.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, e.g. 172.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1028, 1179.

²⁷ *Reg(ister of Robert) Stillington (and Richard Fox)* (Som. Rec. Soc. 52), 416.

²⁸ Somerset County Record Office, Taunton: Wells Consistory Court Book I; all save one of these strips are preserved.

²⁹ *Reg. Stillington*, 354.

³⁰ *Reg. Stafford*, 212; *Reg. Bekynton*, 172, 472.

³¹ MS. Reg. Bubwith, fo. 94v. I am indebted to the Diocesan Registrar, Mr. C. W. Harris, for permission to consult the original registers at Wells.

³² *Dean Cosyn and Wells Cathedral Miscellanea* (Som. Rec. Soc. 56), 85.

the registrar himself was at Salisbury.³³ A later marginal note was made by the registrar himself, *scriptum propria manu*.³⁴ John Machon and William North were called “bishop’s scribes” while William Langton was registrar (1445-54), and were responsible for several entries in Bekynton’s register.

The income of the registrar derived from fees charged for registering institutions, letters dimissory and other items. There is little precise evidence except in the marginalia of Bowet’s register, most of which do not appear in the printed edition. The only specific fee is noted beside the issue of two letters dimissory, the one for the priesthood, the other for all orders, where the fees were 6*d.* and 12*d.* respectively.³⁵ Other marginalia give some idea of the system. Richard Pittes, the vicar-general, was a canon of Salisbury as well as of Wells, and was staying in Wiltshire during November and December 1406. The registrar accompanied or visited him there. Two exchanges and an institution dealt with in the registry at Wells during that time deprived Storthwayt of his fees, and a note in the margin reads: *Expeditum Sarum. nichil habem*.³⁶ Occasionally payment of fees was noted, and in 1408 a registry clerk recorded that he had paid Storthwayt 14*s.* in fees.³⁷ Presumably these had been saved up over a period of time. Thomas Shelford paid nothing at his installation as a canon because he was one of the household clerks of the bishop-elect, Bubwith.³⁸ John Haliwelle, likewise appointed a canon, also did not pay, but one of his colleagues had to make satisfaction.³⁹

Fees must have provided a steady if not an abundant source of income, but some registrars also enjoyed benefices in the bishop’s gift. Storthwayt became a canon of Wells in 1407-8, and received two benefices from his former employer, Bowet, in York.⁴⁰ Shirford (registrar 1411-18) and John Reynold (1418-25) were given stalls at Wells, and Robert Groute (1431-45) was collated to Blackford chapel. Thomas Goldwege (by 1476) and Andrew Lanvyan (by 1425-31) held benefices in the gift of others, though the former was presented to Cheddar by the dean and chapter of Wells at the request of the bishop.⁴¹

The office of registrar was often the beginning of a clerk’s career in ecclesiastical administration. This was particularly true of John

³³ *Reg. Bowet*, 152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

³⁵ *MS. Reg. Bowet*, fo. 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, fos. 41-2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 38v, 45, 46; *Reg. Bowet*, 315.

³⁸ *MS. Reg. Bowet*, fo. 47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Emden, *Oxford*.

⁴¹ (*Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells* (Historical MSS. Commission), 2, 101-2.

Storthwayt, as has already been seen. Shirford's rôle was a more personal one, as he accompanied Bubwith from London via Salisbury to Wells, and then went abroad to Constance.⁴² Reynold, his successor, collected a number of local benefices of which the last was the subdeanery of the cathedral. Lanvyan, a native of Exeter diocese, held benefices there before coming to serve Stafford. His successor, Robert Groute, followed Stafford to Canterbury and remained his registrar. William Langton held benefices in his native Yorkshire after leaving Bekynton's service, practised in the Court of York and acted as vicar-general to Archbishop Booth. John Touker, a married layman, probably from Glastonbury, had close personal associations with the bishop and was left ten pounds in Bekynton's will. William Marke, who is named as registrar in 1468,⁴³ was a native of Taunton and was constable of the town in 1463 and 1469.⁴⁴ Goldwege, another Glastonbury man, held several local benefices including a stall in Wells cathedral, and was registrar of the Consistory Court and official both of the dean and chapter and of the archdeacon of Wells.⁴⁵ All but Lanvyan and Storthwayt were notaries public, and only the former and Shirford held degrees during their tenure of office, though Storthwayt and Langton graduated later. Shirford, Touker and Marke were laymen.

THE APPARITOR-GENERAL. The powers and duties of the apparitor-general are difficult to determine accurately. On the analogy of the apparitors in the consistory court, the apparitor-general was probably responsible for citations to the court of Audience, and acted generally as the bishop's messenger-in-chief. His powers were expressed, somewhat vaguely, in the commission to Anthony Vilate: he could proceed, either in person or by deputy in cases brought either by himself or by another, could detect and denounce offenders, and do all other things which were by custom attached to the office, receiving the usual fees.⁴⁶ Exactly what offences were involved is open to question. Thomas Miton and Geoffrey Mone were empowered to act, cite and sequestrate, but again for what causes and in what circumstances is not clear.⁴⁷ From scattered evidence it seems that the apparitor-general could act for the bishop beyond the confines of the single deanery which was the limit of the ordinary apparitor's powers, issuing and delivering citations to the bishop's own court.

⁴² Guildhall Library, MS. Reg. Bubwith, London, fo. 8v; *Calendar of Papal Registers, Papal Letters*, 6, 126; *Somerset Medieval Wills, 1383-1500* (Som. Rec. Soc., 16), 85.

⁴³ *Reg. Stillington*, 84.

⁴⁴ *Proc. Som. A. S.* 55, 53-4.

⁴⁵ Consistory Court Book 1, fos. 79, 159v; *MSS. Dean and Chapter of Wells*, 2, 178; *Register of Oliver King and Hadrian de Castello* (Som. Rec. Soc. 54), 554.

⁴⁶ MS. Reg. Bekynton, fo. 12.

⁴⁷ MS. Reg. Bowet, fo. 14; MS. Reg. Stafford, fo. 149.

He seems to have been closely involved in elections in monastic houses, when he cited objectors before the bishop confirmed the proceedings.⁴⁸

Appointment to the office lay with the bishop, but the holder did not necessarily cease to hold office when a diocesan died or was translated. Thomas Smyth was appointed for life in 1454 by Bekynton, and was still in office in 1475, nearly ten years after Stillington's accession.⁴⁹ The position was not always as clear. After Stafford's translation to Canterbury in 1443 a petition was addressed to him as chancellor by Geoffrey Mone, whom he had appointed in 1438.⁵⁰ Mone complained that his appointment had been made for life, but that "Thomas Wareyn of Taunton wold not suffre youre seid besecher to occupy the seid office to grete hurte of youre seid besecher . . ." ⁵¹ This petition is undated, and it is not known when Wareyn was appointed, though he was acting by August 1446.⁵² Bekynton had, however, two years before this, appointed Anthony Vilate.⁵³ Mone may have petitioned against him as well, though, if so, it is likely that his later plea would have contained some reference to this. The explanation may be that Vilate, a foreigner, may not have been able to exercise much power against an already established rival, but that Wareyn, a local man, presented a much more dangerous threat. Wareyn seems to have won his case, for he was still active in 1448,⁵⁴ and Mone is nowhere further mentioned.

The office of apparitor-general was not an exalted one, though it gave opportunity in popular estimation for bribery and corruption. Most of the occupants at Wells were natives of the diocese, and were laymen with one exception, John Boghere or Boghe, described as a clerk from Exeter diocese.⁵⁵ In 1413 he was allowed to act as a notary public, and by 1420 was living in Taunton.⁵⁶ He held the office of constable of the borough of Taunton in 1426, and by 1431 he was registrar to John Bernard, Stafford's commissary-general.⁵⁷ Richard Piers was a citizen of Wells when he was appointed in 1419; Anthony Vilate came from Paris, where Bekynton may have met him during a diplomatic mission.⁵⁸ John Elys and Thomas Wareyn were described as literates; the latter acted as proctor and sub-collector of a clerical tax for the prior of Taunton in 1450, and was

⁴⁸ *E.g. Reg. Bekynton*, 1637, 1643.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 914; *Reg. Stillington*, 602.

⁵⁰ *Reg. Stafford*, 680.

⁵¹ Public Record Office, Early Chancery Proceedings (C 1), 17/140.

⁵² *Reg. Bekynton*, 1637.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1640.

⁵⁵ *Calendar of Papal Letters*, 6, 415.

⁵⁶ Public Record Office, Exchequer, Ancient Deeds, series B (E 326), 5017.

⁵⁷ *Proc. Som. A. S.* 55, 53-4; *Reg. Stafford*, 306.

⁵⁸ *Reg. Bubwith*, 828; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1452-61*, 343.

constable of the borough of Taunton in 1454 and 1461.⁵⁹ Peter Cole acted as sub-collector for the canons of Bristol and for St. John's Hospital, Bridgwater, in 1431 and 1435 respectively.⁶⁰ Thomas Smyth was a member of Bekynton's temporal administration, acting as auditor from 1448 until 1454, and was Member of Parliament for Wells in 1467.⁶¹ All these were comparatively humble men; it cannot be told whether any of them deserved the widespread reputation for corruption attached to the office.

THE *FAMILIA*. The large number of men a medieval bishop gathered around him in a more informal capacity are much more difficult to trace. Very little can be said, for example, about the *familia* of Bowet. No name occurs twice in witness lists, though one, Thomas Terry, had been a member of Erghum's household.⁶² Under Bubwith, two canons, Thomas Shelford and John Codford, made frequent appearances; Shelford was responsible for filling benches in the bishop's gift while Bubwith was in Constance, and both were the bishop's executors.⁶³ John Catour, a notary, seems to have been a senior clerk in his writing office and was collated to the church of St. Mary the Great, Ilchester, in 1423.⁶⁴ John Oudeby, also a notary, was probably also employed there. Bubwith's will was witnessed by John Austell and Thomas Greneham, esquires, and Thomas Fermor, John Whitle, Robert Emory and Roger Fold, valets, presumably members of his *familia*. Austell appears again in Bekynton's household; Fermor had been clerk to John Wells,⁶⁵ the spiritual chancellor. Apart from the normal appearances of the senior officers under Stafford, there are occasional glimpses of three notaries, John Kermarthyn, John Mundham and Benedict ap Howel. The last became registrar of the consistory court in 1443.⁶⁶ William Lech, a friar preacher, and John Lane, rector of Beckington, were permanent chaplains to the bishop, and John Maraley, Thomas Crumpton and Thomas Parle were members of his household.⁶⁷ Apart from Bekynton's *familia* there remains that small group of men led by Robert Wilson who were in London with Stillington between 1470 and 1479; Henry Ayra, the notary, probably acted as his registrar and the others were John Morecote, Thomas Ousteby and Thomas Cowper.⁶⁸

⁵⁹ Public Record Office, Exchequer, Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, Enrolled Accounts (E 359), 24; *Proc. Som. A. S.* 55, 53-4.

⁶⁰ Public Record Office, Exchequer, Enrolled Accounts, 23; King's Remembrancer, Clerical Subsidies (E 179), 4/56.

⁶¹ *Reg. Bekynton*, 386, 892.

⁶² *Somerset Medieval Wills*, 1501-30 (Som. Rec. Soc. 19), 295-7; *Reg. Bowet*, 1.

⁶³ *Reg. Bubwith*, 514; *Somerset Medieval Wills*, 1501-30, 328.

⁶⁴ *Reg. Bubwith*, 1181.

⁶⁵ *Somerset Medieval Wills*, 1383-1500, 87.

⁶⁶ *Reg. Bekynton*, 19.

⁶⁷ *Calendar of Papal Letters*, 8, 542, 588; 9, 62, 79, 156.

⁶⁸ British Museum, Additional Manuscript 41503.

It is only in Bekynton's time that the household can be studied in any detail; allowing for the limitations of witness lists, 67 men appeared in more than one year as witnesses or proctors.⁶⁹ In isolated cases precise office in the *familia* was given. In 1464 Thomas Bromhall was called steward of the household, an office to be distinguished from steward of the temporalities.⁷⁰ Bromhall probably had overall charge of domestic arrangements and supervised travelling and hospitality as well as catering. A calf and a quantity of oats were delivered to him from Banwell in 1444.⁷¹ Three men, John Trevenant, John Pope and William Childe, were known as the bishop's chaplains. Trevenant became a canon in 1444 and provost of the cathedral in 1450; he was receiver-general of the bishop's estates in 1448, 1450-1 and 1452-3.⁷² Pope, a doctor in theology, and Childe, a master of arts, acted as examining chaplains, the latter eleven times between 1459 and 1464.⁷³ Henry Hayne, clerk, a parochial chaplain of St. Cuthbert's, Wells, in 1463, was called the bishop's alms chaplain two years earlier when he rendered an account for the poor house before the mayor of Wells and the cathedral communitarian.⁷⁴ Thomas Dodyng was called 'clerk of the bishop's kitchen' in 1445 and John Shephurd and Walter Vincent were 'servitor' and 'servant' respectively.⁷⁵

Originally the cathedral chapter had been the mainstay of the episcopal administration, but greater specialization and division of interests had severed much of the connexion between the bishop and his canons, in some cases to the point of open warfare.⁷⁶ Relations between Bekynton and the chapter at Wells were unusually cordial. A small group of canons was in regular attendance upon him, notably William Fulford, commissary-general 1441-45, who was a member of the household from 1452 until 1460. As might be expected of a man of intellectual bent, Bekynton gathered around him a large number of graduates who held no office. Some were attracted by grants of prebends and local benefices; a papal dispensation allowed six clerks to farm their benefices while in Bekynton's service,⁷⁷ and

⁶⁹ This number does not include officials of the bishop's temporal administration.

⁷⁰ *Reg. Bekynton*, 1623.

⁷¹ Lambeth Palace Library, Court Roll 222. Under Harewell this official was known as 'keeper of the household' (Lambeth Court Roll 440).

⁷² *Reg. Bekynton*, 351; Lambeth Court Roll 349; Bodleian Library, Somersetshire Rolls 15 (Manor of Wiveliscombe).

⁷³ *Reg. Bekynton*, 1757-89.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 1522; Wells Corporation Book 2, fo. 37. The poor house was probably the hospital of St. Saviour near St. Cuthbert's church, now known as Bubwith's Almshouses.

⁷⁵ *Reg. Bekynton*, 121, 779, 1164.

⁷⁶ Kathleen Edwards, *English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages* (Manchester 1949), 98, 105ff.

⁷⁷ *Calendar of Papal Letters*, 10, 197. This bull was exhibited in the consistory court ten years later when a household clerk was accused of non-residence (Consistory Court Book 1, fo. 4v).

both William North and Thomas Bromhall received separate indults for the same purpose.⁷⁸ There were at least twenty-seven graduates in the bishop's household, including the two spiritual chancellors; fourteen were lawyers, six theologians; most of them were Oxford graduates, and eight were, like the bishop himself, from Winchester College.⁷⁹ They do not appear to have been outstanding intellectually; there is no evidence of a school of humanist studies to attract such non-resident Wells canons as Thomas Chaundeler, Andrew Holes or Vincent Clement to live at Wells rather than at one of their other benefices. The bishop's administrative duties probably prevented him from indulging his tastes which, it must be said, had earlier been confined rather to governmental spheres, bibliophily and private study.⁸⁰ Yet as individuals several of these graduates seem to have been interested in continuing their studies: Thomas Marsh and Hugh Sugar were friends of Chaundeler; William Mounter left books to New College; John Sparhauke gave three books to Pembroke College, three to Stoneleigh Abbey and one to the University library at Oxford.⁸¹ In a further clause of his will he wrote: "Item, to the same library if it be not found there *librum originalem* upon the old testament. But if it be found there, I bequeath the same book to the library of Pembroke College. But if they have the book, let it devolve to the library called Quenys College . . ." Thomas Overay gave money to All Souls; Richard Swan supported two scholars at Lincoln and gave the college a quantity of plate, a missal and Nicholas de Lyra's *Super Evangelia*. Here is certainly an intense interest in learning among the household of Bekynton, but except for the friends of Chaundeler, no connexion with humanism. Perhaps Thomas Purveyor was influenced by the new learning at Padua where he read theology, but he never returned to this country, and ended his days in Rome.⁸²

Purveyor's career illustrates an important point about Bekynton's household. One of the bishop's greatest contributions to his diocese was his effort to raise the standard of clerical education. Encouragement was certainly given to members of his household. Purveyor first appeared in 1444 as a clerk when he was collated to the chapel of North Chewton.⁸³ A year later the bishop gave him the chapel of Blackford and in 1450 a canonry, although he was not in Holy

⁷⁸ *Calendar of Papal Letters*, 9, 511, 521.

⁷⁹ William Childe, M.A., William Mounter, B.Th., Thomas Mersh, B.Cn. & C.L., John Morton, D.Th., William North, B.Cn. & C.L., Robert Peusey *alias* Leycestre, B.Cn. & C.L., John Russell, B.Cn. & C.L. and Hugh Sugar, D.C.L.

⁸⁰ R. Weiss, *Humanism in England* (Oxford 1941), 73, 83. For Bekynton's intellectual circle see also A. F. Judd, *The Life of Thomas Bekynton* (Marc Fitch Fund, 1961), 81-108.

⁸¹ Emden, *Oxford; Somerset Medieval Wills*, 1383-1500, 224.

⁸² R. J. Mitchell, 'English Students at Padua, 1460-75', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 19 (1936), 107-8.

⁸³ *Reg. Bekynton*, 40.

Orders but only a B.A. of Oxford.⁸⁴ In such a way could a bishop support a promising lad during his studies. John Compayn and John Erle provide similar examples: Compayn appeared as 'clerk' or 'literate' quite frequently between 1445 and 1459, but in that year, as B.A., he was collated to Blackford, though he remained in the household at least until 1462. Erle, described as 'chaplain' was instituted to Brushford in 1445 and held the benefice for eight years; in 1454, addressed as B.A., he was given the vicarage of Martock.⁸⁵

In return for their services on some of the many *ad hoc* commissions, for acting as proctors and for other duties, many of these graduates were rewarded with canonries at Wells, benefices in the bishop's gift, or office in the temporal or spiritual administration. Ten graduates received canonries; Richard Swan became receiver-general of the bishop's estates before 1459;⁸⁶ Hugh Sugar held the offices of official principal from 1458 and vicar-general from 1461. An episcopal household thus provided a source of income and something of a collegiate life for a fortunate few. Recruitment was by influence and ability, and it is a matter of some note that at least five of these graduates were local men.⁸⁷

A further group of non-graduate clerks is also evident. At least two of these, Walter Osborne and John Riche, later became canons, and the latter acted as examining chaplain in 1461 and 1463.⁸⁸ Robert Catour, another of this group, was a vicar-choral, and became one of the principal members of their college in 1440 and 1441. He was organist in the cathedral in 1449-50.⁸⁹ A number of others do not appear to have been beneficed; they may have served in some subordinate capacity in the writing office or chapel, receiving board and a small amount of cash for their services. The reeve of the manor of Wells accounted for 10s. paid to the bishop for two of his clerks in 1458-9.⁹⁰

There is also an interesting group of laymen whose precise function in the household is not clear. John Austell, John Wisdom and John Dancastré appeared with some regularity. Austell may be identified as the Member of Parliament for Wells, Somerset and Devon, whose brother Thomas was a canon. He was on the Commission of the Peace for Somerset 1439-51 and acted as sheriff of

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 157, 504; he was not ordained acolyte until 1451, by which time he was also a canon of St. Paul's (*Reg. Bekynton*, 1690).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 134, 757, 865, 1231.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1221; Lambeth Court Rolls 1132-3.

⁸⁷ Thomas Purveyor and John Russell from Beckington, Thomas Horne from Odcombe, Thomas Mark from Glastonbury and William Henton *alias* Lomys from Martock. John Peterton was from Bath and Wells diocese, and William North from Corston and Boyton in the neighbouring county of Wiltshire.

⁸⁸ *Reg. Bekynton*, 1767, 1780.

⁸⁹ Wells Museum, Act Book of the Vicars Choral, 1, fos. 7-8; *MSS. Dean and Chapter of Wells*, 2, 78.

⁹⁰ Wells Cathedral, Dean and Chapter, unnumbered accounts.

Cornwall 1446-7 and of Somerset and Dorset 1449-50. He was collector of a clerical subsidy in 1458 and died in 1463.⁹¹ Wisdom received a grant of land in Cheddar from the bishop in 1454; and Dancastre, a native of Wells, practised in the consistory court there in 1460.⁹² Richard Chokke, who appeared in the household in 1453 and 1456 may have been the man who became a serjeant-at-law in 1453 and a justice of Common Pleas in 1461.⁹³ His family lived at Long Ashton, and Richard himself is buried there. The household of a bishop was certainly a fitting place for the sons of local gentry to acquire an education.

Little can be said of the domestic arrangements of the household, of the valets, cooks, grooms, gardeners and other menial servants who must have been required to allow the bishop to keep up state. A household roll of Ralph of Shrewsbury of 1337-8 gives evidence of a buttery, pantry, kitchen, hall and stable as separate departments of account.⁹⁴ An average of eighty-three people were fed daily during the period in question, and on March 9, 1338, sixteen men of the *libera familia*, seventeen officers and fifty-six grooms sat down to a meal. In the wills of Bishops Erghum and Harewell there are glimpses of esquires, valets and boys of the chapel.⁹⁵ Bekynton's own will does not mention servants by name but indicates their status: "I bequeath to the exhibition of ten poor scholars not having a sufficient exhibition in the said University of Oxford, to be selected from my diocese, 10*d.* each weekly. And I will that in this bequest the poor boys of my chapel . . . be preferred before others . . ."⁹⁶ He then went on to give money to each *domicellus*, *valectus*, *garcio* and other servants.

* * * *

Because of the nature of the surviving material it is not possible to reconstruct even Bekynton's household completely, but what emerges in general is a body of men drawn to the bishop by intellectual or local ties. If they did not aspire to rule their bishop like Mr. Slope at Barchester, their position gave them a certain prestige: the cathedral communar accounted for £1 paid to the bishop's servants "for forwarding business in the bishop's hands".⁹⁷ It was for these men that the bishop exercised his patronage over cathedral stall and parochial benefice, but in return they were required to give of their time and skill to aid the bishop in his task of administering the diocese. Relations of the bishop with his household clerks were obviously close, a fact which is underlined by Bishop Erghum's will. Like Bekynton after him he left money to support students at

91 J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament, Biographies* (H.M.S.O. 1936).

92 *Reg. Bekynton*, 847; Consistory Court Book 1, fo. 132v.

93 E. Foss, *The Judges of England* (1851), 4, 486-7; a man of the same name witnessed an act of Bishop Stafford in 1426.

94 *Collectanea I* (Som. Rec. Soc. 39), 85-157.

95 *Somerset Medieval Wills*, 1501-30, 289-90, 294-7.

96 *Ibid.*, 1383-1500, 206.

97 *MSS. Dean and Chapter of Wells*, 2, 78.

university, particularly the boys of his chapel. He remembered his registrar, Gilbert Stone,⁹⁸ and left him two books. He gave money to priests of his household, to his chaplain cross-bearer, to Roger Raygate, vicar of Chard, to William, who had been his "palfreman", to two "cherieters", to valets, pages and the chapel clerk. He mentioned by name his suffragan, Henry Nony, Bishop of Ardagh, and gave him £20. Then he came to servants whose names reveal their occupations: John Buschupp, Ralph of the Kitchen, Edward Barbor, Richard Warderope and Thomas de la Boterye. Many of these servants must have been fairly young, and seven were given extra money for their marriage. Perhaps the most intimate touch of all is the bequest to Thomas Terry of "the bible out of which he used to read to me". This is a strong reminder that the men who surrounded the bishop provided most of his diversion. Trollope portrays this situation at Barchester:

Mr. Harding does dine with him [the bishop of Barchester] very often, which means going to the palace at 3 and remaining till ten; and whenever he does not the bishop whines, and says that the port wine is corked, and complains that nobody attends to him and pets himself off to bed an hour before his time.⁹⁹

Dr. Grantly may not have a parallel among the medieval bishops at Wells; it would certainly not have been in character for Bekynton to whine. Yet Bekynton and the other occupants of the Palace at Wells must have gained great pleasure from the conversation of their closest associates.

HOUSEHOLD OFFICERS, 1401-91

SPIRITUAL CHANCELLORS

William Bildeston, B.C.L.	by	20 Nov. 1401	<i>Reg. Bowet</i> , 3
John Wells, D.Cn.L.	by	17 Jan. 1413	<i>Reg. Bubwith</i> , 390
Thomas Stevens, B.C.L.	by	20 Dec. 1418	<i>Ibid.</i> , 824
William Felter, D.Cn.L.	app.	5 Jan. 1422	<i>Ibid.</i> , 1068
John Storthwayt, B.C.L.	by	26 Mar. 1439	<i>Reg. Stafford</i> , 730
Robert Stillington, D.C.L.	by	2 Aug. 1445	<i>Reg. Bekynton</i> , 137
Hugh Sugar, D.C.L.	by	29 Sep. 1454	<i>Ibid.</i> , 882
? Robert Wilson, B.Cn. & C.L.	by	18 Oct. 1473	<i>Reg. Stillington</i> , 584

REGISTRARS

John Storthwayt	by	18 Mar. 1405	<i>Reg. Bowet</i> , 236
John Shirford, bachelor of laws	by	27 Jan. 1411	<i>Reg. Bubwith</i> , 66
John Reynold	by	2 Nov. 1418	<i>Ibid.</i> , 805
Andrew Lanvyan, B.C.L.	by	19 Nov. 1425	<i>Reg. Stafford</i> , 932
Robert Groute	by	5 Jun. 1431	<i>Ibid.</i> , 330
William Langton	by	20 Jun. 1445	<i>Reg. Bekynton</i> , 121
John Touker	by	5 Nov. 1454	<i>Ibid.</i> , 898
William Marke	by	Mar. 1468	<i>Reg. Stillington</i> , 84
Thomas Goldwege	by	21 Dec. 1476	MS. <i>Reg. Stillington</i> , fo. 195

⁹⁸ See E. F. Jacob, 'Florida Verborum Venustas', *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 17 (1933), 286-9, for letters of Gilbert Stone.

⁹⁹ Anthony Trollope, *The Warden* (Oxford 1929), 203.

APPARITORS-GENERAL

Thomas Miton	app. 15	Mar. 1402	<i>Reg. Bowet</i> , 60
John Boghe <i>alias</i> Boghere	app. 12	Feb. 1405	<i>Ibid.</i> , 228
Richard Piers	app. 12	Jan. 1419	<i>Reg. Bubwith</i> , 828
John Elys	app. 30	Oct. 1422	<i>Ibid.</i> , 1138
Peter Cole	app. 30	Jun. 1425	<i>Reg. Stafford</i> , 37
Geoffrey Mone	app. 24	Aug. 1438	<i>Ibid.</i> , 688
Anothony Vilate	app. 12	Apr. 1444	<i>Reg. Bekynton</i> , 39
Thomas Wareyn	by 27	Aug. 1446	<i>Ibid.</i> , 1637
Thomas Smyth	app. 18	Mar. 1454	<i>Ibid.</i> , 914