

A Letter Relating to the Crisis of 1468

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For King Edward IV, the year 1468 started promisingly enough. In March a treaty of marriage between his sister, Margaret, and the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, cemented an alliance between England and Burgundy. In the early summer Parliament agreed a grant of taxation in support of an invasion of France, and in August the Welsh castle of Harlech, the last stronghold in Edward's dominions of the supporters of the deposed Henry VI, surrendered. Edward seemed at last entirely secure on his throne. Soon enough, however, the king's fortunes began to unravel. Even in the early weeks of the year there was unrest in Kent and Yorkshire. As the year progressed, rumours of Lancastrian conspiracies in England proliferated. In June a certain Cornelius, a servant to Sir Robert Whittingham, one-time receiver-general to the deposed Henry VI's son, was captured, and under torture incriminated a number of leading Londoners. Numerous others were accused, arrested and questioned, and some were executed.¹

In London, another community was in turmoil for different reasons. Following an attack in the previous summer by a group of merchants from Bristol and Lynn on the Danish colony in Iceland, in the course of which they murdered the governor and his family, King Christian of Denmark had ordered the arrest of a number of English ships in recompense. The owners of the English vessels petitioned Edward IV for redress, conveniently ignoring the Danish involvement, and instead blaming the merchants of the Hanseatic league. In July 1468 the English king acquiesced to their demands, and ordered the arrest of all Hansards in England and their goods. To aggravate the problem, the merchants of Cologne who had long played a dominant part in Hanseatic trade to England now opened separate negotiations, and by the autumn had secured their release and an exemption from the reprisals against the Hansards at large. In November the king's council formally acquitted the men of Cologne, but condemned their fellows to

¹ C.L. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth*, 2 vols., London 1923, vol. 1, pp. 454, 480-81; Charles Ross, *Edward IV*, London 1974, p. 122; Hannes Kleineke, *Edward IV*, London 2009, pp. 93-95. Perhaps the best-known victim of the proscriptions of 1468 was the alderman of London's Broad Street ward, the former mayor Sir Thomas Cook: A.F. Sutton, 'Sir Thomas Cook and his troubles: an investigation', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, vol. 3, no. 2, Apr. 1978, pp. 85-108; M.A. Hicks, 'The case of Sir Thomas Cook', in M.A. Hicks, *Richard III and his Rivals: Magnates and their Motives in the War of the Roses*, London 1991, pp. 419-33.

pay substantial compensation.²

The Hansards who remained in prison and some of their fellows who had succeeded in taking sanctuary at Westminster Abbey before they could be arrested continued their diplomatic efforts to secure their release and the return of their goods. In mid-December the clerk of the Steelyard, the London headquarters of the Hansards, Hermann Wanmate, travelled to the Low Countries to seek the intercession of the duke of Guelders and the bishop of Utrecht with the young duke of Burgundy. From Utrecht he sent a letter to the mayor of Lübeck, Heinrich Kastorp, containing a report on the situation of the Hansards in London, but also including some news of what had occurred in England in the weeks preceding his departure. He noted the arrests that had taken place, and recorded a rumour that Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, would shortly set sail for Calais and resume the captaincy of the strategically important fortress. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that Wanmate's report was, above all, concerned with the plight of the Hansards in England. The wider political crisis in England interested him only in so far as it promised to make a shaken Edward IV more pliable to reach a settlement with the League.³

Hermann Wanmate hailed from Soest in Westphalia and was in major orders. He had been one of the clerks (or secretaries) of the London Steelyard since 1462, and by 1468 had gathered considerable experience both of Hanseatic diplomacy and of English affairs. When the crisis broke, he initially avoided arrest by taking sanctuary at Westminster, but he soon emerged to become one of the principal spokesmen of the imprisoned Hanseatic traders. In 1473-74, when the Hansards and the English Crown actively sought a diplomatic solution to their quarrel, he took up residence in London once more and played a leading part in negotiating the eventual peace treaty of Utrecht.⁴

² On the Anglo-Hanseatic crisis of 1468 and the events leading up to them, see F.R. Salter, 'The Hanse, Cologne, and the crisis of 1468', *Economic History Review*, 1st ser., vol. 3 (1931/2), pp. 93-101; Stuart Jenks, *England, die Hanse und Preußen, Handel und Diplomatie 1377-1474*, 3 vols., Cologne 1992, vol. 2, pp. 710-13; *idem*, 'Die Hansen in England: Die wirtschaftliche und politische Bedeutung ihres Handels (1380-1474) und ihre Versuche zur Bewältigung der Krise von 1468', in Volker Henn and Arved Nedkvitne, eds., *Norwegen und die Hanse*, Frankfurt a. M. *et al.* 1994, pp. 129-30.

³ The letter has long been in print in its original German: Goswin von der Ropp, ed., *Hanserecense, 1431-1476*, Leipzig 1890, vol. 6, pp. 94-96. It has been used extensively by students of the breakdown of Anglo-Hanseatic relations in 1468: cf. e.g. Joachim Deeters, 'Gerhard von Wesel – ein Kölner Kaufmann im Londoner Hansekontor', in Henn and Nedkvitne, eds., *Norwegen und die Hanse*, p. 166.

⁴ On Wanmate see G. Neumann, 'Hansische Politik und Politiker bei den Utrechter Friedensverhandlungen', in Klaus Friedland, ed., *Frühformen englisch-deutscher Handelspartnerschaft*, Cologne 1976, p. 34, and most recently Nils Jörn, "With money and blood": *Der Londoner Stahlhof im Spannungsfeld der englisch-hansischen Beziehungen im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Cologne 2000, p. 372.

Wanmate left London on 16 December 1468, rode for Dover, from where he sailed in the early hours of 19 December, and reached Bruges on 23 December.⁵ At the time of writing his report to Lübeck he thus had been away from London for just a fortnight. As a rule, the merchants of the Steelyard were well integrated with their neighbours and kept abreast of the news and rumours circulating in the streets with greater ease than many other aliens.⁶ The uncertainty of Wanmate's information is symptomatic of how far the arrest of many of the merchants had unsettled the community: as Wanmate himself emphasized, the men from whom he now took his instructions were inexperienced and divided among themselves, and the news to which he had access was limited.

In at least one respect, Wanmate was misinformed. John de Vere, Earl of Oxford – as Godfrey Greene had reported to his uncle, the Yorkshire knight Sir William Plumpton a week before the Hansard's departure from London – had been 'committed to the Tower, and, it [was] said, kept in irons, and [had] confessed many things', but he had not been executed.⁷ Equally, the 'two great gentlemen of the King's house' and the 'writer of London' were probably William Alsford and John Paines, two household servants of the duke of Norfolk, and the London skinner, Richard Stairs, who according to Greene were beheaded on 28 November.⁸ More interesting are Wanmate's comments about the arrest of the bishops of Salisbury, Winchester and St David's. These bear out the observations of the prior of Croyland abbey, who recorded in the abbey's chronicle that '... at this period, many nobles and great men of the kingdom, as well as very many bishops and abbots, were accused before the King of treason'.⁹ It is not hard to see why Waynfilete, a prelate with longstanding ties to the house of Lancaster should have come under suspicion. The bishop, who had served as Henry VI's chancellor during the years of Queen Margaret's ascendancy from 1456 to 1460 had reached an accommodation with Edward IV's government, but evidently had retained some Lancastrian sympathies: when King Edward was driven into exile in 1470 it was Waynfilete who was charged with removing the restored Henry VI from the Tower to the bishop of London's palace. During the Readeption he seems to have remained at Southwark within easy reach of the council at Westminster, and on Edward's return at least one foreign observer believed him to have been

⁵ Jenks, 'Hansen in England', p. 144, n. 149.

⁶ Jenks, 'Hansen in England', p. 150.

⁷ Joan Kirby, ed., *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Cambridge 1996, p. 40.

⁸ A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, eds., *The Great Chronicle of London*, London 1938, pp. 207, 430; Thomas Stapleton, ed., *Plumpton Correspondence*, London 1939, pp. 18-20; *Plumpton Letters*, no. 16; Thomas Hearne, ed., *Thomae Sprotti Chronica*, Oxford 1719, p. 296.

⁹ H.T. Riley, ed., *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, London 1854, p. 439.

incarcerated.¹⁰

The arrest of Robert Tully, Bishop of St David's, adds some colour to this otherwise obscure prelate's career.¹¹ A Benedictine monk from Gloucester abbey, Tully was provided to the Welsh see in 1460 in the days immediately after the battle of Northampton and before the duke of York and his supporters had a chance firmly to grasp the reins of government, and may thus have been the final appointment of the Lancastrian regime. Several commentators have emphasized the bishop's 'staunch, and unpopular, support of the Lancastrian monarchy', but evidence for Tully's political attitudes, particularly after 1461, is scant.¹² He may, nevertheless, have been among the more enthusiastic backers of Henry VI's Readeption. He was present in London at the time of the battle of Barnet in April 1471, and he (along with Bishop John Hunden of Llandaff) subsequently had to wait until September 1472 before being granted Edward IV's pardon.¹³ It is not clear in what way Tully had incriminated himself in 1468, but it is tempting to speculate whether he was thought to have in some way lent support to Jasper Tudor's ultimately unsuccessful landing in northern Wales in June 1468, which nevertheless saw him progress virtually unchallenged from Barmouth to Denbigh.¹⁴

Rather more interesting is Wanmate's assertion that the bishop of Salisbury, Richard Beauchamp, was among those arrested. Although preferred to the episcopate by Henry VI in 1450, ten years later Beauchamp had moved apparently effortlessly into the favour of the house of York. A kinsman of the countess of Warwick, Anne Beauchamp, in July 1460 Bishop Richard had joined the duke of York and his Neville allies on their march to Northampton. He was present at the assembly convened at Baynards Castle to acclaim Edward IV as

¹⁰ Virginia Davis, 'Waynfflete, William (c.1400-1486)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols., Oxford 2004, vol. 57, pp. 781-85; *eadem*, 'William Waynfflete and the Wars of the Roses', *Southern History*, vol. 11 (1989), pp. 1-22; Hannes Kleineke, 'Gerhard von Wesel's newsletter from England, 17 April 1471', *The Ricardian*, vol. 16 (2006), p. 75.

¹¹ Details of Tully's ecclesiastical career are found in A.B. Emden, ed., *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500*, 3 vols., Oxford 1957-59, vol. 3, pp. 1912-13. There are more extensive remarks, particularly on Tully's probable rebuilding of his cathedral church, in R.A. Griffiths, 'St Davids, its bishops and the early Tudor kings', *Friends of St Davids Cathedral – Cyfeillion Eglwys Gadeiriol Tyddewi: Annual Report 2008*, p. 17-18. It is worth noting that to date Tully has not been deemed worthy of an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which is populated by luminaries such as Jamie Bulger and Sweet Fanny Adams.

¹² Emden, p. 1913; Barrie Dobson, 'English and Welsh monastic bishops: the final century, 1433-1533', in Benjamin Thompson, ed., *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, Stamford 1999, p. 362; R.J. Knecht, 'The episcopate and the Wars of the Roses', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, vol. 6, (1958), p. 113.

¹³ Ross, *Edward IV*, p. 184; Kleineke, 'Gerhard von Wesel's newsletter', p. 70.

¹⁴ Ross, *Edward IV*, p. 120. The area of Tudor's activity did, of course, not fall within Tully's diocese, but within those of Bangor and St Asaph.

king in March 1461 and within weeks was able to claim that the king had chosen him 'to be the chief of the three to whose judgment all the most secret matters of the council are referred'. Such a claim did, however, exaggerate the bishop's importance, and there is little subsequent evidence to suggest that he took much part in the government of the realm. In 1468 he was nevertheless prominent in the negotiations for Margaret of York's marriage to Charles the Bold, and performed the marriage ceremony. He did, however, spend much of Henry VI's Readeption in his house at Chelsea within easy reach of the council at Westminster, withdrawing to his diocese in February and apparently not returning to the restored Edward IV's side until July 1471.¹⁵

Finally, there was the rumour that the earl of Warwick was to return to Calais and retake it: Richard Neville had been captain of the port since the duke of York's second protectorate in 1456, but during the early years of Edward IV's reign his extended responsibilities in England had kept him away from the pale for long periods of time. Among those implicated by the confessions extracted from the Lancastrian agent Cornelius had been not only Nicholas Huse and Sir Gervase Clifton, respectively victualler and treasurer of Calais in the final years of Henry VI's reign, but more damagingly also one John Hawkins, a servant of Warwick's deputy at Calais, Lord Wenlock.¹⁶ If Wanmate was correctly informed, Edward IV's government may have taken the accusations as signs of a wider threat of disloyalty among the Calais garrison. In the event, of course, Warwick did indeed cross to Calais, but in order to marry his elder daughter to the king's brother, the duke of Clarence.¹⁷

Appendix: Letter of Hermann Wanmate to Heinrich Kastorp, Mayor of Lübeck, Utrecht, 30 December 1468.¹⁸

Honourable, wise and understanding Master. I would have liked to have written to your worship long before this time, but God knows that I had to write from England in such a way as the community's¹⁹ affairs lie, and also that the country in itself is full of faction and treason, so that letters in all baggage are broken open and examined etc. Furthermore, so I believe, you will by this time have

¹⁵ R.G. Davies, 'Beauchamp, Richard (d. 1481)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 4, pp. 595-97; Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 27, 34, 275, 318; A.B. Hinds, ed., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts existing in the Archives and Collections of Milan*, vol. 1, 1385-1618, London 1912, no. 79; Kleineke, 'Gerhard von Wesel's newsletter', p. 75.

¹⁶ Scofield, *Life and Reign*, p. 454.

¹⁷ Kleineke, *Edward IV*, p. 97.

¹⁸ *Hanserecesse*, vol. 6, pp. 94-96.

¹⁹ The term 'community' has here been used to render Wanmate's use of 'the merchant', the customary term for the commonalty of Hanseatic merchants.

entirely understood what false sentences have been imposed upon and given to the community, evidently against all counsel and right, and also against its privileges, as the legal process being held here before the king and his lords shall clearly show extensively, which, God willing, I will set out to you and my masters, the towns, at the diet. God in heaven may have mercy in eternity that the innocent community shall be so miserably oppressed and undone etc. However, I trust in God and my masters, the towns, that it shall be bettered, and there was never better time in 100 years than now. For these four weeks the king has put in prison more than 100 knights and good men, because they wanted to kill him, and furthermore within four days, before I left London, so he captured in like wise the bishop of Winchester,²⁰ the bishop of Salisbury²¹ and the bishop of St David's,²² and the earl of Oxford²³ has been beheaded with two great gentlemen of the king's house and a scrivener of London. And the earl of Warwick²⁴ shall go back to Calais and take it. Thus it is a strange thing, the towns should wisely consider it, for those of London, Boston, Lynn, Hull and Newcastle have promised to the king, before he would pass sentence, that in the spring they shall go out to the towns in the Schagen, Bergen in Norway and other places, therefore it is necessary to act in this matter with good fortune and wisely etc. Item it appears to me from everything that I can glean from various people, that those of Cologne shall not leave the country willingly, but they may not be able to prevent it, according to various things that I know well, and especially that the city of London now presses more before the king, to get rid of them too, than they ever did against the whole community. They may well try something, but they shall entrap themselves; in the first damage that the towns shall inflict upon England, they shall fare as the community fares now, God grant them luck. I do not intend to interfere, if I have a way out, since I know well that I cannot preserve my honour therein, and should perhaps earn shame in the process, therefore I will keep out of it. Of these things you shall shortly learn much that is strange and I shall tell you myself at the diet, God willing. Item, honourable dear masters, since the community is now regrettably entirely without comfort and help, and lies in prison in its bodies, and its goods shall lie undistributed under arrest until two weeks after Epiphany, for this reason the captive community has sent me now to the lord bishop of Utrecht²⁵ and the lord duke of Guelders,²⁶ of whose subjects many are in prison in England, that they might sue and write in the matter

²⁰ William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester, 1447-86.

²¹ Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury 1450-81.

²² Robert Tully, Bishop of St David's 1460-81.

²³ Robert de Vere (d. 1513), 13th Earl of Oxford.

²⁴ Richard Neville (d. 1471), Earl of Warwick.

²⁵ David of Burgundy, Bishop of Utrecht 1456-96, an illegitimate brother of Charles the Bold.

²⁶ Adolf, Duke of Guelders 1465-71.

to the lord duke of Burgundy, so that the aforesaid Lord Duke on account of their request, might write to the lord king of England on behalf of the community, so that the community might save its body from prison and also its goods, since at this time there is no other solution. And with this I must return with all speed to England, God knows, I would gladly do my best, but I have only little support. My masters there are small men, and in addition disunited, what is worst, young of counsel, and I myself do not know the latest. Thus I am much burdened in the matter and do not know for certain how I shall best proceed. I would, had it been God's will, that I had had nothing to do with it, since I can certainly tell, that disunity and selfishness shall cause much evil, otherwise the matter could be settled easily. I beg that you write to me in England your thinking at the first opportunity, so that I may know, how the community may best be advised and informed. At this time the men of Cologne will give no advice or aid to the community, and they do not reveal their affairs to me, and I will not worry about it; from this you may well gather, how the matter lies. Therefore do what is best and let me have any advice, for I can do no more, since I am no more than one man. With this be commended to God in eternal bliss by my prayer, and pass my greetings to Gerdt and Hans Kastorpe, your brothers. Written in haste at Utrecht, 30 December 1468.