FORMAL CONTEMPORARY accounts of medieval campaigns seldom identify the rank and file, but concentrate on the great men who led armies. The ordinary soldier is usually just one of many anonymous combatants, lost among the chroniclers' estimates of the size of the fighting forces – in the Wars of the Roses and in a host of other conflicts. In this respect, the chronicle and ballad sources for the Bosworth campaign of 1485 are no exception, while the archival sources, especially the surviving administrative and military records for the period, are also of little help in identifying ordinary soldiers, particularly those on the Yorkist side.

For instance, during the whole of the reign of Richard III, no troops raised in support of the Yorkist cause are named in the records of the city of Norwich, a place where, in the words of Norfolk antiquary, Francis Blomefield, 'the city seems to have done the utmost they could for the King during his reign, which might not proceed from fear, as it did in many other places, but from the interest of Sir John Howard, whom he had created Duke of Norfolk ..., who, as well as his son, the Earl of Surrey, was much respected here'.

However, the city Assembly book of proceedings and the chamberlains' account book for the period do show how Norwich's support for Richard manifested itself on a number of occasions throughout his reign. For instance, in November 1483, the city agreed to send £40 to the king, via the hand of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, in auxilium guerre dicti domini Regis versus Ducem Bukynghamie at alios rebellis (in aid of the said lord king's war against the duke of Buckingham and other rebels). On 22 March 1484, Norwich's assembly was concerned with the commission of array issued by the king within the county of Norfolk, although none had been made for the county of the city of Norwich. It was nevertheless agreed that all citizens and other inhabitants should contribute and help towards the king's war, according to an assessment based on the extent of their goods. Aldermen and others in each ward were elected to supervise musters of all fencible men, both citizens and other inhabitants, within eight days, while inspections were to be made of the city's defences, including all the gates and portcullises, cum les gunnes in eisdem (with the guns in them).

2 Norfolk Record Office (hereafter, NRO), NCR, case 16d/1, f. 122 (Norwich City Records, Assembly Folio Book of Proceedings, 1434–91).
3 Ibid, f. 122v. The crown had issued commissions of array for thirty-six counties, including Norfolk, and to the constable and warden of the Cinque Ports, on 1 March 1484 (The National Archives: Public Record Office, C 66/553, m. 21v). The corresponding entry in the Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476–85, p. 397 wrongly gives the date as 1 May 1484.
References to correspondence between Norwich and the king and his major supporters in East Anglia reveal that such close links continued throughout 1485. For example, in the course of the year, William Dobbys was paid 5s ad liberandam Duci Norfolk' nuper domino Howerd Literam dicti Regis Ricardi ad diversa loca in Suffolk' (for delivering a letter of the said King Richard to the duke of Norfolk formerly Lord Howard at various places in Suffolk), while letters from the duke were received by the city in March. Indeed, at some time during the year, the vigilance of the city authorities resulted in the apprehending, by William London, of a suspected spy (suspecto insidiatore), the city chamberlains paying James Baxter 16d for taking him per vim ad dominum Comitem de Surrey (by force to the lord earl of Surrey). Soon afterwards, Thomas Selers received 30s for conducting the captive from Ashwellthorpe to London and thence usque Notyngham ad presenciam domini regis (as far as Nottingham, unto the presence of the lord king).

While the city records make it clear where Norwich's allegiances lay in 1485, unfortunately, like many other contemporary sources, they give us no information on any members of Richard's army and certainly nothing on the rank and file.

However, contained within one of the medieval registers of the Norwich Consistory Court, which are held at the Norfolk Record Office, is a nuncupative will, which throws some light on a combatant at Bosworth, who almost certainly served as an ordinary soldier in the army of Richard III, most likely as a follower of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey.

Nuncupative wills (sometimes also described as 'oral wills') were made by word of mouth, in the presence of (usually at least two) witnesses, with the intention that they should either be later written down at the earliest opportunity, or that those who had heard the declaration being made would give their sworn evidence to the consistory court before probate could be granted. Such wills were generally made by persons in some emergency, or in the extremity of sickness, or when writing materials could not easily be obtained, or when no-one who could write was present, and the testator entrusted the disposition of his property to the

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4 NRO, NCR, case 18a/3, f. 66 (Norwich City Records, Chamberlains' Account Book, 1479–88); NCR, case 16d/1, f. 124.

5 William London, an affluent mercer who was a prominent member of Norwich's ruling class in the 1480s, was admitted as a freeman of the city in 32 Henry VI and served it in many capacities, including sheriff in 1473, and mayor in 1482 and 1491, as well as being alderman for St Peter Mancroft ward from 1473 until his death in 1493 (B. Cozens-Hardy and E.A. Kent, The Mayors of Norwich, 1403 to 1835, Norwich 1938, p. 34; An Index to Norwich City Officers, 1453 to 1835, ed. T. Hawes, Norfolk Record Society, vol. 52 (for 1986), Norwich, [1989], p. 98; H. Le Strange, Norfolk Official Lists from the Earliest Period to the Present Day, Norwich 1890, pp. 103–4; R.H. Frost, 'The Aldermen of Norwich, 1461–1509: a Study of a Civic Elite', unpublished PhD, University of Cambridge 1996, pp. 91, 106–7, 125, 258).

6 NRO, NCR, case 18a/3, f. 66. 'Insidiator' has several meanings, including 'plotter', 'waylayer' and 'spy'; in this context it clearly refers to an agent of some kind, involved in questionable activities. On the terminology used in medieval espionage, see J.R. Alban and C.T. Allmand, 'Spies and spying in the fourteenth century', War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages, ed. C.T. Allmand, Liverpool 1976, pp. 73–101; I. Arthurson, 'Espionage and intelligence from the Wars of the Roses to the Reformation', Nottingham Medieval Studies, vol. 35 (1991), pp. 134–54.
memory of bystanders. Nuncupative wills were made invalid in England and Wales by the Wills Act, 1837, the sole exception being the case of members of the armed forces on active duty, for whom they are still legal today. Indeed, nuncupative wills have long been associated with fighting men, although it is rare to find examples of such wills before the reign of Elizabeth I.

The will of Thomas Longe of Ashwellthorpe was made verbally in this way on 16 August 1485 before two witnesses, Richard and William Partryk. By his will, Longe left his chattels in Norfolk, unspecified in type or value, to two beneficiaries, Joan, his wife, and William Herward, both of whom were also named as the executors of the will. The will was proven in the Norwich Consistory Court on 14 January 1486, so Longe was certainly dead by that date. It is logical to think that he was slain at Bosworth, or, if not, died later, of wounds sustained in the battle.

As is usual with nuncupative wills, Longe's is relatively brief and lacking in a great amount of detail. Indeed, the fact that the will was nuncupative suggests that Longe was a man in a hurry, his mind filled with thoughts of possible impending death. The clue is in his statement that he was 'willynge to dey as a child of be chirch the seid day and tyme goyng forth unto be kynges hoste at Notyngham to bataile'. This wording, coupled with the date of the will – just six days before the battle of Bosworth – is significant, tying Longe in with the chronology of the events leading up to the battle.

On 11 August, Richard III, then at Nottingham, after hearing that Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, had landed at Milford Haven, wrote to his main supporters, including the duke of Norfolk and earls of Surrey and Northumberland, instructing them to join him, to oppose Richmond's advance. John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, and his son, Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, were in East Anglia at the time, Norfolk certainly at his castle at Framlingham in Suffolk. While we are not sure exactly where Surrey was, he may well have been at Ashwellthorpe, his main residence. If Longe were in the retinue of one of the Howards, it is most likely, given the Ashwellthorpe connexion, that he served under Thomas Howard on the campaign.

John Howard received Richard's writ on 14 August and, as is shown by the summons which he sent to John Paston, he immediately arranged for his followers to muster at Bury St Edmunds by the 16th, prior to setting off to join the king's host. No doubt Thomas Howard reacted in a similar vein. Whether or not Thomas joined his father at the muster-point at Bury, or made his way with his force directly to the Midlands, the Howards and their followers arrived at Leicester on 20 August, where they were joined in the evening by Richard III and others of his supporters. Reinforced by the arrival of the earl of Northumberland's troops.

7 NRO, NCC, Will Register, Caston, f. 256v (Norwich Consistory Court, Probate Records, Will Registers). A transcript of the will appears at the end of this article.
the next day, the royal army set off westwards, intending to block Henry Tudor's advance, as his forces approached from the direction of Atherstone. By the evening of 21 August, Richard's army had passed through Sutton Cheney, near Market Bosworth, and made camp to the south-west. When battle commenced on the following day, Richard's vanguard, under John Howard and his son, Thomas, became engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting with Lancastrian troops under the earl of Oxford, but was rapidly pushed backwards by Oxford's wedges of pikes, in the bloodiest engagement of the conflict. Seeing his vanguard wavering under such heavy pressure, Richard ordered the earl of Northumberland to move forward to give it support, but, for whatever reason, Northumberland failed to do so. In a worsening situation, Norfolk was killed, and his son was wounded and taken prisoner. If Thomas Longe died in the battle, fighting for the Howards, the most likely place was in this desperate mêlée, where many soldiers fell.

So who was Thomas Longe? Longe is a fairly common Norfolk surname, occurring in many parts of the county, one of the most significant families being the Longes of Hingham and, later, of Spixworth. The existence of Thomas's will was briefly noted in the account of the parish of Ashwellthorpe given in Francis Blomefield's *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* and this led to a suggestion in some early editions of *Burke's Landed Gentry* that he was somehow connected with the Longes of Hingham and Spixworth. However, as Walter Rye showed, there is no proven connexion between this family and the Thomas Longe of Ashwellthorpe who made his will in 1485.

Indeed, any further identification of Thomas Longe is hampered by a lack of surviving records, with the will of 1485 appearing to be one of only two positive, known references to him among the primary sources. His other documentary appearance was as an executor (with John Smyth of Wreningham) in the will of Nicholas Spawnton of Ashwellthorpe, made on 24 February 1483 and proven on 31 May in the same year.

There are few other records relating to Ashwellthorpe, contemporary or near-contemporary with the will, and none which throws further light on the man or his family. The nearest documents in date are a draft manor court roll of 1468 for Ashwellthorpe and two other manors, and a list of jurors at a general court for the manor of Ashwellthorpe, dated 1505. Neither of these contains references to anyone

10 Blomefield, vol. 5, p. 163.
12 W. Rye, *Norfolk Families*, Norwich 1913, p. 494. Remarking on the Ashwellthorpe reference in earlier editions of *Burke's Landed Gentry*, Rye states, 'This is, of course, a stupid mistake ... and there is nothing whatever to connect this Thomas Longe with the ancestors of the present [Spixworth] family'. Rye's stinging correction had its effect: subsequent editions of the *Landed Gentry*, from the 12th edition (1914) onwards, omit the offending passage.
13 NRO, NCC, will register Gaston, f. 161v.
14 NRO, NAS 1/1/16/75 (Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, Frere Manuscripts).
15 NRO, RQG 125/18 (Gurney of Bawdeswell, Title Deeds and Estate Papers, Extracts from Ashwellthorpe Court Rolls).
named Longe. The Ashwellthorpe parish registers, unfortunately, do not begin until 1558 and no Longes were recorded in them during the sixteenth century. The family therefore seems not to have been in Ashwellthorpe after Thomas's death.

Thomas Longe's will makes no mention of land, only of chattels. This possibly may be because it was nuncupative (wills of this kind often, but not always, confined themselves to goods, not land), but it could also indicate that Longe was not a man of great substance and that his position in the manor may have been as lowly tenant or as a retainer within the household of its lord. The absence of a title, such as 'esquire' in the will, although not conclusive, suggests that Longe probably served as an ordinary soldier.

The manor of Ashwellthorpe, situated some twelve and a half miles south-west of Norwich, within the hundred of Depwade, was held by the Thorpe family from the twelfth century until the early fifteenth century, when it came by marriage to the Tilneys. In 1472, Elizabeth Tilney, widow of the Yorkist, Sir Humphrey Bourchier, who died at Barnet, married Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, who shortly afterwards took up residence at Ashwellthorpe, becoming lord of the manor in right of his wife.

Howard's position as lord of the manor makes it almost certain that Thomas Longe served in his retinue at Bosworth, but however probable that may be, supporting documentary evidence has either not survived, or is inconclusive. There are no extant muster rolls for Thomas Howard's retinue at Bosworth, nor other household records of his which might give further clues. Nor can Longe be positively identified in the household accounts of John Howard, Duke of Norfolk. The only Thomas Longe appearing in these records is one of the thirty-seven mariners on board John Howard's 'kervelle for the vyage to Caleys, to brynge the Bastard of Burgoyne over the sea' in 1467. It is impossible to say whether this was the same man as Thomas Longe of Ashwellthorpe, but it seems unlikely. John Howard's account books also contain several references to a William Longe and a 'Long', who possibly may have been related to Thomas, although this is, of course, also uncertain, while, no-one named Longe features in the list of the duke of Norfolk's 1,000 men, whom 'my lord hath graunted to the kyng' in February 1484, and who were almost exclusively raised from within Norfolk and Suffolk. Moreover, the separate series of accounts of John Howard which are held in the Norfolk Record Office, also make no reference to anyone named Longe.

16 NRO, PD 53 (Parish Records of Ashwellthorpe).
17 OS Grid Reference TM 1497.
18 Blomefield, vol. 5, pp. 142–52; NRO, MC 604/1 (Papers of the Tilney family of Terrington, Norfolk, Pedigree roll of the Tilney family, compiled by Peter Le Neve, 1694).
21 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 480–92.
22 NRO, NNAS Sz/6/1 and 6 (Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society Collection, Safe 2, Papers of Sir John Howard).
So are there any further clues in Longe's will itself? The answer has to be very few, although the will is useful in several respects. It was clearly dictated in a hurry, and the value and details of Longe's bequests are not given, other than they were goods and chattels in Norfolk, and that they were left to his wife, Joan, and to William Herward, both of whom were to be his executors. Nothing more is known of his wife, although his other executor, William Herward, was named as the bailiff of Ashwellthorpe in 1489, when, on 6 August of that year, Walter Wyautte, the receiver of the earl of Surrey, acknowledged receipt of £20 from 'William Herwarde baylay of Achwellthorpe', in part payment of his charge.23 If Herward were already bailiff in 1485, it is unlikely that he would have accompanied his lord on campaign. The will does not make it clear if he were present when it was dictated, although, if that were the case, it would suggest that the will was made at Ashwellthorpe, rather than elsewhere.

We also do not know whether the two named witnesses, William Partryk and Richard Partryk (modern Partridge), were Longe's companions in arms on the Bosworth campaign. They were both certainly present when the will was dictated, and if it were made en route to the battle (perhaps at Bury St Edmunds, assuming that Thomas Howard rendezvoused with his father's forces there), then they themselves might also be reckoned among the Yorkist combatants at Bosworth. If they did indeed participate in the battle, they survived, since a William Partryck and a Richard Partryck appear in a list of jurors swearing an oath in respect of Margaret Roo, in the General Court for the manor of Ashwellthorpe held on the Friday after Whitsun, 20 Henry VII [16 May 1505].24 Owing suit of court, they were certainly residents of the manor, thus it may be that Longe also used the Partryks as witnesses and named the bailiff, Herward, as one of his executors in his will because they were known or prominent members of the local manorial community.

The will of Thomas Longe, although brief and lacking somewhat in detail, is important in that it is one of few surviving sources which relate to an ordinary soldier who fought at Bosworth on the Yorkist side. Other wills of Bosworth combatants, such as that of Yorkshire squire, Robert Martin, made on 20 August 1485, are known, but they were made by persons of gentry rank and above.25 Although the lack of other documentary sources prevents us from finding out more about the man himself, the will allows us to say, with certainty, that Thomas Longe of Ashwellthorpe participated in the Bosworth campaign; on that campaign, he probably served as a common Yorkist soldier in the retinue of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, and died as a result of the battle.

23 NRO, NAS 1/1/2/26.
24 NRO, RQG 125/18.
The Will of a Norfolk Soldier at Bosworth

Transcript

Nuncupative will of Thomas Longe of Ashwellthorpe, made 16 August 1485. Proven on 14 January 1485/6 (Norfolk Record Office, NCC, Will Register, Caston, f. 256°).

Testamentum
Thome Longe nuper de Aysshwelthorpe defuncti.
[The will of Thomas Longe, formerly of Ashwellthorpe, deceased].

In dei Nomine Amen. the twesday after the fest of the assumption of our lady the xvj day of August in pe yere of our lord m' CCCClxxxv Thomas Longe of Ayshwelthorpe hole of his body and of a good mendl willynge to day as a child of he chirch the seid day and tyme goyng forth unto he kynges hoste at Notyngham to bataile made his testament nuncupatyve in this wise.

First he commendyd his soule to almyghty god kyng of blys And his body to be beryed amongst cristene pepyll in such place as god wuld dispose for hym.

Also he wuld pat Johan his wife and William Herward aftyr his deceasse shuld have all his goodes meveabyl and unmeveabyl and all maner catalls of his pat remayned after his dethe in pe Countie of Norffolk with all maner of stuff of howsold what so ever condicion it wore of or unto hym or howsold any maner of wyse longyng.

Also he wuld pat he seid Jone and William shuld have fulle poure and hole disposicion of and in all his goodes a fore Rehersyd with this condicion pat they shuld pay his dettes as far as his goodes pat cam unto peir handes wuld extende and to do for hym accordyng after peir discrecione to he plesing of god and wele of his soule And to pis intent he seid Thomas Longe namyd Jone his wiffe and William Herward afore wretyn his executors.

And in Wittenesse or testimony and faithe of this his testament nuncupatyve these discrete persons William Partryk Richard Partryk with othyr pat tyme beyng present wore requiryd and desired to Recognise these premisses a fore declared.

Probatus etc. xiiiij° die Januarij Anno domini Ml° CCCClxxxv° etc. Et commissa fuit Administracio etc. Johanne etc. Reservata potestate alij Executori etc. In cuius Rei testimonium.26

26 'Proven, etc., the 14th day of January, in the year of the Lord 1485 [i.e., 1486 New Style], etc., and administration was granted, etc. to Joan, etc., with power reserved to the other executor, etc. In testimony whereof'.