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TRAVEL FROM DURHAM TO YORK (AND BACK) IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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DURHAM CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES contain a remarkable series of depositions which throw considerable light on travel northwards in and beyond Yorkshire in the fourteenth century. They form part of a court case brought by the parishioners of St Oswald's church in Durham against Bishop Thomas Hatfield between 1360 and 1364. The details of the whole case are irrelevant here; suffice to say that in the course of it the parishioners appealed to Rome and had their case heard by papal judges-delegate in York, beginning late in 1360, with the witnesses recorded in February the next year. Miscellaneous Charter in the Durham Cathedral Muniments 5527a tells us that the witnesses it listed were heard on 4–6 February 1360(1), 5527c and 2610 give 5 and 6 February for their lists;¹ 2611 says its list was heard on 14–16 February. Details about travel came to be included because, when Hatfield was summoned to York, he or his lawyers contended that York was too far from the boundary of his diocese for him conveniently to come.²

I have added as an appendix the names of the witnesses with, next to each, the Miscellaneous Charters of the Cathedral of Durham where the copies of their evidence are contained. In order to understand the depositions one needs to realize that Hatfield's case was that he had been summoned 'to a place too far away considering the person of the aforesaid reverend father, the difficulties of the journey and the time of year, which was much more than a day's journey' [*ad locum nimis remotum considerate persona reverendi patris, viarum discrimina et temporis qualitate, longa ultra unam dietam*].³

After Martinmas, he claimed, the roads were far too muddy. One of his points was that York was further from the Tees than Canterbury is from Rochester 'which is commonly considered in England to be an ordinary day's journey' [*que quidem*

¹ D(urham) C(athedral) M(uniments), Misc Ch 5527c, fols 9^v, 10^v.

² The points pleaded in this part of Hatfield's case are in DCM, Loc xxvii 26(20).

³ DCM, Loc xxvii 26 (18).

distancia communiter reputatur in Anglia una dieta vulgaris].⁴ Thus, according to his lawyers, the summons breached canon law. William Lyndwood, the almost contemporary English canonist, said that someone cited to appear must be given enough time and that what counted as enough must depend on the type of case, the distance, and the quality of the people concerned.⁵ A day, he said, was to be considered a natural day and would vary according to the area.⁶ Thus the case of Hatfield came to discuss whether the Bishop could or could not reach York in one day from the boundaries of his diocese of Durham.

The Durham archives have preserved the depositions of forty-four witnesses for both sides of the case, some remarkably detailed. Many gave their age and status and some explained where they were living now. All gave reasons for their answers. The questions they were asked included in all cases what they considered to be the shortest way from the boundaries of the diocese to York, how long that distance was and what the route was. They were also asked what they considered to be a day's journey, and some of them replied with opinions about whether the Bishop could do it in winter. The witnesses ranged from Master Hugo de Fletham to William Porter from Durham, a fishmonger, persons of very different experience and social status. Therefore their estimates of the length of journey possible and of the ways that it could be done varied greatly.

The question of what was considered a day's journey produced the most dissimilarity, revealing striking differences between persons with different occupations. Only Master Hugo de Fletham, who was a clerk and notary, showed clear consciousness of the difference between a day for legal purposes and an ordinary one. He put it that there was one sort of day ordinarily used and another which was legal, written in the law. [*quod una (dieta) est vulgaris et alia legalis que scribitur in iure*] The day, not surprisingly, was measured for most of the witnesses from sunrise to sunset. They expressed this in different ways. William de Sockburn, a householder living in Bishopston 'cultivating land but formerly a cloth merchant travelling through the area' [*moram trahens in Bishopton paterfamilias, colens terras nunc et aliquando fuit mercator panni communiter laborans per patriam*], said robustly that noble persons 'may rise with the sun and go to bed before it sets if they wish' [*surgant cum sole et cubent ante occasum si velint*]. Others had other ways of measuring the day's length. Richard de Croxdale, living in Durham, said that the day began 'with daylight fit for counting money' [*cum luce diei apto ad numerandum pecuniam*] and ended with the light.

Measurements by daylight meant that winter and summer days were of very different lengths and witnesses would say that they were describing 'these parts', with their short winter day and very long day in summer. Dominus Walter Jakes, a mass priest from Durham City, and Dominus Thomas Cupper, another priest from Durham, both described travelling to York from Darlington about 2 February, probably in fact to give this evidence. They went via Neasham, which they reached 'at full day' or 'at

⁴ DCM, Loc xxvii 26 (20).

⁵ W. Lyndwood, *Provinciale, (seu Constitutiones Anglie)* (Oxford, 1679, Gregg reprint 1968), Book 2, tit 1, c. 2 at *inducias*.

⁶ Lyndwood, *Provinciale*, Book 3, tit 7, c. 4, at *dieta*.

sunrise' and got to their destination a little after vespers said in the monastery of York. They must therefore have started in the semi-dark. John Travers of *Meles* (Meaux?) talked of starting two or three miles before day. This usage merely confirms that most witnesses realized that a winter day was much shorter than a summer one and measured the day by the distance they reckoned to be able to travel. For most of the witnesses for the citizens, however, about thirty miles in a day in winter on horseback and between thirty-six and forty in summer was what a man could do. So said, for example Dominus Robert Aresom or Sireson, a chaplain and mass-priest from Wearmouth. It was in their interest, of course, to lengthen the day. Some claimed remarkably long days even in winter. Alexander de Belingham claimed to have gone with Hatfield into Scotland the last time the King was in Scotland (therefore in 1356)⁷ and they travelled with all the Bishop's train in one day in winter from the little town (*villeta*) called *Bankyll* (?Bankshill in Dumfrieshire) to Bolton in [East] Lothian (*Louzian*) on about 2 February, a distance much more than thirty miles. He claimed to have travelled sixty miles on horseback in one day [*ipsemet iuratus transivit ut dicit per lx miliaria uno die cum equo suo*]. Roger of Dunnington, who lived at *Angrum* two miles from Sockburn and was a servant of Robert de Herle, knight (whom we will meet again), declared that in summer he often walked from Darlington to York. He often came from Sockburn to York, beginning his day at Sockburn, having first set his lord's servants to the plough and still arrived at York in daylight [*inceptit diem suam apud Sockburne positus primo per servientes domini bobuis et iumentis ad arandum et venit ad Ebor' per lucem diei illius*]. Clearly these last were tough, vigorous men. Not all were like this, evidently. Robert de Sireson, for instance, said that 'in summer he began his day immediately after sunrise and ended it long before sunset, that is about midday, although he usually travelled very gently' [*tempore estivo post ortum solis statim incipiet dietam huiusmodi et finiet diu ante occasum solis videlicet circa meridiem licet communiter et valde delicate laboraret*].

There were, of course, many reasons why a day's journey might be shorter. Witnesses recognized that much depended on the quality of the horse. So John de Dunwell, who lived in York, had come over a river crossing in summer 'with small horses' [*cum parvis equis*]. William de Munketon reckoned that in summer 'sometimes people riding stronger horses' could do between forty-eight and fifty miles in one day [*aliquando in forcioribus equitantibus*]. Thomas Cupper said that he had done Darlington to York in one day in summer and others with him, 'with weak horses' [*cum equis debilibus*]. Richard of Croxdale had done the journey with one small horse and considered that episcopal horses would be stronger than his.

Clearly much depended also on the fitness of the rider. It is of interest to see that as an alternative to *itinero* for 'travel' our text uses *laboro*, an accepted usage which seems to imply journey on business, though I have translated it 'travel' in most contexts. Galfridus de Thornton, a servant in York, claimed to have walked following his master's horse from Darlington to York even on the shortest day and was sure that this was a day's journey 'for anyone who is strong and able to travel' [*pro quocumque potente et valente laborare*]. He claimed to have done the journey from

⁷ See DNB article on Hatfield.

Neasham (on the banks of the Tees in Durham diocese) in the company of nuns, presumably from the convent there, who could be supposed to be weaker creatures. Dominus Richard Talbot, a chaplain to Master William Farnham, said that he knew that Hatfield was able to make a journey longer than that from Darlington or Neasham to York in winter, asserting that ‘the bishop is quite young and fit to travel and this witness has seen him, so he says, riding steadily and fast’ [*et est idem episcopus satis juvenis et robustus ad laborandum quem vidit iste testis ut dicit firmiter et velociter equitare*].

Some of the witnesses, however, recognized that bishops were not just ordinary travellers. Clearly a bishop might be expected to wish to hear mass on the day of travel. Witnesses were asked about fitting mass into their day and a very few said they did so. Thomas Bower, a forester from Weardale, said that ‘some of the merchants with whom he had travelled (from Darlington to York) sometimes heard mass on the journey’ [*quosdam ipsorum sic itinerantium aliquando vidit audire missas suas in medio itinere*]. Dominus Richard Talbot, as befitted a chaplain, had often heard mass on the journey from Neasham to York. William de Munketon said that, coming from York, merchants heard mass on the Ouse Bridge, no doubt at the chantry chapel of St William.⁸ But far more said that mass did not come into their day; their testimony can be summed up by that of John de Coucy, a butcher of York, who said bluntly ‘men who travel rarely hear mass . . . especially such as he saw doing these day’s journeys, that is common men such as merchants with their packs and bundles’ [*homines qui communiter itinerant per raro audiviunt missas suas . . . precipue tales quales ipse vidit facere dictas dietas, videlicet vulgares homines sicut sunt mercatores cum packis et fardellis suis*].

Furthermore, of course, the Bishop was a great man and would travel ‘with his household, bringing equipment for divine service and with sumpter horses, hand-carts and wheeled carts’ [*ducere secum totam familiam suam, caragium cum correctis . . . et cum falleris et capella*]. The vicar of St Mary’s church, Bishophill Junior, in York, Walter of Middleham, regarded this as ‘fitting’ [*ut decet*].⁹ This clearly made a great difference to speed, so that Robert Sireson, for instance, thought that the Bishop could fit in mass with his household but not if he wanted to travel in one day with all his train. For this sort of reason some of the witnesses made an episcopal day much shorter than that for an ordinary commercial traveller. William Dobyn from Durham City, and Thomas de Wham, another chaplain from Durham, put the episcopal day in winter at twenty miles. William Boner, a chaplain from Kirklington in York diocese though now subject to the bishop of Durham, and Walter de Wynertorp another chaplain, put it at twenty-four or even twenty miles, whereas Boner thought the more ordinary travellers might cover thirty. John Travers, a forester of Girsby, however, said he had served the Bishops of Durham Louis de Beaumont and Richard de Bury for a long time, and they regularly did thirty-two miles a day in winter. Bracton, calculating for merchants to come and go in one day and do business in between, had estimated twenty miles.¹⁰

⁸ *Victoria County History: City of York*, ed. P.M. Tillott (Oxford, 1961), pp. 515–16.

⁹ DCM, Misc Ch 7231, fol. 7^r gives this as *beate Marie super Bichehill, Ebor*. See *VCH, York City*, p. 389.

¹⁰ Bracton, *De legibus et consuetudinibus Anglie*, ed. G.E. Woodbine, trans S. E. Thorne, 4 vols (Cambridge (Mass), 1968–77), iii, fol. 235, p. 198.

Part of the problem, for those who thought the distance too far, was the time of year and the state of the roads and what witnesses called ‘the dangers of the ways’ [*discrimina viarum*]. These certainly included the crossing of the River Tees, which marked the boundary between the dioceses of Durham and York. The journey out of the diocese of Durham to York was understood by all the witnesses to go from Darlington over the Tees and from there via Northallerton, Thirsk, Tollerton, or Helperby and then to York. Robert de Sireson thought that one could go to Thirsk ‘on a high way’ [*per altam viam*] by Sessay and Easingwold. This journey, from Darlington by modern roads, is about forty-eight miles. Some witnesses were anxious to say that in winter-time the roads were dreadful. Walter de Wynethorp considered that from Martinmas (11 November) to 2 February the roads between York and Northallerton ‘are very muddy and difficult to travel on’ [*sunt valde lutose et difficile ad transeundum*]. John Travers of *Meles* agreed with him; it had been like this since last Michaelmas, but he added ‘except when there was a strong and great frost so that men could pass over the frozen earth and water’ [*excepto quando fuit forte et magnum gelu ita quod homines poterant super terram et aquam congelatam transire*]. John knew that this journey was very difficult to do between All Saints (1 November) and Martinmas (11 November) because when he did do it he only stopped to eat at Thirsk and even then scarcely did it in one day.

Not all the witnesses agreed with this, of course. John Travers of Girsby thought that there was what he called ‘a royal highway’ [*alta via regia strata*] from the end of the vill of Girsby and through its fields from York towards Durham. Robert Sireson thought that the road from Girsby was very short to York and ‘very easy to travel on’ and he called it ‘a royal road and a high and public way’ [*militaria . . . facilia ad transeundum et dicit quod regia strata et alta ac via publica*].

The major obstacle to speedy travel out of the diocese of Durham southwards was the crossing of the Tees, which for much of its length in County Durham marked the boundary of the diocese, and most witnesses were questioned closely about the nearest crossing places for those who wished to get to York. There was general agreement that the usual crossing point was at Neasham, about four miles from Darlington, where indeed two fords can still be discerned. The advantage of this crossing was that it had a ford and a boat which could also take horses and clearly had a regular ferry. Richard Talbot said that the usual custom for those going from Durham to York was to spend the night either at Darlington or Neasham. He knew of other ways over the river but said that Neasham was ‘the most common way for ordinary men’ [*majus commune passagium pro communibus hominibus*]. The bishop had a manor at Darlington in any case.¹¹ William de Sockburn said that at Neasham there was ‘usually a boat ready for horsemen and all’ [*navicula que est ibi communiter parata pro equitibus et omnibus*]. This meant that even if the water was high one could usually cross.

There were other crossings, however. If one looks at the map one can see that at Sockburn the river does an enormous meander, thus taking the diocese of Durham nearer by about two miles to York than Neasham. According to some witnesses, two

¹¹ G. Cookson, *The Townscape of Darlington*, VCH Studies (2003), pp. 13–14, 23–26.

possible places could be used to cross there. Some of the witnesses talk of crossing at Sockburn, others talk of crossing near Smeaton mill. These almost certainly describe the same crossing viewed from either side of the river. There was a mill on the Tees a mile beyond [Great] Smeaton, called by Alexander de Belingham ‘the new mill’ [*de Smethton usque vadum et transitum iuxta molendinum quod vocatur novum molendinum super aquam de Tese situatum est unum miliarem tantum*] and there was a ford where horsemen could cross.¹² William de Sockburn said

Those wishing to cross the water at the mill usually cross by the ford with their horses because there is no boat for horses there . . . but only for those on foot who commonly cross there [*Volentes transire aquam ad predictum molendinum communiter transeunt per vadum cum equis quia ibi non est navicula pro equis . . . sed dumtaxat pro hominibus peditibus qui communiter transeunt ibidem*].

Galfridus de Thornton explained that there was ‘no boat big enough for taking horses there’ [*non est tam magna navicula ibidem que sufficiat ad transvehendum equos*]. William de Munketon, however, said that there was both a boat and a ford at the mill. Richard Chalunner from Durham and John del Bires from Shincliffe near Durham both said that at the mill of Smeaton there was a common passage and both agreed that when the water was low one could cross by boat and ford and when it was high by boat [*est commune passagium quando aqua est alta et per vadum et navem quando aqua est bassa* (Chalunner). . . *commune passagium per navigium et quando aqua est bassa per equos*]. Thomas Benet, rector of [Kirby] Sigston, knew the crossing and knew also of its difficulties. He had crossed the ford on horse-back ‘on Wednesday last’ [*die mercurii proxime preterito*] ‘and the water came up to his horse’s belly’ [*et aqua inde tetigit equum usque ventrem*]. We need to remember that he was giving his evidence in early February. John Dunwell of York however, who had recently been in the service of Thomas Neville, the Archdeacon of Durham, had crossed at Smeaton mill in summer and had seen there ‘a safe boat for carrying men and horses’ [*unam securam navem ad portandam homines et equos*].

The explanation of these different perceptions was given in part by Walter de Middleham who explained that ‘the miller usually kept a boat there in which he took people on foot but he did not take horses unless the water was low’ [*molendarius dicti molendini tenet ibidem communiter unam naviculam per quam aliquando pedites communiter ibidem transeunt dictam aquam sed equites non transeunt ibidem nisi quando aqua est modica et bassa*]. Robert Sireson said that people crossed by the

common passage at the ford with horses at all times of year. . . but there is not a common crossing except with a horse and not by boat because there is not usually a boat except one for fishing which the miller of the mill keeps there [*transeunt per vadum et est commune passagium . . . cum equis omni tempore anni. non sit ibidem communis transitus . . . nisi cum equo, non per naviculam quia ibi non est communiter aliqua navicula nisi fuerit pro piscibus capiendis quam molendarius dicti molendini ibidem tenuit*] . . .

John Travers of Girsby, however, said that at the mill there was not a common passage and people ‘could only cross there if they were special friends or familiars of Sir Robert of Herill (or Herle)’ [*nisi sint speciales amici vel familiares domini Roberti de Herill*]. Robert Herle was described by some (Roger of Dunnington and John of

¹² VCH, Yorks, North Riding, 1, 198 for a mill in this area.

Ravenston, the latter having also served his father) as a knight who was lord of Girsby and Sockburn. Sockburn was held by the Conyers family and this Robert must have been a sub-tenant; Petronilla Conyers, daughter of Sir John Conyers, married a Robert Herle.¹³ The importance of his part in all this testimony was that the diocese of Durham did not in fact end at the Tees at Sockburn, since the parish of Sockburn, in Durham diocese, also included Girsby and what is now East Sockburn, over the water in North Yorkshire. Since the main point at issue was the nearest way out of the diocese of Durham to York, it mattered exactly where the boundary was. The edge of Durham diocese at Girsby was much nearer to York than Neasham.

One or two witnesses showed very clear understanding of the jurisdictions involved. Robert de Sireson described how one could come to Durham diocese from York without crossing the Tees at all. The fields [*campos*] of Girsby were the nearest part of the diocese of Durham and Girsby was in the parish of Sockburn. Walter de Middleham was even more specific. He said that the diocese ended at a certain wood called Thurstandale wood, (which is the modern Staindale Wood).¹⁴ *Caldehall* and this wood and the fields of Dinsdale were all in the diocese of Durham. Those questioned about this attested that they knew that the area was in Sockburn parish either because the people of Girsby paid their tithes to Sockburn (William de Sockburn) or because they buried their dead in Sockburn cemetery (William de Munketon).

This complicated set of jurisdictions also covered another way of crossing the river, but one which was clearly not well known in 1361. If one came via the Girsby fields, Middleham said there was a straight road to the river at *Pountaysbrigg* (Ponteesbridge). He said that this had been the crossing 'before the bridge was broken, which he thought had happened about six years before' [*ubi solebant homines communiter transire antequam pons ille fuit confractus quod contigit hinc a sex annis elapsis ut recolit*]. He usually crossed at Sockburn. Ponteesbridge is mentioned only by two other persons. Robert de Sireson said that one could go through the Girsby fields to this bridge where there was a common passage over the Tees with horses. Adam de Dunelm, who lived in York, said that the bridge was near the mill and that 'men could now cross it and had been able to do so for about six months' [*unus pons vocatus Pontasbrigg per quem homines transire nunc possunt et potuerunt per totum dimidium anni proxime iam preteriti*]. So little known was this that the scribe who copied it had first written *Persbrigg* (Piercebridge). Ponteesbrigg was a well-attested bridge across the river at Dinsdale which was probably Roman in origin and had a chapel and a hermitage.¹⁵ It is marked on the six-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1899 as crossing the river at Dinsdale Park.¹⁶ As we have seen most of the travellers did not use it, perhaps because they continued to think it was broken. There is no sign of a bridge there now but a track does lead down to where one may have been.

¹³ R Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*, 4 vols (1823), III, 247.

¹⁴ *VCH, Yorks, North Riding*, I, 449–54 for the whole parish of Sockburn.

¹⁵ *The Victoria History of the County of Durham*, ed. W. Page, III (1905–28), 299; Surtees, *History of Durham*, III, 228–29.

¹⁶ Sheet 55, SE sheet; NZ 346 120.

A few travellers commented on the places to stop or stay on the journey from York to Durham, which clearly made a difference for the length of day's journey. Those coming south from Durham seem to have stayed the night at Darlington and certainly the bishop could do so at his own manor. Many people coming the other way did the same. If they could not get to Darlington in time in winter they stayed at Northallerton. Thomas de Wham from Durham said that there was no common hospice at Neasham so that people either went to Smeaton or Darlington in one day. John de Ravenston, going from Darlington to York in summer, 'stopped in three places to feed his horse' [*moratus fuit in tribus locis pascendo equum suum*]. He did not say where.

Some of these witnesses tell one something about their travels and their jobs. William Porter and Adam Serjaunt were both sellers of fish and both thought that the journey via Sockburn was very difficult in winter. Porter said that he often brought fish for sale from Durham diocese to York and more usually passed along the roads at night 'as is usual for men of his kind exercising this kind of trade' [*sicut est de more hominum sue condicionis exercencium huiusmodi mercimonium*]. Adam said he was a fisherman [*piscarius*] who commonly journeyed with his horses bearing his fish to sell beyond the diocese of Durham to the city of York at all times of year. His day's journey began 'after the market at York or in other places, sometimes earlier, sometimes later and he travelled a lot at night' [*post forum factum in Ebor vel in aliis locis diocesis Dunelm et aliquando citius et quandoque tardius et multum laborat in noctibus*]. Thus he did not know what a day for an ordinary person might be. Robert, son of Peter of Girsby, recounted how last Lent he had travelled from Girsby to York 'with a horse carrying a sack of wool weighing twenty stones' [*cum uno equo portante unum saccum de xx petris lane usque Ebor*]. Several of those who said they knew the road from York to Darlington well, knew it because they went to the fairs at Darlington. Alexander de Belingham, who said he was from Eryholme, had seen 'several merchants and other artisans with their goods and carts' [*plures mercatores et alios artifices cum suis mercimoniis et caragiis*] at the time of the last Darlington fair travelling from York to Darlington. This probably applied to the butchers of York. William Waldyng, Thomas Doghty, William Attehall, John Coucy, and Robert de Duncolm. Roger of Dunyngton had been several times at the fair at Northallerton.¹⁷

Several of the witnesses were employed by ecclesiastical persons. John de Dunwell said that he had not long since been in the household of Thomas Neville, Archdeacon of Durham. The Archdeacon was the son of Ralph, first Baron Neville of Raby, who became archdeacon in 1334 and was a senior canon of York at the time.¹⁸ He had been appointed one of the judges-delegate in this case by the papal curia but had declined because he was too busy.¹⁹ Very possibly he did not wish to be embroiled in what appears a very politically charged case. John Travers of Girsby had travelled with the Bishops who employed him, Louis de Beaumont (1317 × 33) and Richard

¹⁷ C. M. Newman, *Late Medieval Northallerton. A Small market town and its Hinterland, c. 1450–1540*, (Stamford, 1999), p. 99 for St Bartholomew's fair, 24 August.

¹⁸ A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, II (Oxford, 1957), 1351.

¹⁹ DCM, Misc Ch 7231, fol. 2^{va}.

de Bury (1333 × 45). William de Munketon travelled on his own business but also had done business for the Prior of Durham at Howden and Hemingbrough, where the priory owned livings. Munketon was one of those who had given separate evidence about the beginning of the case. He described how he had gone with Robert Litster, the leading parishioner, to interview Hatfield in the course of the argument.²⁰ Richard of Croxdale had gone from Darlington to Neasham 'on the Wednesday after the Purification last' (3 February 1361) and there had delivered a letter to the nun who was the doorkeeper of the nuns at Neasham convent. John Travers *de Meles*, who thought even the way by Neasham was too muddy for the Bishop in winter, knew the journey because he had been with others attempting to ride it from York, and named them as John de Appleby, Official of Durham and Master Simon de Neuton. Appleby was probably the man who was soon to leave Durham for the Roman curia where he became an advocate at the papal court.²¹ William de Esshe had travelled with Hugh de Fletham and Hugh de Tesedale, both involved in the ecclesiastical courts.

One or two described the travels of the Bishop. John Travers of Girsby knew from members of the Bishop's household that the Bishop travelled from Bishop Auckland to Crayke, his manor near York and into much more remote parts. Walter Jakes had seen the Bishop do this journey in winter. William Munketon had seen the Bishop arriving at Crayke from Howden on the vigil of the Assumption last year (14 August 1360) and he got there at about midday. Thomas Benet had travelled with the Bishop to London once with a clerk from the Bishop's household. The Bishop was clearly thought to be a frequent and intrepid traveller.

It is equally striking that some of the witnesses had travelled little and professed not to know roads with which one might have expected them at least to be acquainted. Several professed to know nothing of Sockburn or Smeaton, though familiar with Neasham. Examples were William de Caldebeck of Gateshead, John de Colchester and William Dobyn of Durham. William Whitberd of Durham had only done the journey from Neasham twice, once to come to give his evidence. Several were also anxious to disassociate themselves from any suggestions that they knew about bishops and their ways. The usual disclaimer was to say that those they knew about were 'ordinary people' [*personas vulgares*]. The former cloth merchant turned farmer, William de Sockburn, was more emphatic, saying that 'he had not travelled much in the company of bishops' [*non multum laboravit in comitativa episcoporum*].

Thus some of the perceptions of the ease or difficulty of the roads sprang from the social level of the persons involved. What one can discover about the witnesses shows very varied status. There was, not surprisingly, a group of clergy. Hugo de Fletham, a notary, was scribe to the York Chapter.²² Richard Talbot described himself as living in Durham with Master William de Farnham. Farnham was a canon lawyer, rector of Walkington, Official to Hatfield (an important judicial position), advocate of the Consistory court of Durham and a former chaplain to John Thoresby, Archbishop of York.²³ Talbot must therefore have been in a very good position to know about

²⁰ DCM, Loc xxvii 26 (17).

²¹ Emden, *Oxford*, 1, 40–41.

²² DCM, 1.3 Archiep.4, dated 1356.

²³ Notes from the card-index in 5, The College, Durham.

the Bishop's habits. Thomas Benet, rector of Kirby Sigston, York diocese, would have been appointed by Durham Priory, as would Thomas Bowes, rector of West Rounton.²⁴ In 1366, Thomas de Wham was rector of St Mary in the North Bailey, Durham City in the gift of Durham Priory also.²⁵

Several of the lesser clergy were chaplains living in Durham. Walter de Wynertorp had given evidence of the incident in St Nicholas church, Durham which had sparked off the trouble. He had seen it all from the nave.²⁶ It would appear from the evidence concerning 'days' that there was an attempt to impugn his good faith; 'asked whether he was a criminal 'he did not wish to reply' [*Interrogatus an sit criminosus dicit quod non vult respondere*]. Since the whole case had begun with an episcopal visitation some criminal records may have surfaced. John de Baumburgh, a chaplain, can often be seen acting as either a trustee or as a conveyor of land in Durham City between 1356 and 1380.²⁷ In 1371 he acted for Robert Litster who was the leader of the parishioners involved in the case against Hatfield.²⁸ Before 1376, and again (or still) in the 1380s he was procurator of St Oswald's church, that is he acted as the agent for the priory in all the financial affairs of the parish.²⁹ Walter Jakes, with his brother John who was also a Durham chaplain, was yet another of these chaplains, who can be seen doing business in property with Baumburgh in 1356.³⁰ Walter also served as the chaplain of the country chapel of Croxdale, outside Durham but part of St Oswald's parish, between 1356 and 1359.³¹ Thomas Cupper can also be seen acting as a trustee for property transactions in the city between 1364 and 1377.³² He was paid by the priory for celebrating at St Margaret's chapel, a dependency of St Oswald's, in 1368–69.³³ William de Esshe had part of a tenement in Durham in 1382–83, which had previously been held first by John de Smethton, then by Walter Jakes and then by Walter's sister Agnes. These people must therefore have known each other, but then Durham was a very small city.³⁴

The Durham and York laity who gave evidence can also sometimes be traced elsewhere. John de Colchester was probably the man who in 1352 with his wife Joan granted a messuage in Elvet, Durham.³⁵ Roger de Normanton seems to have owned, with his wife, a tenement in the marketplace in Durham in 1362.³⁶ William Porter held a burgage in Alvertongate in 1352.³⁷ There is an Adam de Serjaunt, perhaps the father

²⁴ *VCH, Yorks, North Riding*, i, 409, 446; Benet was a witness to DCM, 1.3.Archiep.4, in 1356.

²⁵ R. Donaldson, 'Patronage and the Church: A study in the social structure of the secular clergy in the diocese of Durham (1311–1540)' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge Univ. 1955); M Camsell, 'The Development of a Northern Town in the Later Middle Ages', 3 vols (unpub. D.Phil. thesis, York Univ. 1985), ii, 150. Volumes are numbered as in the copy in 5, The College.

²⁶ DCM, Loc xxvii 26 (17).

²⁷ Camsell, thesis, ii, 14, 26, 223, 270, 271, 296, 326, 360, 400, 408; iii, 438, 541, 550, 557, 598, 601, 609, 612, 635, 714.

²⁸ Camsell, thesis, iii, 612.

²⁹ DCM, Hostiller's accounts, 1376, 1382–3, 1383–4, 1383A, mentioned 1373–4 in DCM, 4.16.Spec. 56a.

³⁰ Camsell, thesis, ii, 26.

³¹ DCM, Hostiller's accounts.

³² Camsell, thesis, ii, 43, 54, 78, 81, 202, 260.

³³ DCM, Hostiller's accounts.

³⁴ Camsell, thesis, ii, 63.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, iii, 654.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, 365.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, ii, 19.

of the witness in 1361, who owned a place [*placea*] on the way out of Durham towards Kepier Hospital in 1319.³⁸ None of the several York butchers, all chosen, no doubt, because they often made the crossings concerned, can be traced as freemen of York, though there were several Doughtys and Dughtys in the lists.³⁹ John de Corbrigg or de Smethton, tanner (barker), however, may be the man who had been granted the freedom of York in 1349.⁴⁰ Our witness calls himself a citizen of York but it is intriguing to discover that there was a John de Smethton who in 1339 with his wife, owned two tenements in Crossgate, Durham, which later belonged to Walter Jakes.⁴¹ Thomas de Strensall, though he does not say so, may have been a goldsmith of York.⁴²

The evidence presented here is unique for its time. What it tells about Pontees-bridge, for instance, is not found anywhere else. It is in any case very unusual to find such a diverse group discussing travel conditions in this way. What it also reveals is that, preposterous though in one sense it seems, the Bishop probably had a point when he said that travel for him was difficult in winter. One can read between some of the lines to see that although the distances stated could be done in winter they often might not be achieved and certainly not by anyone travelling in any style. It is not possible to think of the Bishop of Durham crossing the Tees quickly even over the ford at Neasham, and even in summer, which all agreed was easy enough, or striding out like a merchant with a packhorse.

APPENDIX

(Names of Witnesses)

- ATTEHALL**, William, butcher [*carnifex*] and citizen of York. Misc Chs 2616, 5527b.
BAUMBURGH, John de, *clericus* living in Durham aged 30. Misc Chs 5527c, fol. 10; 2610.
BELINGHAM, Alexander de, aged thirty. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 2^v.
BENET, Thomas, rector of [Kirby] Sigston, York diocese. Misc Chs 5527c, fols. 6^v–7; 2610.
BIRES, John del, living in Shincliffe near Durham, aged 30 and more. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 5; Misc. Ch. 2610.
BONER, William, *capellanus*, from Kirklington in York diocese, living in York diocese but owing obedience to the bishop of Durham. Misc. Ch. 2611.
BOWER, or **HOWER**, Thomas, of Weardale, forester, Misc. Ch. 2617, 5527a.
BOWES, *dominus* Thomas de, rector of West Rounton [*Rungeton*]. Misc. Chs 5527c, fol. 7^v; 2610.
CALDEBECK, William de, of Gateshead. Misc. Ch. 2611.
CHALUNNER, Richard, living in Durham, aged 40. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 4.
COLCHESTER, John de, citizen of Durham. Misc. Ch. 2611.
COUCY, John, butcher [*carnifex*], citizen of York. Misc. Chs 2617, 5527a.
CORBRIG, John de, called de Smethton, barker. Misc. Chs 2617, 5527a.
CROXDALE, Richard of, living in Durham, aged 30. Misc. Chs 5527c, fols. 5^v–6; 2610.
CUPPER, Thomas, priest, aged 30, living in Durham. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 3^v; 2610.
DOBYN, William, citizen of Durham. Misc. Ch. 2611.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 401.

³⁹ *Freemen of York*, I, ed. F. Collins, Surtees Society, xcvi (1897), 16, 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 44.

⁴¹ Camsell, thesis, II, 59, 62, and above

⁴² *York Memoranda Book*, I, ed. M. Sellers, SS, cxx (1912), 2; II, 54 for his son William.

- DOGHTY**, Thomas, butcher [*carnifex*] and citizen of York. Misc. Chs 2616, 5527b.
- DUNCOLM**, Robert de, citizen of York, butcher. Misc. Chs 2617, 5527a.
- DUNELM**, Adam de, aged 30, living in York. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 11^v.
- DUNYNGTON**, Roger of, aged 40, servant of Robert Herle, knight, lord of Sockburn and Girsby. Living at *Angrum* two miles from Sockburn. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 8^{rv}.
- DUNWELL**, John de, living in York, aged 30, was in household [*de familia*] of Archdeacon Thomas Neville recently [*non est diu*]. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fol. 6^{rv}.
- ESSHE**, William del, *clericus* living in Durham. Misc. Ch. 2611.
- FLETHAM**, master Hugo de. Misc. Chs 5527c, fol. 10^v; 2610.
- GORMIRE**, Galfridus, householder living in Langton [*paterfamilias moram trahens in Langton*]. Misc. Chs 2616, 5527a.
- GRISBY**, Robert son of Peter of, aged 40, living in Girsby. Misc. Chs 5527c, fol. 9^{rv}; 2610.
- JAKES**, *dominus* Walter, *capellanus*, aged 40 and more. Misc. Ch. 5527c, fols. 3^{rv}.
- MIDDLEHAM**, Walter de, vicar of the church of Saint Mary, Bishophill Junior, York. Misc. Chs 5527a and b.
- MUNKETON**, William de, aged 44, citizen of Durham. Misc. Chs 5527c, fols. 1–2; 2610.
- NORMANTON**, Roger de, living in Durham. Misc. Ch. 2611.
- PORTER**, William, citizen of Durham, fisherman, Misc. Ch. 2611.
- RAVENSTON**, John de, living in Croxdale, aged 50 and more; served Robert Herle and his father for thirty years. Misc. Chs 5527c, fols. 8^v–9; 2610.
- SELBY**, John de, living in York city, common worker and remaker of ecclesiastical vestments [*communis operarius et refector vestimentorum ecclesiasticorum*]. Misc. Chs 2617, 5527a.
- SERJAUNT**, Adam, citizen of Durham, fisherman. Misc. Ch. 2611.
- SIRESON**, or **ARESOM** *dominus* Robert de, *capellanus*. Living in Wearmouth, celebrating mass there [*ibidem celebrans missas*]. Misc. Ch. 2616 (incomplete); Misc. Ch. 5527a.
- SOCKBURN**, William de, living in Bishopton, a householder cultivating land and once he was a clothmerchant travelling the area [*moram trahens in Bishopton paterfamilias colens terras et aliquando fuit mercator panni communiter laborans per patriam*]. Misc. Chs 2616, 5527a.
- STRENSALE**, Thomas de, Misc. Chs 2616, 5527b.
- TALBOT**, *dominus* Richard, chaplain, living in Durham with Master William de Farnham [*capellanus moram trahens in Dunelm cum Magistro Willelmo de Farnham*]. Misc. Chs 2617, 5527a.
- THORNTON**, Galfridus de, living in York, a servant [*moram trahens in civitate Ebor' ibidem deserviens*]. Misc. Chs 2616, 5527a.
- TRAVERS**, John, of Girsby [*Grysbys*], living at Girsby, forester and former servant of both Bishops Louis Beaumont and Richard de Bury. Misc. Chs 2617, 5527a.
- TRAVERS**, John, de *Meles*, (?Meaux) living in Durham diocese for five years. Misc. Ch. 2611.
- WALDYNG**, William, butcher [*carnifex*] and citizen of York. Misc. Chs 2616, 5527b.
- WHAM**, *dominus* Thomas de, *capellanus*, owing obedience to the bishop of Durham, living in Durham city. Misc. Ch. 2611.
- WHITEBERD**, William, of Durham. Misc. Ch. 2611.
- WYNERTHORP**, Walter de, *capellanus*. Of Durham diocese. Misc. Ch. 2611.

Source: Durham Cathedral Muniments (DCM), at 5, The College, Durham.