

Hugh de Cressingham

“...The jury have heard for certain that the said Hugh was a bastard¹.”

Being the life and times of Hugh de Cressingham, king’s clerk, justice in eyre,
until his appointment as Treasurer of Scotland in 1296.

Introduction

Hugh de Cressingham leaped from nowhere onto the pages of history on 6 September 1296 when he was appointed Treasurer of Scotland. For a year, in the absence of his nominal superior John de Warenne Earl of Surrey, he was virtually in sole charge of the kingdom – acquiring in the process a reputation for greed, luxury, corruption and oppression. On 11 September 1297 he was, appropriately, killed at the battle of Stirling Bridge. Appropriately because he had done more than anyone else to lose that battle.

Historians describe Cressingham – if they describe him at all – as a typical example of his class, an obnoxious king’s clerk, former justice in eyre and illegitimate. This does little to explain the reasons for his appointment and nothing to account for the actions of one who, if only for a year, wielded considerable authority and profoundly influenced the history of a kingdom.

Chroniclers dilated upon his greed and pomposity, laughed at his obesity,² condemned his way of life³ and misuse of office,⁴ and may thus have influenced historians more than is strictly just.

To the Scots he personified the hated administration. Fordun, for instance, wrote of Stirling Bridge:

“As the king, however, was intent upon many troublesome matters elsewhere, he sent his treasurer, named Hugh of Clissingham, with a large force to repress this William’s boldness... Hugh of Clissingham was killed and all his army put to flight.”⁵

It is interesting that he did not see fit to mention Warenne’s part in the battle, but included him in, “all his army.” So major a figure surely deserves more attention than he has received to date.

This account of Hugh de Cressingham’s life up to his appointment seeks a better understanding of three problems.

First, it must have been less obvious to the king than it is to us that his clerk was totally unsuited to the task he had been set. What deluded Edward into believing that this portly priest was capable of handling the affairs of a kingdom?

Second, he is often described as being a typical member of his class. What, exactly, does this mean?

¹ *Cal. Inq. P. M.* p.267

² Tout; *Chapters* v. p.238

³ *Chron. Guisb.* pp.301-305

⁴ *Gray* p.219

⁵ *Fordun* p.322

Third, there are unsolved anomalies about the rise and fall of the English administration in Scotland of 1296-97. Some knowledge of the skills and failings, aspirations and fears of one of the principal actors in this drama must at least allow us to guess more intelligently.

Chapter 1: King's Clerk

Who was he?

Almost all we can confidently say of Hugh de Cressingham's early life is that it is obscure. It is certain that he was illegitimate⁶ and born in Great Cressingham,⁷ the larger of two Norfolk villages bearing that name. They are one and a quarter miles apart and situated in the fork of the modern A1065 and B1108 some twelve miles north of Thetford. Great Cressingham was part of the temporalities of the see of Norwich⁸ and probably held by the prior, of the bishop.⁹

Hugh first appears in May 1273 as one of the twelve mainpernors (guarantors) for William de Benges, charged with the death during the reign of Henry III of one Geoffrey de Askeby.¹⁰ Assuming he was by then a major this implies that he was born by 1252.

According to his seal he was the son of William de Cressingham.¹¹ No brothers or sisters are mentioned and, being a clerk, if he had children of his own he kept them quiet. A web search suggests a daughter however: Alice or Elizabeth.¹²

It is difficult to imagine that the John de Cressingham, clerk, who in 1296 was issued with a protection to stay in Scotland on the king's service with Hugh de Cressingham, was unrelated.¹³ He may be the John de Cressingham who with Hugh's acquaintance John Lovel among others, was convicted before Hugh's fellow-justice and companion in Scotland, Osbert de Spaldington, of an act of violence while apparently acting with and as a henchman of Roger Bigod earl of Norfolk.¹⁴ The entire band was later given a conditional pardon by the earl upon payment of a fine of 500 l.¹⁵

There is also a Nicholas de Cressingham who, with two others, acknowledges a debt of 40 marks to George de Laverton on 1 May 1292.¹⁶ The three debtors had between them sufficient "lands and chattels" in Norfolk and Suffolk to guarantee the debt; but this would not necessarily have been a great deal. The name further occurs on several occasions in *Feudal Aids* volume iii. In 1302 we find the heirs and tenants of Clement de Cressingham holding lands of Thomas de Felmingham (and he in turn of the bishop of Norwich) in North Birlyham by military service.¹⁷ Amis de Cressingham¹⁸ is

⁶ *Cal.Inq.P.M.* Vol.iii Edw.I. no.405.p.267

⁷ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.83

⁸ *Feudal Aids.* vol.iii. p.448 & p.433; [C.P.R. \(1232-47\)](#) p.190

⁹ *Feudal Aids.* vol.iii. p.446

¹⁰ [C.C.R. \(1272-79\)](#) p.13 & p.45

¹¹ *Bain* ii. App.iii 453

¹² [RootsWeb](#) entry for Hugh de Cressingham, accessed 5th July 2015.

¹³ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.201

¹⁴ [C.C.R. \(1302-07\)](#) p.480

¹⁵ *C.F.R. (1272-1307)* p.527 (17 Oct.1305)

¹⁶ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.264

¹⁷ *Feudal Aids.* vol.iii. p.418

¹⁸ *Feudal Aids.* vol.iii. p.446

mentioned as a holder of land by military service in the hundred of Greenhoe South, and John¹⁹ and Thomas²⁰ are also mentioned. This John could be the one we have already met and the fact that Clement holds indirectly of the bishop of Norwich may be significant. There is however nothing but their name to connect either Amis or Thomas with our protagonist.

As for Hugh himself, his education and early life are as effectively hidden from our eyes as his family. We hear nothing more of him until nine years later, in 1282, the east coast began to suffer from pirate attacks.²¹ Presumably as a result the bishop of Ely (at this time Hugh Balsham)²² was entrusted with the fortification of the Isle of Ely and Hugh de Cressingham with taking security and oaths to observe the king's peace in those parts. He was given a writ *de intendendo* on 1 May until Michaelmas.²³ After this there is a further five-year silence until 8 February 1287 when, on the brink of his full scale entrance into public life, he and Eborace archdeacon of Sudbury were appointed attorneys, for one year, of William bishop of Norwich.²⁴

This bishop was William de Middleton, a former archdeacon of Canterbury,²⁵ prominent canon lawyer and royal servant. He ascended the see in 1278, and when he appointed attorneys in 1287 was about to go to Gascony in the king's service. He was appointed interim seneschal there between the death of John de Vaux (10 September 1287) and the arrival of John de Havering, was still acting in that capacity on 15 June 1288, but returned to England in time to die on 1 September.²⁶ He seems to have been an astute politician and by no means averse to taking a little venison without licence.²⁷

His early association of Hugh de Cressingham is unlikely to be coincidental. Hugh must in his youth have attracted the attention of his village's ecclesiastical lord and entered his service. When, a few years later, William de Middleton took stock of his new episcopate Hugh would have been well placed to catch his eye. This he evidently did to such good effect as to become the bishop's protégé and receive a thorough if informal training in legal and political practice at his master's side. In the process his face would have become a familiar sight to the greatest of the realm among whom the bishop moved, a fact which would shortly stand him in very good stead.

The above account of his early life, though speculative, must be substantially accurate. The pattern of his career suggests a legal education. From the first his activities in royal service are mainly within the machinery of justice, and both the above commissions would require a man at least familiar with legal procedures. The fact that he is never accorded the title, 'Master' suggests he learned his skills on the job. Moreover he appears, taking oaths in the Isle of Ely, three years after William de Middleton's elevation to the see of Norwich on 28 January 1278.²⁸ This is about the time it might take to obtain a foothold in the bishop's administrative *mesnie* and gain enough competence to be entrusted with responsible tasks outside the household.

¹⁹ *Feudal Aids*. vol.iii. p.453

²⁰ *ibid.* p.544

²¹ *Chron. Bury St. Edmunds* p.76

²² *ibid.* p.36 & p.87

²³ *C.V.C.R. (1277-1326)* p.218

²⁴ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.263

²⁵ *Chron. Bury St. Edmunds* p.65

²⁶ [British History Online: Bishops of Norwich](#) accessed 30 June 2015

²⁷ [C.C.R. \(1279-88\)](#) p.443

²⁸ *Chron. Bury St. Edmunds* p.65

Finally, the visible portion of his life consistently exhibits the aggression needed in the Middle Ages by a self-made man, with neither privilege of blood nor influential relatives to protect him. The skill which translated this attitude into action, which enabled him to weather at least one major crisis, and make his way into the blind alley of the Scottish Treasury must however have been learned – and that from a master as well versed in the art of personal aggrandizement as Bishop William.

Promotion

In 1288 the silence shrouding the career of Hugh de Cressingham evaporates. From 16 January, when he replaced Henry le Waleys (who was detained overseas) in a commission to enquire into persons attempting to pass silvered metal sheets as silver, and the concealed goods of condemned Jews,²⁹ he was regularly employed in royal service. On 16 February he was at Westminster and witnessed the partition of the lands of John de Vallibus between his co-heiresses.³⁰ On 8 June he was presented to his first recorded living: that of the church of Barneton in the diocese of Ely.³¹ Ten days later he was appointed to a commission of *oyer and terminer* in London with John de Lovetot and William de Carleton, one of his colleagues of the January commission – his first known judicial role.³² By 25 July this was concluded and Hugh ordered to Wales: he nominated attorneys at Westminster on that date until Michaelmas,³³ stating he was going on the king's service. The reason for the journey is unclear but the administrative aftermath of Rhys ap Iaredudd's rebellion – crushed nine months previously – is one possibility. Whatever his business in Wales it was probably complete by the end of the year when he and Master Thomas Cantok were nominated attorneys in England by Baldwin de Frimle, going overseas on the king's service.³⁴

The very abruptness of his arrival upon the public stage gives pause. The two tasks he was given before 1288 required more conscientiousness than brilliance in the execution and offered little opportunity for Hugh to make his mark, though we can assume he performed them competently. Nor is there any overt sign of a new and influential patron.

William de Middleton was however away at least until the end of June, and dead by the beginning of September.³⁵ The effect upon Hugh's career would have been twofold. First, the bishop's absence would have left his clerk lightly occupied with domestic affairs, and thus at liberty to accept more commitments of his own. Second, Middleton had to handle his remaining political and legal interests in England through his attorneys. This must have brought de Cressingham far more prominently to the notice of those who, in the absence of the king, held the reins of state than before. He had, as it were, emerged from the shadow of the see of Norwich.

In view of this it is hardly surprising that, having once been employed on royal service, he would be used again. The competent completion of one task is all that would be needed for a clerk such as he to be given another – it was not, after all, such an enormous reward. The result of the bishop of Norwich's effective removal from English political life was thus that Hugh de Cressingham gradually

²⁹ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.291

³⁰ [C.C.R. \(1279-88\)](#) p.531

³¹ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.296

³² *ibid.* p.306

³³ *ibid.* p.297

³⁴ *ibid.* p.310

³⁵ See above p.3

left his service – and entered the king’s. His presentation to Barneton was *mesurable hire* for the full-time royal service which he was then beginning.

Moreover, although there is no overt sign of his acquiring another patron, by the time the king returned in 1289 from his long absence abroad Hugh was steward of Eleanor of Castile’s lands.³⁶ Not only steward, but well enough entrenched to be the subject of one of the first enquiries into official corruption ordered by the king on his return.³⁷ Hugh remained in the queen’s service until her death on 28 November 1290,³⁸ and during her last two years was certainly also active on the king’s behalf.

If, as seems likely, Hugh de Cressingham was already the queen’s steward in 1288 any remaining anomalies in that year resolve themselves. It may be significant, for instance, that one colleague on his June commission of *oyer and terminer* was John de Lovetot who was accused in 1291 of malpractice on the queen’s behalf when auditing her accounts.³⁹

The first eight months of 1289 are another period of frustrating silence about de Cressingham. It is difficult to imagine the care of Baldwin de Frimle’s affairs fully occupying his time so, in the absence of anything else for him to do and in view of the paucity of Eleanor’s financial records, we can reasonably assume him to have been busy in her business. In any case his powers of attorney on Baldwin’s behalf were due to expire a fortnight after Midsummer, the king returned from Gascony in August, and very shortly afterwards the enquiry was ordered.

This was the only major crisis of his career before he became Treasurer of Scotland. It was claimed that neither the queen nor Humphrey de Bohun (from whom she received the barony) were at that time or had ever been in seisin of the right to hold pleas in Haverford by writs of their own chancery, but that such right belonged to William de Valence, earl of Pembroke, the king’s uncle, and his wife Joan; and also that the queen’s officials – principally Hugh – had nevertheless held such pleas. The queen denied both charges and, rather inconsistently, by 20 February 1290 de Cressingham counter-claimed that John Wogan with a large number of men – presumably acting on William de Valence’s behalf – entered the castle of Haverford and there impeded the proceedings of the queen’s court which he was holding.⁴⁰

Both Hugh and John evidently survived unscathed as on 28 August 1295 we find them jointly commissioned to take up the enquiry into the respective rights there of the (by then) late queen-consort, of William de Valence and Humphrey de Bohun.⁴¹ The commission was repeated on 28 July 1294 owing to delays on the part of Ralph de Ivinghoe in sending them the records of previous proceedings;⁴² and in both cases the commission carried the proviso that matters determined in the queen’s lifetime were to remain unaltered. Clearly these must have included the roles of the two commissioners.

Nor was Hugh de Cressingham’s association with Haverford over at this point. On 3 January 1295 he was granted custody of the castle and town, with the chancery there and its seal, and of the town of

³⁶ Tout; *Chapters.v.* p.271

³⁷ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.331

³⁸ *ibid.* p.411

³⁹ Tout; *Chapters.v.* p.238

⁴⁰ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.398

⁴¹ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.49

⁴² *ibid.* p.114

St. Clear;⁴³ all of which he held until his death⁴⁴ rendering the customary amount for them to the queen's executors. Thus not only did he remain connected with Haverford for the rest of his life but, through it, also with the long-dead queen.

Indeed, the spectre of this formidable woman dogs those who came into contact with her, making them a class apart. For instance there is a licence, dated 22 June 1293 for the alienation of lands in frank almain by Hugh de Cressingham to the prior and convent of St. Mary's, Spinney, "for the soul of Eleanor the late queen-console;"⁴⁵ and in December of that year a parcel of rights which had been confiscated from the prior and canons of St. Mary's, Carlisle by Hugh and his accomplices in eyre was returned as a gift for the souls of the king, Eleanor, and his ancestors and heirs.⁴⁶

One of those accomplices was none other than John Wogan.⁴⁷ Another of the queen's senior officials, John de Berwick, had further dealings with Hugh both in his capacity as one of her executors and as one of the latter's companions in a commission of *oyer and terminer* in 1294.⁴⁸ Finally, Hugh's other companion in this commission was William de Carlton, who is several times mentioned as one of his colleagues during his term as the queen's steward and shortly afterwards.⁴⁹

It would be easy to read too much into these later connexions. No association within so small and mobile a class as the clerical servants of the crown in this period should surprise us and after all, they interacted far more frequently with those who were not their former colleagues than with those who were – few of them devoted all their time to the queen's household anyway. Nevertheless the similarity of their lives tells us something about the sort of people they were – able career men, mainly with little or no background and not overburdened with principle – and importantly reminds us that Hugh de Cressingham was not alone but a typical representative of his breed.

During these years he must, if he didn't possess it already, have acquired the mind of his contemporaries: that peculiar pattern of prejudices, priorities and presumptions which distinguished these politic priests from the three orders of society. As steward of Eleanor's lands he would have gained experience in handling, or at least in gathering, large sums of money; which must have been among the qualifications that eventually secured his appointment as Treasurer of Scotland. The income from lands for which he was responsible may have been in excess of 4500 l a year in his time,⁵⁰ quite conceivably more than Scotland yielded while he was there. Tout comments on the suspiciously large increase in Eleanor's income (particularly from queen's gold, which at this time was in the charge of John de Berwick) during the king's absence in Gascony;⁵¹ and elsewhere writes, "The records certainly convey the impression that everywhere the queen's officials were bent upon exacting the uttermost farthing."⁵² In such a situation de Cressingham would quickly learn a wealth of overt and covert tricks for extracting as much money as possible from rent, farm and privilege. If the

⁴³ *C.F.R. (1272-1307)* p.368

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.391

⁴⁵ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.26

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.55

⁴⁷ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.507

⁴⁸ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.114

⁴⁹ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.291, p.306, p.456

⁵⁰ Tout; *Chapters*, v. p.270

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.265 n.4

⁵² *ibid.* p.271

chroniclers (who never describe him as either honest or incompetent) are to be believed, he learned his lesson well.

Chapter 2: Justice in Eyre

Justice

We resume the story of Hugh de Cressingham's life shortly after the king's return from Gascony, when Eleanor had a little more than a year to live. On 28 September 1289 Hugh and William de Giselham were given a commission of enquiry at the request of the new bishop of Norwich (Master Ralph de Walpole, former archdeacon of Ely⁵³ and thus connected with both the sees where Hugh had experience), concerning the market of the liberty of the borough of Lenne, of which Ralph was lord.⁵⁴ This was renewed on 12 November, implying that it occupied him until about the end of the year. He was associated with William de Carleton in an inquisition *post mortem* in Middlesex which was completed by 17 February 1290.⁵⁵

Presumably because of the litigation concerning Haverford we hear no more of him until 16 September 1290 when he and two others were given a commission of *oyer and terminer* touching persons hunting illicitly in the queen's park of Camel, Somerset.⁵⁶ At this time he was still acting as her steward, in which capacity he put her yeoman Ebelettus de Montibus in seisin of the custody of the manor of Shirlinge, Kent during minority of the heir.⁵⁷ On 28 October he was associated with Roger Brabazon in a commission of *oyer and terminer* on crown demesne lands in Derbyshire,⁵⁸ and a month later the queen was dead.

Her departure marks another watershed in Hugh's life. From that moment he was unequivocally the king's clerk: fully occupied in the king's service and entirely dependent on him for patronage. As far as the record of his activities is concerned the difference is not immediately apparent. There is a commission of *oyer and terminer*, dated at Norham on 8 June 1291, to William de Carleton and Hugh de Cressingham in Bury St. Edmunds⁵⁹ – evidence, incidentally, that he was not involved in the deliberations about the Great Cause – and apart from this his only recorded task of the year is another commission of *oyer and terminer* ordered on 18 September,⁶⁰ again with William de Giselham.

As regards patronage, however, his change of status is quickly visible. On 12 June he was presented to the church of Ufford in the diocese of Lincoln,⁶¹ and on 9 September he was granted six bucks from the forest of Wauberge, of the king's gift.⁶² In the few remaining years of de Cressingham's life similar gifts were repeated annually – a form of *ad hoc* royal patronage which, being variable from year to year, was favoured for civil servants whose claim to reward was entirely based upon ability

⁵³ *Chron. Bury St. Edmunds* p.91

⁵⁴ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.332

⁵⁵ [C.C.R \(1288-96\)](#) p.70

⁵⁶ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#). p.406

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.411

⁵⁸ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.408

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.456

⁶⁰ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.458

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.432

⁶² [C.C.R \(1288-96\)](#) p.177

and industry. Hugh had shown his competence and loyalty in service of the queen; and if his honesty was unproven it would probably have been too much ask. Corruption was endemic in thirteenth-century government and no-one was too bothered so long as the king's work was done.

The comparative inactivity of 1291 is puzzling but may be explained by Edward's temporary withdrawal from public life after his queen's death and by the mass of business to wind up Eleanor's affairs.

1292 however sees a sharp rise in surviving references to de Cressingham. On 2 February John de Methingham, William de Giselham and he were commissioned to enquire into a complaint by the abbot of St. Edmunds that persons of St. Edmunds had committed certain injuries upon him.⁶³ This cannot have achieved a great deal as the commission was repeated on 4 March 1293 with John le Eretun and William de Redham named in the place of William de Giselham, who had died in the meantime.⁶⁴ The delay is unlikely to have been caused by William's last illness, though, as he and de Cressingham were again associated in a commission of *oyer and terminer* on 28 March 1292 touching a fishing dispute in Norfolk.⁶⁵ It is hardly credible that this would have been done had he been incapacitated by a fatal illness at the time. On 20 May Hugh de Cressingham, alone, was appointed to a commission of *oyer and terminer* concerning some Norwegian merchants who had been assaulted on the Norfolk coast.⁶⁶ By this time preparations for his first judicial itineration were in full swing.

In Eyre

On 14 April 1292 a writ of summons was issued to the sheriff of Lancaster, of an eyre for common pleas to be held in the octaves of Holy Trinity before Hugh de Cressingham, William de Omesby and others.⁶⁷ On 16 April these two, with John Wogan, Master John Lovel and William de Mortuo Mari [Mortimer] were appointed "justices in eyre for this turn in the counties of Lancaster, Westmoreland and Cumberland, and of *oyer and terminer* touching complaints against bailiffs and ministers of the king and of others."⁶⁸ The next day William Gerberge of Yarmouth was appointed to the custody of the rolls and writs in the eyres,⁶⁹ and Richard de Cornubia on 20 May 1292 to the chirography.⁷⁰ The first letters patent on business arising from the eyre were made on 6 July.⁷¹

On 28 August Northumberland was added to their itinerary;⁷² by 3 November they were in session at Carlisle,⁷³ and probably still were a month later.⁷⁴ Here they seem to have heard the pleas of both Cumberland and Westmoreland.⁷⁵ Before 2 April 1293 they had moved to Newcastle,⁷⁶ by which time

⁶³ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.472

⁶⁴ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.45

⁶⁵ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.516

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p.490

⁶⁷ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.261

⁶⁸ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.485

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.491

⁷¹ *ibid.* p.500

⁷² *ibid.* p.507; [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.272

⁷³ [Bain](#) 645, p.149

⁷⁴ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.276

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.1; [Bain](#) 645

⁷⁶ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.9

also a writ of summons of eyre had been issued to the sheriff of York, on 12 February.⁷⁷ An unusually long interval elapsed between this and the official nomination of the judges on 28 May,⁷⁸ and even then the composition of the bench was changed by the substitution of Robert de Swynlinton for Master John Lovel on 1 September. By this time, however, the pleas had certainly been under way for well over a month.⁷⁹

Compared to the others the eyre in York seems to have been a remarkably desultory affair. It was in session by 12 July 1293⁸⁰ and continued until 12 June 1294, when it was prorogued until the following November.⁸¹ Nothing further is heard of it after this. Its eleven-month duration is presumably evidence of the troubled state of the realm at this time. The period includes the aftermath of the sea-battles between the men of Normandy and of the Cinque Ports, deteriorating relations between England and France, the outbreak of war, raising money and administrative preparation for levying troops.⁸² So frenetic was Edward's activity after the confiscation of Gascony that it is difficult to imagine any royal servant not being heavily involved and, as we shall see, Hugh himself was certainly not in Yorkshire the whole time. Nor can it be coincidental that those activities of the eyre requiring all its members were suspended at about the time when the heavy footwork involved in gathering troops for 1 September would have started. They were never in Hugh's lifetime to resume.

One thing – almost the only thing – always said of de Cressingham's background by historians dealing with the Scottish revolts of 1296-97 is that he had been a justice in eyre. This is less than the whole picture. Such work occupied him intermittently for two years of his life and was over two years before his involvement in the administration of Scotland. Moreover, he was from the very start of his itinerant career a chief justice. Evidently it was not on this that his status depended.

Perhaps though, had the good fortune of Edward's early years stood by him now, his clerk's career might have followed that path to its conclusion. But the last thirteen years of the king's reign were a time of continuous emergency. Normality was the exception – many northern counties were not to see another eyre until the fourteenth century. The three years beginning in the summer of 1294 brought a Welsh rebellion, a disastrous Gascon expedition, the mutiny of the constable and the marshal, *Clericis laicos*, the conquest and loss of Scotland, and an inconclusive but expensive expedition to Flanders. At such a time, in a land beset by difficulties and dangers on every side, there is much to do. Responsibility is easy to pick up but very, very difficult to carry.

How, then, did Hugh fare as a justice itinerant? He seems to have displayed greater regard for the letter of the law than for common sense. At Lancaster, for instance, he took the liberties of the town into the king's hand because, claiming to have the same liberties as Northampton, its burgesses held markets and fairs on different days and times. The king tactfully restored their liberties on 4 August 1294,⁸³ then after de Cressingham's death declared that his decision had been subject to "a manifest

⁷⁷ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.310

⁷⁸ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.50

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p.35; [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.294

⁸⁰ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.294

⁸¹ *ibid.* p.351

⁸² *Chron. Bury St. Edmunds* pp. 117-121

⁸³ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.361

error,” and quashed the judgement.⁸⁴ If this suggests a habit of acquisitiveness on Hugh’s part it was a trait which the king could on occasion find very useful; especially when money was as short as at this time. The source of a king’s authority lay in patronage; and for this a regular income from escheats and forfeits was absolutely essential. The process is well illustrated by a homage and right of marriage recovered from Robert de Holland and a parcel of rights of wreck and waif recovered from various lords (mostly ecclesiastical) in eyre in Lancaster, which were then granted out to Edmund earl of Lancaster, the king’s brother.⁸⁵

The city and episcopate of Carlisle must have felt particularly hard done by. True, taking the city into the king’s hand because its citizens had lost their charter in a disastrous fire was in character with his legalistic frame of mind.⁸⁶ But his wholesale confiscation of the liberties of the see of Carlisle without any clear reason given must have seemed incomprehensible. Certainly it left its mark upon official records as late as 1409, well after anything else he did.⁸⁷

It is interesting to note the way in which these goods and privileges were disposed. On 6 June 1293 Hugh de Cressingham was granted custody for life of the hospital of St. Nicholas without Carlisle, the advowson of which the king had recovered before him, and of the tithes arising from assarts made in the forest of Englewood outside the bounds of any parish.⁸⁸ These tithes were returned to the prior and canons of St. Mary’s (although they had been resumed from the bishop, the prior and Alan, parson of the church of Thoresby) on 5 December;⁸⁹ along with four messuages, eighty-two acres of land, a mill and 75s. 1d. of rent in the suburbs of Carlisle and Dalton (which had been recovered against the bishop alone), to be held as appurtenant to their manor of Dalton.⁹⁰ In both cases the return was made not as a matter of justice but as a gift; in the first instance for the souls of the king, Eleanor and his heirs and ancestors, and in the second for the soul of Eleanor only.

This and the exemplification of the relevant parliamentary proceedings made in 1409 (cited above) suggest that the bishop of Carlisle eventually regained most if not all of what he had lost, but with no admission on the royal part of any injustice in their confiscation. This in turn implies that de Cressingham was acting with royal knowledge and assent.

Since John Halton, bishop of Carlisle at the time, was not elected until 1292 the apparent victimisation probably had nothing to do with the *fracas* when the canons defied the previous eyre (led by John de Vaux in 1278) to elect a new bishop without first seeking a fresh royal licence, especially as that was dealt with before the parliament of 1279. The fact that Halton was collector of the papal tenth in Scotland is far more likely to be relevant. In view of Edward's increasingly desperate need for money and the clergy’s reluctance to vote him the necessary subsidies it was vital to impress upon a new bishop in such a key financial position his vulnerability to royal sanctions. It would be hard to imagine a more fitting instrument than Hugh de Cressingham. It is not, however, so

⁸⁴ [C.C.R. \(1296-1302\)](#) p.514

⁸⁵ *Cal. Ch. Rolls (1257-1300)* p.461; p.462

⁸⁶ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.292, *Chron. Bury St. Edmunds* p.115

⁸⁷ *Foedera*, Syllabus 562

⁸⁸ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.20

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p.55

⁹⁰ *Cal. Ch. Rolls (1257-1300)* P.433; [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p. 338

hard to picture the bishop's chagrin at Hugh's appointment to the custody of the hospital, or at his presentation to the church of Levington in the diocese of Carlisle on 21 November 1293.⁹¹

And Elsewhere

We have already seen that the eyres never entirely filled Hugh de Cressingham's time. On 28 December 1292 –which must have been very shortly after the eyre in Cumberland⁹² – he was given a commission of *oyer and terminer*, with T de Belhus and William de Carleton, touching some poaching which had taken place on Guy Ferre the younger's lands at Benhale, Suffolk.⁹³ This must have been concluded by 4 March 1293, when an earlier commission touching injuries said to have been committed upon the abbot of St. Edmunds was repeated,⁹⁴ and this in turn before 2 April by which time Hugh was in Newcastle.

It was during the eyre at York that he and John Wogan – who was with him on the judicial bench – were commissioned to enquire into the rights of the late queen and the earls of Hereford and Pembroke in Haverford⁹⁵; but not much was done about it before 28 July 1294, after the prorogation of the eyre.⁹⁶ Another commission of *oyer and terminer*, to be held in Norfolk, was given to him and William de Ormesby on 19 March.⁹⁷ Nor is this likely to have proceeded far at the time however, as Ralph de Bomund was appointed to it in his place on 2 January 1296.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, the facts that such commissions could be given (presumably knowing the whereabouts of those supposed to execute them), and that some action must have been taken on the Haverford enquiry to discover that Ralph de Ivinghoe had failed to hand over all the records; show that it was not incongruous for a justice while in eyre to be given work to do elsewhere, and that in Hugh's case this probably happened. In any case, he must have been back in York by 10 May, when he and his fellows there witnessed a release by Isolde daughter of Simon de Wyvelesthorne;⁹⁹ and there, as far as we know, he remained, until 12 June.

On 28 July he and Roger de Ingepenne were appointed to audit the account of the abbot of Stanley for the time that he had had custody of the priory of Aumbresbury and to return it to the prior and prioress,¹⁰⁰ a task well suited to the combination of legal and financial skills he was building; and on the same day the commission in Haverford was repeated. 11 August saw him appointed with John de Berwick and William de Carleton to deal with another complaint by Guy Ferre (about to go overseas on the king's service, where he became in 1298 lieutenant of Gascony)¹⁰¹ concerning his manor of Benhale in Suffolk¹⁰² – all three of them were witnesses to the charter by which Nicholas de Cryel granted the manor to Guy Ferre in 1290.¹⁰³ The two subsequent occasions on which Hugh de

⁹¹ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.51

⁹² See above p.10

⁹³ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.44

⁹⁴ *ibid.* p.45; above, p.9

⁹⁵ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.49

⁹⁶ *ibid.* p.114

⁹⁷ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.111

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p.212

⁹⁹ [C.A.D. iii. B4003](#)

¹⁰⁰ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.82

¹⁰¹ [The Gascon Rolls Project](#) website, accessed 30 June 2015

¹⁰² [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.114

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p.78

Cressingham had dealings with this man and manor are examples of a chancery habit which is becoming evident: assigning tasks to its servants in areas with which they are familiar. Hugh's repeated commissions in Norfolk and later in Wales – the dispute over Haverford, for instance – suggest this was a conscious policy, and a sensible one.

From this point onward Hugh was progressively more absorbed in the military enterprises of the period. Nevertheless he found time to undertake commissions *de wallis et fossatis* in Norfolk (on 26 September, with Simon de Ellesworth)¹⁰⁴ and Yorkshire (on 18 April 1295,¹⁰⁵ with John de Lythegreynes, the scope of which was extended on 23 April).¹⁰⁶ Finally on 25 April the chancery was ordered to make letters patent empowering de Cressingham and another impartial judge chosen by him to hear and determine trespasses and grievances against Margaret de Ros (a tenant in chief) by Master Alan de Esingwald.¹⁰⁷ This was done naming Robert de Retford and Adam de Cokedayk as his associates on 28 April,¹⁰⁸ implying he was at or near the chancery which was in Wales at the time. Margaret de Ros held a bailiwick in Kendal, Westmoreland;¹⁰⁹ and Master Alan was trying to obtain a mediety of the church in Kirkby there contrary to the wishes of the Archbishop of York.¹¹⁰ The commission of *oyer and terminer* given to the same justices on 1 May, "touching the parson of the church of Kirkby in Kendale,"¹¹¹ was therefore probably on the same affair.

This episode closes Hugh de Cressingham's active role in the king's justice, though the effects of his judgements were not so quickly disposed of. Direct repercussions from his judicial decisions continued until 1317,¹¹² at which point history finally (apart from the hiccup of 1409) digested him.

The King's Wars

We have seen that Hugh's judicial activities declined in the summer and autumn of 1294, and this coincided with levying troops for the Gascon campaign, in which we can reasonably assume his involvement. On 30 September, however, the Welsh revolted and the king had to turn his attention to that problem. He needed forces quickly and in the absence of his justiciar for West Wales (Walter de Pederton, who had already left for Gascony) turned, among others, to Hugh de Cressingham. On 15 October he, Roger Brabazon and Peter Malorre were entrusted with the recruitment of footmen for Welsh service from Nottingham, Derby, Lancaster, Cumberland, Westmoreland and York;¹¹³ to be at Chester for 1 December. They must therefore have formed part of the 16,000 foot that Edward found waiting for him there when he arrived on the fifth. The speed of this operation testifies to de Cressingham's efficiency, his knowledge of the counties (he had visited all but the two southermost in eyre), and to his probably having previous experience of this sort of work.

¹⁰⁴ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.115

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* p.160

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *C.C.W. (1244-1326)* p.58

¹⁰⁸ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.160

¹⁰⁹ *C.C.W. (1244-1326)* p.155

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p.54

¹¹¹ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.160

¹¹² [C.P.R. \(1313-17\)](#) p.645

¹¹³ *C.V.C.R. (1277-1326)* p.355

He seems to have accompanied the king in Wales until 10 February 1295 when Edward despatched an order, which Hugh had helped prepare,¹¹⁴ to William de March his treasurer. This commanded that a list of those of 40 l. and more of income (the level at which liability to distraint of knighthood had been fixed in 1293) should be made, and that they be required to accompany the king with horses and arms and at his wages whenever so requested. As the subsequent parliamentary writ makes clear a Scottish expedition was already contemplated.¹¹⁵ In the light of future events the warrant mandating the chancellor, "to give undoubted faith to Hugh de Cressingham in the matters which the king has enjoined to him by word of mouth and which he will expound," dated at Conway on the same day,¹¹⁶ may well have concerned the same business.

On 16 February the king ratified the arrangements, in which Hugh was involved, for the division of spoil between the crews of certain ships of Bayonne.¹¹⁷ In view of the need to supply Welsh garrisons by sea during the early months of the year it was probably around then that he confiscated, in Wales, a sloop containing goods and wares of vassals of Didacus Lupi de Haro, Lord of Biscay.¹¹⁸ Before 9 April he and Walter de Langton had accepted the mainprise of at least one convict for service in Gascony or Wales;¹¹⁹ and on 23 April, when the Welsh campaign was all over bar the armed parade, he was entrusted with the conveyance of thirty-six Welsh hostages from Anglesey to Chester.¹²⁰ Nor did de Cressingham's part in the pacification of Wales end, quite, with the war. On 18 August (by which time King Edward and Madog ap Llywelyn were both in London) a writ of aid was issued for John Troppe, being sent to Cardigan on business touching the king's peace, to which was appended the legend, "on the information of Hugh de Cressingham."¹²¹

Silence shrouds his affairs once more during the latter half of August and the month of September. It is tempting to assign to this niche his commission in Kendal touching Margaret de Ros, but he could equally well have been in Wales or London, occupied with the aftermath of the Welsh rising or, like his king, with thoughts of the projected expedition to Flanders. Certainly this must have been in his mind by 3 October, when he and William de Mortuo Mari were made responsible for the recruitment of 8,000 foot from the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge and Huntingdon, and for having them brought to Winchelsea by early November.¹²²

Already the storm-clouds were beginning to gather over Scotland. 5 July, as the Welsh campaign was drawing to a close, had seen a parliament at Stirling where royal authority in Scotland effectively transferred from John Balliol to a council of twelve magnates. Negotiations with France were under way and on 23 October, before Cressingham had finished gathering troops for Flanders, the Franco-Scottish treaty was ratified. From the moment the news reached England it must have been clear that war with Scotland was inevitable. The nature of his activities in the previous year made it natural that Hugh should stay with the king and work on the military arrangements; and it is reasonable to assume that this is what brought about his substitution on 2 January 1296 in the

¹¹⁴ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.439

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* p.553

¹¹⁶ *C.C.W. (1244-1326)* p.52

¹¹⁷ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.130

¹¹⁸ [C.C.R. \(1296-1302\)](#) p.220

¹¹⁹ *C.C.W. (1244-1326)* p.56

¹²⁰ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.410

¹²¹ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.140

¹²² *ibid.* p.151

commission with William de Ormesby in Norfolk.¹²³ For the next nine months his movements and activities are a matter of conjecture. He must however have remained close to the king and useful to him, for he is not heard of again until 6 September, when he was appointed Treasurer of Scotland.¹²⁴

Chapter 3: On the Brink of Scotland

Remuneration

Although we have noted in passing some of the gifts and presentations that came Hugh de Cressingham's way the subject merits a separate look; both as an indication of his developing influence and for the light it sheds on his situation, motivation and aspirations at the start of the greatest – and last – test of his career.

As we have seen, our record of his ecclesiastical advancement begins on 8 July 1288, with his presentation to the church of Barneton.¹²⁵ This does not imply that it was his first or only living, as only presentations to churches in the king's gift would be recorded on the patent rolls. These would be given to people who had proven or were expected to prove their worth in royal service. Certainly Hugh was already a clerk on 16 February of that year¹²⁶ and if – as we have surmised – he originally made his way in the service of William de Middleton would have been so for some time. The fact that on 18 October 1294 he held several churches, including Cressingham itself, to which there is no record of him being presented, supports this view.¹²⁷ Moreover it is perhaps significant, certainly interesting that the then bishop of Ely (whose diocese contains Barneton) was the king's conscientious treasurer and regent John Kirkby. It would seem that the door of this particular church was accessible only through the corridors of secular administration.

Three years later, on 12 June 1291, Hugh was presented to the church of Ufford in the diocese of Lincoln.¹²⁸ This gift, occurring six months after the queen's death, may be recognition of his sharply increased activity in the king's service about this time. The increase continued until after less than a year, shortly before his first eyre, he was further presented to the church of Kingsclere in the diocese of Winchester on 12 February 1292.¹²⁹ This he resigned before 18 September 1296¹³⁰ (when it was given to John de Droxford, keeper of the wardrobe). We are not told the reason, though the fact that he had just been appointed Treasurer of Scotland may suggest he had used it in some way to bargain for the office. Early in 1293 he was given a quittance of the common summons of the eyre in Kent,¹³¹ implying that at this stage he held something there – presumably a prebend – and on 21 November of that year the living of the church of Levington came his way.¹³² This affords an interesting

¹²³ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.212

¹²⁴ [Bain](#) p.225

¹²⁵ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.296

¹²⁶ [C.C.R. \(1279-88\)](#) p.531

¹²⁷ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.120

¹²⁸ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.432

¹²⁹ [C.P.R. \(1281-92\)](#) p.475

¹³⁰ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.200

¹³¹ [C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.311

¹³² [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.51

indication of his status at this point – while in eyre in York – as we know that Levington comprised 40 bovates of land,¹³³ and its church was in 1306 worth 40 l yearly: the value of a small knight's fee.¹³⁴

Around 1294 Hugh is recorded holding a prebend of St. Paul's London,¹³⁵ and by 18 October of that year when he paid the clerical moiety he held in addition to anything mentioned above the churches of Enderby, Hatfield, Chalk, Berlee, Dodington and Reymerton.¹³⁶ Finally, at the time of his death in 1297 he also held the church of St. Mary Bethaghe in London¹³⁷ and Rudby, a rich living in the archdeaconry of Cleveland.¹³⁸ These add up to eleven known livings, not counting Kingsclere.

The account would be incomplete and certainly less amusing if we omitted a letter written to the king on the affairs of Scotland, dated 24 July 1297. The author, from his grovelling tone and because he seems to be in charge of Berwick castle, is presumably Hugh's protégé Osbert de Spaldington. At one point he writes:

*"E la eglise de Douglas est voide, e vaut ben cc.mars, sicum joe si entendu, e si il le vous pleseit doner a vostre Tresorer d'Escoce, joe crai ke vous le averiez ben employe; kar, a la foy ke joe vous doy, il ne se faint point en vos busoynes, einz ment mout penible entente de fere les ben."*¹³⁹

The writer's earnestness cannot be doubted. Nor can his persistence: he seems likely on evidence of style, language and place also to have been responsible for a letter to the king from Berwick on 4 August; just as the 2,000 l which Edward had sent de Cressingham to forward the king's affairs in Scotland was running out.¹⁴⁰ In this the writer assures the king that his troubles in Scotland are over and enjoins him to entrust his treasurer there with the keeping of the realm.¹⁴¹ Predictably there is no record of the king acting on either of these pearls of wisdom – in any case there was little time to do so before the death of de Cressingham and the total loss of Scotland.

What, then, of Hugh de Cressingham's other income? Records are sketchier than for his benefices. We have seen that on 6 June 1293 he was granted custody for life of the hospital without Carlisle¹⁴² but even this is more an ecclesiastical than a secular source of revenue. He must however have held some land at this time, as in the same month he was given a licence to alienate a messuage, and assorted land, meadow and wood totalling 39 acres.¹⁴³ This was followed by another licence for alienation, dated 12 August 1294, of 32 acres of land in Brunham and Salle to the prior and convent of St. Mary's Walsingham.¹⁴⁴ Neither of these suggests a vast landed income but they confirm that he had some. On 3 January 1295 he received the custody of the towns of Haverford and St. Clear, in a writ which implies that they were held for a fixed rent but does not state the amount.¹⁴⁵ This he

¹³³ [Bain](#) p.65
¹³⁴ *ibid.* 1861
¹³⁵ *Le Neve* i. p.65
¹³⁶ [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.130
¹³⁷ *ibid.* p.507
¹³⁸ *Chron. Guisb.* p.302
¹³⁹ *Stevenson* p.205
¹⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.229
¹⁴¹ *Stevenson* p.221
¹⁴² [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.20
¹⁴³ *ibid.* p.26
¹⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.83
¹⁴⁵ *C.F.R. (1272-1307)* p.368

continued to hold until his death¹⁴⁶ at which time he was believed to have been a tenant in chief.¹⁴⁷ Not only was this belief erroneous¹⁴⁸ but the jury performing the Inquisition Post Mortem found that, being unlawfully born, he could have no heir.¹⁴⁹

The inquisition does however reveal some interesting things. True, his lands in Finchley and Hendon were only worth 45s. 7d. yearly, from which he had to pay 23s. 9d. (the jurors were a penny out in their arithmetic) in rents which left Hugh's net income a mere 21s. 10d. True also that the extent of his lands in Suffolk (made on 6 November 1297 at Great Thryllowe) is so damaged that Bain has not bothered to give any details. But it is possible to infer that he must have held more than 3 assuages; 444 acres of land; 25½ acres of meadow; 30 acres of woodland; 69s. 0½d. in rents; a windmill and the advowson of a church in that county – still not a princely sum, but respectable enough. Moreover, it appears that rents and services due for most of this were nominal. The entire manor was held, of divers lords, by the eoffement of Robert de Ripariis. The divers lords however – who included Henry de Lacy earl of Lincoln – required on the surviving parts of the manuscript a total of 78s. 4½d. yearly of rent; a pair of gilt spurs (Henry de Lacy, this); two clove gillyflowers; an indeterminate number of roses and a peppercorn.

We also mentioned in passing that at one stage Hugh de Cressingham received gifts in kind from the king so regularly as to constitute a retainer. These began on 9 September 1291 with a gift of six bucks from the forest of Wauberge.¹⁵⁰ A year later, on 28 August 1292, he was given another six bucks, this time from the forest of Salcey.¹⁵¹ He appears not to have taken this up at the time as the present is repeated, from the forest of Galtris on 6 June 1293, with another four added as that year's quota.¹⁵² Similarly in 1294 and 1295 he was presented respectively with six and four bucks on 8 August and 23 August, in both cases from the forest of Wauberge.¹⁵³ In addition he may have received some form of stipend for his judicial activities.

At his death he also held a messuage in the parish of St. Mary Bethaghe, London, probably appurtenant to the living of the church there,¹⁵⁴ and owed one Adam de Uphal of Vileby the crippling sum of 10 marks about which the latter seems to have been very worried.¹⁵⁵

Qualification

Our narrative has brought Hugh de Cressingham from obscurity to his appointment as Treasurer of Scotland in 1296, but not dealt with the reasons for that appointment. It would be as well to summarise the abilities and experience which seemed to suit him for the task.

We have noted Edward's tendency to send his clerks to areas they already knew, thus developing a corps of specialists on whom he could call in any county or region. In the case of Scotland Hugh's

¹⁴⁶ *C.F.R. (1272-1307)* p.391

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Bain* 965; *C.C.R. (1296-1302)* p.142

¹⁴⁹ *Cal. Inq. P. M.* iii. P.267; *Bain* 951

¹⁵⁰ *C.C.R. (1288-96)* p.177

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* p.241

¹⁵² *C.C.R. (1288-96)* p.286

¹⁵³ *ibid.* p.362; p.422

¹⁵⁴ *C.P.R. (1292-1301)* p.507

¹⁵⁵ *Bain* 959

colleague Walter de Amersham (who had previous experience in the Scottish chancery in 1291)¹⁵⁶ is a better example but de Cressingham himself was by no means unfamiliar with Scottish politics, at least in the South. His eyres in Cumberland, Westmoreland and Northumberland included much business arising in the March – he had for instance had an altercation with Patrick de Dunbar over a writ *de quo warranto*¹⁵⁷ and at one time it looked as though the Bruce family, appellant or defendant, was set to monopolise the eyre in Cumberland.¹⁵⁸ In 1293 he went from Northumberland to plead the pleas of the liberty of Tyndale,¹⁵⁹ and his commission of *oyer and terminer* for Margaret de Ros would have taken him to the border. Robert Bruce lord of Annandale (the Competitor's son) was castellan of Carlisle during Hugh's tenure of the hospital there¹⁶⁰ and – the supreme irony of all – his living of Levington was squarely in the earldom of Carrick.¹⁶¹

The king would, on the completion of the Ragman Roll, have had two things principally on his mind. First, it seemed that his long-delayed expedition to Flanders would finally be possible in the near future. Second, it was, like all his wars, apt to prove very expensive. There can indeed have been few occasions after 1294 when money was not on his mind, but in the autumn of 1296, when the storm over *Clericis laicos* was building up to its full fury and the revolt of the constable and the marshal was brewing nicely, the issue must have been particularly sensitive. Under such circumstances Edward may well have remembered his clerk's reputation for enthusiastic exploitation of the queen's revenues during his absence seven years earlier. He was not above making use of his servants' weaknesses on occasion and the appointment of Hugh to administer the finances of Scotland may well have seemed the perfect way to make that land repay him for the trouble he had taken to conquer it. In any case, the experience that Hugh had gained in the queen's service of collecting and dealing with large sums of money must itself have been a recommendation.

Finally and perhaps most cogent of all, during the previous eighteen months de Cressingham had been almost continuously with the king, observing and operating the procedures used to raise armies, crush rebellions, govern conquered territories and establish law and order there; in which last his legal experience would also have been useful. In the absence of anyone of higher calibre – most of whom were occupied in dealing with the king's problems elsewhere, or were earmarked for the expedition to Flanders – Hugh's blend of qualities and abilities would have appeared to fit him well for what, after all, would not have seemed too difficult a task.

Conclusion

England's "Malleus Scotorum" had just conquered a kingdom in five months. The Scottish feudal host had been obliterated at Dunbar and, as in Wales, one decisive victory had brought about the collapse of almost all organised resistance. Once more conquest had been a matter of an armed parade through the country and taking homages.

Hugh de Cressingham, if told clearly what to do, could be relied on to do it well; and John de Warenne was both able and experienced. Edward was not to know that the earl would take so

¹⁵⁶

[Bain](#) 496

¹⁵⁷

[C.C.R. \(1288-96\)](#) p.295

¹⁵⁸

[Bain](#) 645

¹⁵⁹

[C.C.W. \(1244-1326\)](#) p.34

¹⁶⁰

[Bain](#) 81; [C.P.R. \(1292-1301\)](#) p.204

¹⁶¹

[Bain](#) p.37; p.331

strongly against the land that he spent most of the following year on his Yorkshire estates. Planning and foresight had never been required of de Cressingham but he did his inadequate best. His inadequacy – probably through lack of discipline or thought beyond the immediate future, combined with a habit of accumulating wealth on his own account – is witnessed by the universal execration in which he was held by the Scots.

We should not however underestimate the difficulties he faced. He had never before seen endemic rebellion – the only revolt he had experienced was active, and then with a king before him and an army behind. Here he was stranded in Berwick, surrounded by hostile country and with only the men he had brought with him of his own ilk – William de Ormesby, Osbert de Spaldington, William de Mortuo Mari and the rest – to help. His anger at being, as he would have seen it, marooned by the professional soldiers (Warene, Percy and Clifford) combined with the realisation of his total dependence upon them may go a long way to explain the plaintive tone of his letters to Edward in 1297¹⁶² and his otherwise incomprehensible behaviour before and at the battle of Stirling Bridge. What but emotion could induce such a corpulent cleric, administrator by trade, to ride into battle like a knight among the first troops across the bridge? Antony Bek might have done it, but Bek would not have been as stupid as to veto Richard Lundy's flanking manoeuvre,¹⁶³ and certainly not in so hopeless a tactical situation.

Finally, however well founded the chroniclers' abuse, we should remember that they were monks and Hugh de Cressingham was as secular a clerk as one could hope to meet. Monastic sensibilities may have been offended by pluralism, absenteeism and the sight of a consecrated servant of God wielding a sword; but in a turbulent century that was how it worked.

His class of men was an uncomfortable fit with the three estates of the medieval mindset: too worldly for the priesthood, not noble, yet indispensable. Their efficiency (if not their honesty) eventually helped make the feudal kingdom's complex web of personal relationships scalable into something we would recognise as a nation state.

As a group they were essential; individually all too expendable:

“QUEM EXCORIANTES SCOTTI DIUSERUNT INTER SE PELLEM IPSIUS IN MODICAS PARTES,
NON QUIDEM AD RELIQUIAS SET IN CONTUMELIAS.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² *Stevenson* p.200; p.206; p.218; p.225

¹⁶³ *Chron. Guisb.* pp.301-302

¹⁶⁴ *Chron. Guisb.* p.303

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