

**Pipers and waits in the English royal households, c1290-1475:
issues of identity and function**

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Introduction

My doctoral thesis, *Secular Musicians* (1968), left some important issues relatively unexplored, as theses often do (for details, see the Bibliography, below). In studying the minstrels of the English royal households in the late Middle Ages I did say something about those minstrels described as "piper", but not enough. They include the players of two different instruments: the shawm and the bagpipe. The occasional use of the term "bagpiper" to describe a minstrel helps to resolve the function of minstrels so called, but does not preclude those men from playing the shawm as well. One problem, therefore, is to identify any minstrel who can be shown to have played both instruments.

I also said something about the household watchmen, known as *vigiles* or *vigilatores* (the terms are in chronological order, and overlapped in the middle of the 14th century). Their main responsibility was the security of buildings: but in the 1290s, late in Edward I's reign, the *vigiles* were also rewarded for minstrelsy, and probably formed a group of shawmists. The question arises, Were they the equivalent of the later "pipers", or were they a group employed in addition to pipers? By the mid-14th century only some of the *vigilatores* were musical; and by the late 15th century it is not certain that any *vigilatores* were able to make minstrelsy. In the *Liber Niger* of Edward IV, 1471-2, the household watchman – only one by then – was listed next to the minstrels, and was directed to eat with them, but had no musical duties specified. By this time, too, the watchman was known as a "wait", a term that probably identifies the man as a shawmist but may not have carried that meaning exclusively.

Since some royal household servants were known as both "piper" and "wait" these two areas of investigation join to provide a single set of questions to be answered. The situation concerning pipers, bagpipers and waits will be addressed in two ways. First,

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the evidence that I originally gathered must be revisited as an aid to refining the questions themselves: the present paper starts this process. Later, as the revision of my thesis continues, I shall consider new evidence.

The principal source of information about the royal minstrels is the financial accounts of the king's household. Other, "dependent" royal households were maintained for the queen, the Prince of Wales and the younger children of the monarch.

The account books do not give us a complete record of a household's financial business, mainly because much material has been lost. Nor can we be sure that wage-lists and livery-lists give a complete picture of the household's personnel, or that absence from such a list signifies a servant's absence from the household. But we can piece together a likely picture of life in a royal household – in this case, minstrel life. With that in mind, I turn to the picture of pipers and *vigiles* in the household of the kings of England between about 1296 and 1472. Other minstrels will be ignored for this purpose.¹ We should however bear in mind that the trumpeters and nakerer formed a loud ensemble, as the shawms seem to have done, although with different functions.² I shall consider this material reign by reign, and generally using the regnal years in which the accounts were recorded.

The records concerned are calendared in my doctoral thesis, available online at <http://www.waits.org.uk/essays/index.htm>

Most of the wage-payments, liveries and gifts are recorded in the accounts of the royal wardrobe, which are in Latin. Edward II also used the accounts of the Chamber for such transactions, and these are in French. There are considerable problems of identity among the minstrels, aggravated by the different forms that their names may take in the languages concerned. I have therefore normally used the form of name given in the accounts concerned.

Edward I (20 November 1272 – 7 July 1307)

In the last years of Edward I's reign the picture of pipers and *vigiles* is fairly clear. In the 25th year of the reign (1296-7) the king's household included three *vigiles*, who were frequently rewarded as a group for minstrelsy: John de Windsor, Adam Skirewith and

¹ A full list of royal minstrels is given in my "Minstrels of the English Royal Households".

Alexander de Windsor. John was replaced by Geoffrey de Windsor around *anno* 31, and Robert de Finchesle joined the group then as a fourth member. Alexander was replaced by Hugo de Lincoln *anno* 33; and the appearance of John de Staunton *anno* 34 (from 8 February 1306) brought the strength of the group to 5.

The king's *vigiles* certainly formed a loud band, several times rewarded for minstrelsy as a group. Why their number was increased from 3 to 4, and then to 5, in the last years of the reign is not clear. One reason may be the king's problems in Scotland - Adam Skirewith acted as his *vigilis* there in 32 Ed I - necessitating a larger group for the security of buildings when he was travelling there with a reduced household. It is however obvious that no pipers other than the *vigiles* belonged to the king's household: Hamoin the bagpiper (*estivour*) appears in the records several times in these years, but there is no evidence that he was a member of the household.

There is no direct evidence that the *vigiles* played pipes at this time, nor, if so, what type of pipes they played: but in view of later evidence, and the fact that no minstrels called "piper" are known in the king's household at this time, it seems likely that the *vigiles* formed the loud wind-band of shawms that we hear of in several sources.

Edward II (8 July 1307 - 24 January 1327)

At the start of this reign only two *vigiles* were employed in the king's household - Hugo de Lincoln and John de Staunton, the two most junior *vigiles* from the end of the previous reign. The senior *vigiles* (Adam Skirewith, Geoffrey de Windsor and Robert de Finchesle) had perhaps retired or died around the beginning of the new reign. In 4 Ed II there is a mention of Robert Chaunceler, who may already have been a *vigilis* in the queen's household; and in the 4th or 5th year a *vigilis* called Geoffrey de Merton is mentioned (but never appears again). The available evidence is that Edward II's household included only two *vigiles* for much of his reign.

When *vigiles* appear again in the records, *annis* 13-17, they are named as John de Petrestre and Robert Chaunceler; these were soon joined by John Harding *annis* 16-17. The *vigiles*, reduced from 5 to 2 at the start of the reign, were augmented to 3 by around the 16th year.

Meanwhile, we find two *vigiles* in the queen's household - Robert Chaunceler and

² See my article "Some English consort-groupings".

Richard de Burwardsle *anno* 5, and Robert Chaunceler and Robert de Baumburgh *anno* 9. Chaunceler, we know, later transferred to the king's household – not an unusual move. One John, given money for robes *anno* 5, was the *vigilis* of the household of Thomas and Edmund, the king's brothers: he might be John Mauprine, known variously as piper or *vigilis* in the following reign, but he could easily be a different man.

It is hard to see what other loud minstrels were in the king's household. We also hear of Little Alain, hornpiper, *anno* 18: he does not seem to fit into any group, and he may have left royal service.

Records for the last three years of the reign are particularly sparse, perhaps because of the tricky political situation that resulted in a sticky end to Edward's reign. John de Petrestre seems to have been still a *vigilis* in the king's household in the incomplete 20th year (1326-7), but no other pipers or *vigiles* can be identified. The rather negative evidence may show that the *vigiles* were still at least the principal wind band.

Edward III (25 January 1327 – 21 June 1377)

The evidence for Edward III's 50-year reign is voluminous, but no more representative of the reign than the material of the previous two reigns is of theirs. Edward was absent from England on many occasions, sometimes for extended periods, and record-keeping was clearly disrupted in war-time.

The records show various pipers and *vigiles* at the start of the reign. Of these, John Mauprine was a piper and known as "king's minstrel" in the 5th year; Nicholas de Wycombe is not known as a *vigilis* until the 10th year; and Walter Gayt, who appears in the records only briefly at the opening of the reign, may not have been a minstrel.³ Three *vigiles* are named in the 4th year: John Harding, William Harding and Radulphus le Gayte. This last is named as a servant of the kitchen in the 2nd or 3rd year, which raises an interesting question. When there were enough *vigiles* to work a rota system, so that they were not on duty all night and every night, did they have time for a second part-time job in the household? Looking back at Edward I's *vigiles*, it is clear that they made minstrelsy quite regularly and – more importantly – that they were the only pipers

³ Assuming that his name is cognate with Wait, he need not have been a minstrel or *vigilis*. Several types of royal servant seem to have used the wait-pipe, including huntsmen and falconers.

available to do so. Here, at the start of Edward III's reign, the constitution of the *vigiles* is unclear, and there are other pipers – who, however, do not seem to constitute a coherent group.

A related question concerns the exact functions of certain minstrels. In February 1334 (*anno* 8) Merlin (a fiddler) and two bagpipers, Barberus and Morlanus, were given leave of absence to go to the minstrel schools on the continent. Barberus and Morlanus are probably the trumpeter Robert Barber and the piper John de Morleyens under latinized names. John de Morleyens is also described as “cornemuser”, and since “cornemuse” is a generic name, that identity causes no problem. For Robert Barber, however, we must presumably posit a bagpiper who turned himself into a trumpeter within about three years. As Barberus the bagpiper and Robert Barber the trumpeter do not overlap in the records, it is not inconceivable.

The other cornemuser from this time – first heard of in the following year, the 9th – is John Perrot. He, too, seems to have played two different instruments. On 3 July 1336 the king rewarded the *tympanistra* of the constable of Pontefract Castle for playing to him on the long journey between Pontefract and St Johnstone; and he also compensated him for the loss of his instrument, which the king had given to his own *tympanistra*. A month later, on 5 August, the king compensated John Perot, *cornemuser de montvalour*, for his *tympanum*, which the king had broken – one wonders how.⁴ The king, for the record, was at this time 23 years old.

John Perrot disappears from the records for 10 years or more after this, unless – as seems likely – he is the John cornemuser who was a minstrel of Queen Philippa in the 12th year and (perhaps less probably) the Black Prince's John, *vigilis*, of the 14th year or the John Wayte of the king's household in the 16 or 17th year. The name of John Wayte occurs several times in the records around the middle of the reign, including a man described as a palfreyman. Another case of two 50% posts, or a non-minstrel? Our cornemuser is probably the John Perat of the Chamber recorded in around the 21st year, however. Perrot is an interesting man, and currently the only candidate for a minstrel who might have played both shawm and bagpipe. His biography needs to be explored.

⁴ It is unclear what a *tympanum* was: if the term was used for the tabor, the minstrel may also have played the pipe that would normally be heard with it.

Some outlines of the picture do become clearer as the reign progresses. In the 4th year there were certainly three *vigiles* in the king's household: Radulphus le Gayte (presumably the kitchen servant of a year or two earlier), John Harding and William Harding; in the 11th and 12th years the *vigiles* were William Harding, John Harding and Nicholas de Wycombe; and in the years 34 and 35 there were four *vigilatores*, named as Edmund Wayt, William Wayt, Walter Wayt and William Lamport or Langport.

Various groups of men referred to as pipers can also be seen in the records: John Mauprine, John Morleyns (the cornemuser) and Godscalk, piper, were transferred to the Black Prince's household for a while during the 11th and 12th years of the reign, apparently as a coherent group. Another group that seems to have worked together - much later, around the 33rd to 35th years - consisted of the pipers Flagilet, John Badencore and Peter de Burgoigne. Around the 21st year there seems to have been a group of pipers headed by Lybkin and including his son Hankin fitzLybkin, who later had status as a marshal, or leader.

Some important trends can be seen, then, in the reign of Edward III. The *vigiles*, who gradually became known as *vigilatores*, worked less than in Edward I's reign as a discrete group of minstrels. Another group of pipers was apparently formed to take over much of their minstrel duties - and this in addition to some pipers, at least some of whom were bagpipers, who perhaps had a more soloistic role in more intimate surroundings. An increase in the number of men called Wayt may reflect the larger number of pipers employed in this general increase. At this time there is evidence that the wayt was a pipe of the shawm family. On 10 December 1330 (*anno* 4) John Harding took delivery of fur and cloth for three winter tunics for himself and two companions, the *vigilatores*, and appended his seal to the receipt. This receipt survives. Although the seal is badly worn, the motif in the centre is clearly two crossed shawms.⁵

For some of this reign the increase in pipers may reflect the constitution of a military expeditionary force. The household ordinances in war-time, drawn up some time in the years 18-21 Edward III, describe a minstrel-group that was not typical for peace-time, at least in its provision of *bas* (soft) minstrelsy: five trumpeters, two clarioners, five pipers, a nakerer, a taborer, and only a fiddler and a citoler to make *bas* music. Unfortunately it

⁵ See my article "Wait" in *New Grove*, where the seal is depicted.

is unclear whether the five pipers include the *vigilatores* or not.

Richard II (22 June 1377 – 29 September 1399)

The minstrels at the start of Richard II's reign include four pipers (William Harding, Henry, David Welshman and Conuce); in the 17th year there were still four of them (Henry and Conuce, still, plus Nusselyn and William de Bingley). Of the original four, William Harding was also a *vigilator*, and seems to have fulfilled that dual role; William Lamport was a fellow *vigilator*, and so perhaps was one John Wayt, neither of them being known as a minstrel.

The pipers seem to have consisted of a band of three or four, therefore, one of those doubling as a *vigilator*; and he had either one or two *vigilator* colleagues.

Henry IV (30 September 1399 – 20 March 1413)

Records of the reign of Henry IV show three pipers. William Bingley, who was in service in the previous reign, was transferred (perhaps briefly) to the queen's household around the 8th year and is last heard of in the 14th. Guy Middleton appears first in the 3rd or 4th year, puzzlingly described as a *fistulator* "formerly of the king's household": he remained in service, apparently as a minstrel, but is known as a *vigilator* in the following reign (a post he must have taken up no earlier than 7 or 8 Hen IV). Lastly, John Melton, first heard of in the 7th or 8th year and apparently linked with William Bingley, may have been a *vigilator* at some time, although the evidence is not firm.

William Bingley's appearance in the queen's household in 8 Henry IV puts him together with William Algood, piper. It seems unlikely that the queen would require two shawmists, so perhaps these two were players of a softer instrument such as a small bagpipe.

The lack of *vigilatores* in this reign is puzzling, but it is probably due to incomplete records.

Henry V (21 March 1413 – 31 August 1422)

Accounts early in Henry V's reign list three pipers among the minstrels: John Aleyn, Guy Middleton and John Melton. Middleton and Melton were certainly *vigilatores* by the time of the Agincourt campaign in 1415: a list of the king's retinue at that time includes them as "the king's guides by night". The 15 minstrels at Agincourt are listed separately, and include a group of three pipers called Richard, Meysham and Broune. These three -

Richard Geffrey, William Maisham and John Brown - appear together in a livery-list for a coronation in the 9th year, presumably that of the queen. William Maisham is later described as a still minstrel, and so was apparently not a shawmist; I know nothing more about Geffrey and Brown.

Henry VI (1 September 1422 - 3 March 1461)

Henry VI's household included no more than three pipers at any time; the dual minstrel/*vigilator* role is to be seen in the person of Guy Middleton. (The Lancastrian records tend not to specify the pipers, simply including them in list of minstrels, while the *vigilatores* are so specified.) The other pipers at the start of the reign were William Maisham and perhaps Richard Geffrey. In the 22nd year, some time after Middleton and Geffrey had apparently died or left service, Robert More is found among the minstrels. More became a *vigilator* at some stage: he is among the minstrels in the livery-lists covering the period from the 26th year to the 30th; and he is named a *vigilator* in the king's household, together with Hugo Joye and John Spolly, in the list of 35-6 Henry VI. Earlier in the reign, in the 17th year, when Guy Middleton disappeared from view, the *vigilatores* of the king's household were named as Richard More and William Wodeford. Richard More continued in service until 22-3 Hen VI, when Robert More first appears: so Richard may be a mistake for Robert, but it is also possible that we are dealing with two (presumably related) men.

A John Wayt who appears in the accounts for a while between the 26th and the 31st years may be John Spolly.

Edward IV (4 March 1461 - 9 April 1483)

Robert More remained in place until the 5th or 6th year of the new reign, apparently as a minstrel and thus probably fulfilling the dual role of minstrel and *vigilator*. Occasional mention in the records of a man named Wayt (Thomas in year 8, John in year 22) is unhelpful, and the undifferentiated lists of minstrels in this reign make it impossible to say who were the pipers.

At this stage we have firm information on the duties of the minstrels and *vigilator* in the household ordinances known as the Black Book, of 1471-2:⁶ some minstrels are trumpeters, some play shawms or small pipes, and some play stringed instruments – not a very specific description. Immediately following the section on the minstrels is that on the “wayte”, whose task it was to pipe the watch four times per night in winter and three times in summer, checking for fire and other dangers. The wayte has an assistant, who may be able to carry out the wayte’s duties in his absence. The wayte is directed to eat with the minstrels.

By implication, the usual second job of a *vigilator*, that of minstrelsy, was still open to the wayte even though it is not specified in his job-description. As we have seen, Robert More could have fulfilled this dual role as late as the mid-1460s, only five years or so before the Black Book was compiled. In the ordinary way, one can imagine that a sole *vigilator*, piping the watch every night, might well spend much of his day asleep: but he would still have time for some minstrelsy, if the minstrels would have him, and his time would be much more his own if his assistant were capable. However, I am not aware of any later *vigilator* in the royal households making minstrelsy, and I suspect that staff-reduction had its usual deadening effect on what must sometimes have been an enjoyable post in the 13th and 14th centuries.

As for the pipers, they were eventually reconstituted as a band of shawms and sackbuts, probably at the start of Henry VII’s reign (1485). Shawms and trumpets in the royal households did not mix in the period just discussed, when they formed discrete bands with different functions. Henry VII, I think, brought continental ideas with him after his exile.

Curiously, the mix of shawm and a trumpet was already known in England, in the civic minstrels, the town waits, that had appeared in the early 15th century. The impetus for that grouping, too, was probably continental: it may be that the town waits used the older slide-trumpet (even 16th-century records specify trumpet, not sackbut), whereas Henry VII was bang up-to-date with the new-fangled push-pull instrument (his group was always known as the Shawms and Sackbuts). A new light, perhaps on Henry VII, to be investigated further.

⁶ For the Black Book, see Myers *Household* and Merryweather *Liber Niger*.

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APPENDIX

Pipers and waits in the English royal households

Livery-lists, c. 1290-c. 1395