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THE WAFERERS

Waferers, like the royal *vigiles*, were sometimes capable of making minstrelsy, and at Court such waferers could become king's minstrels, with the rank of squire.¹ At the marriage of Princess Margaret in 1290, one Boneurge, minstrel-waferer of William de Fenes, was paid for minstrelsy; when her sister Elizabeth was married seven years later, the waferer of the Prince of Wales and the king's waferer, John Drake, received similar gifts; and when the future Edward II was knighted at Pentecost, 1306, the list of those who made minstrelsy included the waferers of the king (the same John Drake), the Earl of Lancaster and Dns R. de Monte Alto.²

The minstrelsy of the waferers was not confined to such major celebrations, although a special occasion was of course more likely to be the context for a gift to be made, and there fore for a record to be set down in the Wardrobe accounts.³ But we do find gifts for minstrelsy made to waferers in more normal circumstances: ⁴ indeed, there is reason to suppose that the minstrelsy of [188] waferers was a more common feature of fourteenth-century life than the Wardrobe Books would suggest, for the relationship between minstrels and waferers was, as we shall see, a close one.

No hint of this relationship is shown in the various royal household ordinances, however. The *Constitutio Domus Regis* of c.1136 does not mention minstrelsy at all; the ordinances of 1318 do not mention it in connection with the waferer, although he is directed to be lodged with the wayts;⁵ those of 18–21 Ed III are even less fruitful, while those of 33 Hen VI tell us only that the wafery was staffed by William Overton, yoman, and Thomas Caldwell, groom. A more detailed account is given in the *Liber Niger* of Edward IV's reign: but although

¹ This is the case with Peter de Normard (who seems to be identical with Peter Gaffrer, the minstrel) and Robert de Bosham in Edward III's reign; and with Henry Waufrer, minstrel of Henry IV. John de Bria, queen's waferer, may be identical with John Briays, Edward II's minstrel.

² 1290: C47.4.5, f. 48 (not calendared below); for 1297 and 1306, see below, ii, pp. 16 f, 55, 57 and 58.

³ For instance, that calendared below, ii, p. 99.

⁴ See below, ii, pp. 74 and 87.

⁵ See above, p. 160, n. 62.

the ordinances state the quantities of eggs, butter, flour and sugar allowed to the waferer every day, the duties of the waferer himself are not defined.⁶

This account does make it quite clear, however, that wafers were something special by the late fifteenth century. Except on such occasions as the principal feasts, when a very few nobles might partake of them, the wafers were for the king alone, and [189] the *Liber Niger* explains that the waferer's wages are lower now than in Edward III's reign because then "his busynesse was much more." Certainly the day-to-day duties of the waferer had greatly declined by the late fifteenth century: but we should notice that the Duchess of Clarence had a yoman waferer in her standing household, and that the Duke of Norfolk employed a waferer when he was still Lord Howard.⁷

Wafers probably retained considerable significance at banquets as late as Tudor times. They seem to have been served near the end of a banquet,⁸ and it was the act of handing the wafers to the king that was of such importance. The exact significance of this act must remain something of a mystery; but it is a fact that wafer-serjeantries were tenures held by those who had handed wafers to the king on such ceremonial occasions as coronations (which includes crown-wearings).⁹ In the early case of the manor of Liston Overhall, in Essex, the holder was bound in 1185 to make wafers at the summons of the king's feast: a holder [190] of the same tenure in 1367 did so by virtue of having placed five wafers before Edward III at his coronation, and in 1377 a dispute arose between the Liston tenant and a rival claimant over the right to perform this service for Richard II.¹⁰

The occasional wafer-service to which wafer-serjeantries were attached had little to do with the every-day work of the royal waferers. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries any household of importance had its waferer – those of barons, abbots and earls as well as the dependent royal households – and the waferers probably served their wafers not only at the principal feasts, but also at other celebrations.

⁶ For the ordinances of c.1136, see Johnson/*Dialogus*, p. 131; for those of Ed II, see Tout/*Ed. II*, p. 286; for those of Ed III; Hen VI and Ed IV, see *Ords & Regs*, pp.9, 18 and 72 respectively. A staff of one senior waferer assisted by a groom seems standard throughout our period; in the fourteenth century, each dependent household also appears to have a waferer.

⁷ For the Duchess of Clarence, 8 Ed IV, see *Ords & Regs*, p. 100; for Lord Howard, 1481, see Collier/*Norfolk*, p. 48 (this entry is not calendared in Appendix C, below).

⁸ See above, p. 92, n. 20.

⁹ J.H. Round's fascinating work on the wafer-serjeantry (Round/*serjeants*, pp. 227 ff), which is very briefly discussed here, unfortunately takes no account of the household waferer at Court prior to the late fifteenth century. His comparison of the household waferer of Edward IV (as described in the *Liber Niger*) with the tenants of the earlier wafer-serjeantries is therefore quite invalid: so, unhappily, are some of his conclusions.

¹⁰ Round/*Serjeants*, p. 229.

An interesting parallel with the wafer-serjeantry can be seen in the importance apparently attached to the actual serving of the wafers.¹¹ It seems to have been just as much a part of the waferer's duty to present the wafers at his master's table as it was to make them.

In the conditions of his service, then, the waferer was somewhat exceptional. The wafery was only a sub-department of the Pantry, yet two king's waferers were styled "Master" – John Drake in Edward I's reign, and another John who served both Edward III and Richard II. John Drake probably had considerable responsibilities outside his own sub-department, and must have been one of [191] the senior servants of the Pantry. A payment of 20.0d for shoes for his grooms suggests that he had six or seven of them in his care:¹² and as we have already seen, he spent much time in Court, and had squire's rank with the more generous livery-allowance.¹³

In a waferer's dual capacity as maker and server of wafers (which were something of a delicacy), we can see why it was desirable that he should be an entertainer. Towards the end of a banquet, the gaiety would be at its height, and the little information that we have on the minstrelsy of waferers indicates that its nature was appropriate to this context. On one occasion Queen Philippa was entertained by two dancers, one of whom was a waferer;¹⁴ and some years later her husband made a gift of two waferers who were probably a piper (Sifre) and a dancer or tumbler (Sautour).¹⁵ One would like to know what entertainment Richard and Helen Pilke offered: female minstrels were usually dancers, and indeed Matilda Makejoie, *saltatrix*, seems to have performed on the same occasion.¹⁶

This dual entertainment of minstrels and waferers is by no [192] means an uncommon one:¹⁷ but it is surprising that it occurs with such frequency amongst the *itinerant* minstrelsy. I do not forget that many liveried waferers may have been itinerant for much of the year: but in a set of accounts which normally names the households to which visiting minstrels are attached, the entry

"Item, diversis ministrallis cum Wafirs, xxxj s."

¹¹ See below, ii, pp. 74 f and 99.

¹² Calendared below, ii, p. 30

¹³ See above, pp. 106 and 119 (and n. 125).

¹⁴ See below, ii, p. 87 and n. 49.

¹⁵ See below, ii, p. 99. Medieval iconography and account-books both show that dancing was of a very acrobatic nature, hardly to be distinguished from tumbling.

¹⁶ See below, ii, pp. 74 f.

¹⁷ See, for instance, the article "Wafer" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where the connection is implied in a large proportion of the quotations.

almost certainly refers to a mixed bag of independent entertainers.¹⁸ So, too, does an entry recording a gift to “Richard, *oblator* of Oxford, and other waferers and minstrels” in the accounts of Richard de Swinfield, 1289–90; and two similar gifts to waferers in the company of minstrels are found in the Derby accounts for 1391.¹⁹

Such references are typical: but while the close relationship of minstrels and waferers is obvious, its precise nature must remain undefined until we know more about the waferers themselves – who they were, and what they could do in the way of minstrelsy.

¹⁸ At Durham, 1402–03: see below, ii, p. 148.

¹⁹ See Webb/*Swinfield*, i, p. 148.