

## John Stratford, Bishop of Winchester, and the Crown, 1323-30

NO modern biography of John Stratford, bishop of Winchester (1323-33) and archbishop of Canterbury (1333-48) has yet been published and the only part of his long and important career which has received exhaustive attention is his fall from power in the crisis of 1340-1. He had been one of the most influential royal councillors since at least the end of 1330 and, for most of the time, he or his brother, Robert Stratford, were chancellors. This article is an attempt to trace the beginning of his political career in the reign of Edward II and during the minority of Edward III.

Stratford must have been born at the latest in the twelve-eighties for by 1313 he was a Doctor of Civil Law and proctor of the University of Oxford at the papal court.<sup>1</sup> By 1319 he was archdeacon of Lincoln and had entered royal service.<sup>2</sup> His career afterwards seems to have been comparatively unremarkable until, in 1323, he obtained the bishopric of Winchester, the most wealthy bishopric in England after Canterbury. The story of how he obtained the see and the proceedings which the king took against him afterwards are unusually well-documented. They form the main theme of this article.

Rigaud de Asserio, bishop of Winchester, died at the papal court on 12 April 1323. His death at Avignon gave the pope the indisputable right to present to the see. John Stratford had been at the papal court since August 1322 as a member of the embassy which Rigaud had headed.<sup>3</sup> When Rigaud died Edward wrote to Stratford charging him to recommend to the pope as Rigaud's successor, Robert Baldok, the chancellor.<sup>4</sup> But when Stratford returned to England it was with papal letters by which he and not Baldok was provided to the see. He put it out that he himself had been preferred 'tantam optinuit in conspectu domini Papae gratiam'<sup>5</sup> and later, in justification, that 'notre seint pere le pape dona la dite eveschee de Wyncestre a dit J. Stratford ore evesque de Wyncestre de sa fraunche volunte sanz procurement de luy ou dautre ove lassent de tot le collegie . . .'<sup>6</sup> The pope claimed that he had decided to provide Stratford as soon as Rigaud died,<sup>7</sup> before the delivery to him by Stratford of the letter recommending Baldok.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Calendar of Papal Registers 1305-42*, p. 183. My thanks are due to Dr. M. Richter for his helpful suggestions for this article.

<sup>2</sup>*C.P.R. 1317-21*, p. 429; *Foedera*, ed. T. Rymer (Record Comm.), II. i. 335.

<sup>3</sup>K. R. Exchequer Accounts Various, E 101/309/27. All references to original material, unless otherwise stated, are to documents in the Public Record Office.

<sup>4</sup>*Foedera*, II. i. 519.

<sup>5</sup>*Annales Paulini in Chronicles of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls ser., 1882-3), I. 305.

<sup>6</sup>Ancient Petitions, S.C. 8/139/6903.

<sup>7</sup>*Foedera*, II. i. 533.

<sup>8</sup>For the royal letter on Baldok's behalf cf. *ibid.*, pp. 517-18.

John XXII may have been trying to save Edward's face as well as his own. He was rigorously enforcing papal rights over provisions in these years. Stratford as second-in-command to Rigaud in the English delegation to Avignon might have seemed an obvious candidate to the bishopric. It is also interesting to note that a year later John passed over Baldok again, this time as the king's candidate for the see of Norwich.<sup>1</sup>

The full extent of the king's fury fell upon Stratford. Edward was dogged in his attempts, first to prevent the provision of a candidate not recommended by himself, and that failing, to make life as difficult as possible for the new bishop. Edward levied charges against Stratford which make it impossible to believe that there can ever have been any real reconciliation between them even though Stratford was again employed by him on diplomatic business. He wrote to a number of influential people at the papal court requesting them to plead with the pope to revoke Stratford's election.<sup>2</sup> He wrote letters to the pope and his *familiares*, couched in the strongest terms, demanding that the provision be rescinded 'tanto gravius conturbamur si nobis ingratos et demeritos statum prelatorum in eodem regno occupare nostris temporibus videamus'.<sup>3</sup> He sent writs to prevent the bulls which enforced the provision from entering the country<sup>4</sup> and, after Stratford's return, ordered the Constable of Dover and the keepers of fifty-one other ports to prevent Stratford from leaving the country.<sup>5</sup> In a letter of 17 October to Stratford the king accused him of many misdeeds, of which the acceptance of the provision to Winchester was only the worst. He accused him of 'acting fraudulently in the affairs committed to him by the King for the profit of himself and his friends and not without the vice of ambition'.<sup>6</sup> This is echoed in a charge made against him by the king of 'graves et multiplices offensas quas idem Johannes erga nos contrahere non timuit'.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be an allusion to something more than Stratford's failure to report on his diplomatic business at the papal court.

Meanwhile efforts were being made by the pope to reconcile the king to the provision. The pope sent a letter on 20 June 1323 to Archbishop Reynolds enjoining his help on behalf of Stratford. It confirms Stratford's statement that the personal favour of the pope had won him the see. Stratford is described as

sufficiently endowed with the highest gifts, of a conspicuous fineness of manner and refined elegance of life, adorned with honourable behaviour, prudent in spiritual matters and circumspect in temporal business. One who will understand the church, rule it usefully and govern it wisely.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Grassi, 'William Airmyn and the bishopric of Norwich', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lxx (1955), 552 ff. John alleged in 1323 that he had received some unsatisfactory information about Baldok (*Foedera*, II. i. 533).

<sup>2</sup> *Foedera*, II. i. 526, 529, 532.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> *C.Cl.R.* 1323-7, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> *Foedera*, II. i. 544.

<sup>8</sup> Register of Roger Martival, bishop of Salisbury, 20 June 1323, fo. 147 (*Reg. Martival* (Canterbury & York Soc.), II. 431-2 (in the press)). I am extremely

That the pope seems to have developed the highest regard for Stratford is confirmed in a bull to Martival, the respected bishop of Salisbury. It mentions that Stratford came to the pope's notice as royal envoy and that the pope observed 'his watchful zeal and careful diligence, his persistent labour and the loyal and skilful way he conducted the royal business before Himself and the Curia'. He was also taking into account his learning, his expertise at negotiations, his praiseworthy life and outstanding gifts of character besides the fact that he was an Englishman by birth. The pope claimed that he had chosen him 'without any seeking by him or because of the entreaties of others in his favour. Divine clemency, as we believe, solely inspired the choice which was with the unanimous accord and counsel of Our brethren'.<sup>1</sup>

To appreciate fully Edward's rage over the provision to Winchester in 1323 one must go back to 1320. John Sandale died in 1319 and the pope provided Rigaud de Asserio to the see. Rigaud had been a papal tax collector since 1316 and was a Frenchman in origin.<sup>2</sup> Edward procured from Rigaud a recognition that a papal provision did not entitle him to a restoration of the temporalities. The king then restated what he regarded as the normal procedure.

Once the election has been held the same electors are responsible for presenting the election to the king and for seeking his approval for their choice which, for a good reason, he and his successors can withhold. Once his approval is given and the election confirmed the temporalities of the bishoprics of the said elect must be sought from the king and his successors and received from their hands, being obtainable in no other way.<sup>3</sup>

Ironically, Edward maintained that he would concede the temporalities out of reverence to Rigaud but reiterated his determination to enforce the royal rights in future: 'set a futuris temporibus firmiter observare. Nec presentem gratiam quam tibi facimus ad consequenciam trahi volumus in futurum'.<sup>4</sup>

Then, only three years later, came the provision of Stratford to the very same bishopric. Edward proceeded to withhold the temporalities for one year. This was not an unusually long interval but Stratford petitioned for their return and his petition survives. It was presented *coram rege* and speaks of

aprochaunt la court nostre seigneur le Roi de iour en autre de pais en pais pour avoir prie et requis a notre dit seigneur le Roi de lui avoir livre terres et totes

grateful to Dr. Kathleen Edwards for permission to use these extracts from the edition of Bishop Martival's Register. Cf. also *Foedera*, II. i. 525.

<sup>1</sup>Martival's Register, fo. 151v, 3 Sept. 1323 (*Reg. Martival*, II. 438-40). Cf. also *Foedera*, II. i. 533.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Lunt, *Accounts Rendered by Papal Collectors in England, 1317-78* (1968), p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup>K. R. Ecclesiastical Documents, E 135/17/19: 'Quodque electione celebrata iidem electores tenerentur suum electum dicto regi presentare et petere huius electioni suum adhiberi consensum quem ex causa rationabili ipse et successores sui possent denegare. Et huiusmodi consensu adhibito et electione in eventu confirmata teneantur dicti electi temporalia episcopatum suorum ab ipso rege et successoribus suis petere et ea recipere de manu sua et ea alias nullatenus recepturi.'

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

autres choses restorauns en la mayn notre dit seigneur le Roi et apartenauns al dit evesche de Wyncestre solon usages et custumes de la terre.<sup>1</sup>

The Life of Stratford, attributed to Birchington, intensifies the picture of Stratford's persecution by the king, describing how people were afraid to offer him food or shelter because he was under Edward's displeasure.<sup>2</sup> The exact purpose and authority of the Life are open to question but it seems to echo the intention of the petition, to make Stratford appear as the champion of ecclesiastical rights in this period. Stratford further used the Winchester vacancy to this effect in the next reign when he requested, because of the maladministration of the temporalities by royal officials, that they should be put in the charge of the chapter during future vacancies. The wording of the petition which describes the destruction of houses, vineyards, woods, parks and other possessions leaves no doubt in one's mind that Stratford held the seizure and the prolonged and wasteful detention of the temporalities against Edward.<sup>3</sup>

After the temporalities were finally returned, Stratford was placed under heavy financial obligations which his enemies were repeatedly able to exploit against him and which he was not able to escape until Edward III assumed personal control of the crown. The catalogue of sums extorted from him in reprisal for taking the bishopric can be fully assessed by examining the table which is appended to this article. Briefly, when the temporalities were returned the king demanded that Stratford buy back the chattels of the see which had become royal property by virtue of the vacancy: this again was the king's right, though claims of this sort were frequently waived by the Crown in the case of bishops well-regarded by the monarch. Stratford himself was destined to benefit from this, in happier circumstances, on his translation to Canterbury in 1333. So in 1324 he became liable for the huge sum of £2,460.<sup>4</sup> He was also forced to make recognizances for enormous sums; £10,000 to the king,<sup>5</sup> £1,000 to the Despensers<sup>6</sup> and 1800 marks to Baldok,<sup>7</sup> perhaps by way of compensation. In the case of the recognizances to the king it was regarded as a personal debt for which Stratford's successors in the see of Winchester would not be liable and 'for which £10,000 the King willed that he would be satisfied for £2,000 and that the residue would be put into respite depending upon the bishop's conduct'.<sup>8</sup> But the £1,000 owed to the younger Despenser was certainly paid, for it was deposited by him with the Peruzzi, his Italian bankers, in August 1324.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Edward summoned Stratford to answer concerning the business assigned to him when he was at the papal court. It would be oversimplifying the issue to say that Edward used neglect of duty as a pretext for summoning Stratford before the justices because he could not prosecute him for accepting a papal provision, for there is real anger behind the charges of failing to report to the king on the secret business entrusted to him. A most interesting document survives in the form of the prosecution of Stratford before the

<sup>1</sup>S.C.8/139/6903.

<sup>2</sup>Wharton, *Anglia Sacra* (1691), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>S.C. 8/15/719.

<sup>4</sup>Table, no. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Table, no. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Table, no. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Table, no. 5.

<sup>8</sup>*C.I.R.* 1323-7, p. 198, 29 June 1324.

<sup>9</sup>Table, no. 3.

justices of King's Bench. As a record of a diplomatic mission to Avignon it is of almost unique importance. Edward began by demanding that Stratford should reply 'de tutes altres busoignes dount nous lui chargeoms a ceo qil y est longement demorrez a grant coustages de nous'.<sup>1</sup> Stratford was to deliver all the bulls and secret letters from the pope to the king which were in his custody since he had failed to report with them to the royal emissaries, Geoffrey Scrope and Hugh Despenser the Younger. Edward demanded a receipt from Stratford acknowledging when and where the writ had been delivered to him, the implication being that Stratford was pretending that the king's summonses did not reach him. Stratford provided the receipt and it is interesting to see that far from burying himself at Winchester or his archdeaconry at Lincoln, he was staying at the Carmelite house in Nottingham, the same city where the king and court were residing: no doubt he was trying to take care of his interests on the spot. Stratford did not face the king, however, but appeared before the justices of the King's Bench. He produced his indenture of the instructions for his embassy to Avignon and proceeded to show point by point how he carried them out, all the time trying to demonstrate the success of his mission. The indenture brings out the enormous quantity of diverse business entrusted to him at Avignon. According to Stratford he achieved as much as could humanly be done and he made great play with the difficulties which he had encountered. The business included supporting the creation of a number of new cardinals and excommunicating the Scots on the grounds that opposition to the king of England and, through him, to the pope, amounted to a sort of heresy! More relevant to our study is the fact that he was authorized to parley with two cardinals who were in dispute with Baldok and William Ayremyn about two English prebends. He failed to make peace between the cardinals and these two highly-favoured English clerks and submitted the case to the arbitration of a third cardinal promising to abide by his settlement and pledging Baldok to the sum of 200m. to honour this! He claimed that Baldok and Ayremyn had given him full proctorship but he was accused of exceeding his orders. One can well imagine Baldok's fury when it must have seemed to him that he had lost both the bishopric to Stratford and the prebend through Stratford. The case was adjourned to the next parliament but unfortunately the rolls of parliament for this period are missing.

By November 1324, exactly a year after his appearance before the justices, and five months after he received back his temporalities, the process against him must have been suspended, for he began to be employed as ambassador again<sup>2</sup> and in February 1325 he was actually paid the expenses of his ill-fated trip to the curia.<sup>3</sup> One very strongly has the impression that throughout his career Stratford was immune from complete disfavour because of his long and unique experience in the intricacies of French and papal negotiations. By 1325 he was again chief envoy abroad. In this capacity his

<sup>1</sup> King's Bench Roll, K.B. 27/254, Rex mm. 38-9, Mich. 17 Edw. II.

<sup>2</sup> C.P.R. 1324-7, p. 49, 11 Nov. 1324.

<sup>3</sup> C.Cl.R. 1327-30, p. 256, 13 Feb. 1325. See also Table, no. 8.

recommendations may have played a prime part in the early stages of the events which ended in the deposition of Edward II. In 1325 the peace negotiations with France were at a crucial stage. At the request of the papal envoys the queen was sent to conclude the negotiations.<sup>1</sup> What is interesting is that Stratford, on 13 January, recommended that with the queen should be sent the prince of Wales, then aged twelve years.<sup>2</sup> He was to swear homage to Charles IV in Edward's place. A year later Edward and Isabella returned to England with the army which deposed Edward II. But there is no known evidence to show whether in advocating sending the prince of Wales to France in 1325 Stratford was being disloyal to Edward II. Certainly he seems to have been suspect because less than a fortnight before Isabella landed, a new recognizance for £2,000 was secured from him by the Younger Despenser, suggesting that the Despensers regarded it as necessary to keep a hold on him.<sup>3</sup>

Stratford's first reaction to the invasion was to join the archbishop of Canterbury, Reynolds, in issuing a bull against the invaders.<sup>4</sup> Within a month of the landing of Isabella, however, we find Stratford listed among her chief adherents who, at Bristol on 26 October, formally recognized Edward, prince of Wales, as Keeper of the Realm.<sup>5</sup> By 14 November Stratford had been made treasurer. Whether he had been in contact with Isabella before her landing remains an open question, but at least one statement by the queen in a proclamation against the Despensers would seem to apply to him and other prelates who had been persecuted by the Despensers. She speaks of 'les prelatz et autres persones de seinte eglise de leur biens contre dieu et dreiture despoilez et en trop de manieres deshoneurez'.<sup>6</sup> It is very interesting to find this document in a formulary book containing material in part at least connected with Stratford. It would seem possible that a copy of the proclamation had once been in his possession.

Stratford proceeded to take a notable part in the deposition of Edward II. He was one of the three prelates who put the case for the deposition of the king before the parliament which met on 7 January.<sup>7</sup> On 13 January he preached the 'official' sermon in favour of the deposition.<sup>8</sup> Finally, his complete ruthlessness is suggested by his behaviour at Kenilworth. It was he who, with the earl of Leicester, led out Edward II half-fainting and weeping to announce his abdication. Previously, in private, the earl, Stratford and the bishop of Lincoln had threatened to disinherit Edward's son, the future Edward III, in favour of one who was not of royal blood, perhaps Mortimer.<sup>9</sup> Stratford's future relations with Edward III must be seen in the

<sup>1</sup> Grassi, *ubi supra*, p. 554.

<sup>2</sup> *The War of Saint-Sardos, 1323-5*, ed. P. Chaplais (Camden 3rd ser., lxxxviii, 1954), p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> Table, no. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Annales Paulini*, p. 315.

<sup>5</sup> *Foedera*, II. i. 646.

<sup>6</sup> British Museum, Royal MS. 12 D. xi fo. 30r.

<sup>7</sup> B. Wilkinson, *The Constitutional History of Medieval England (1216-1399)* (1948-58), II. 26.

<sup>8</sup> M. Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent* (1964), p. 181.

<sup>9</sup> *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, ed. E. M. Thompson (1889), p. 27.

light of this threat to disinherit him and one must bear in mind these occurrences to appreciate fully the veiled hints about deposition in the correspondence between the king and Stratford in 1341 when Stratford pointedly reminded Edward of the fate of his father.<sup>1</sup>

It was shortly after the deposition that Stratford earned an enemy who, according to contemporary allegations, was to play a major role against him in 1340-1.<sup>2</sup> On 27 August 1327 the bishop of Worcester died. Adam Orleton, bishop of Hereford, who had replaced Stratford as treasurer in the previous January, was chosen by the pope for translation to the see. Stratford supported the other candidate, the prior of Worcester. Orleton was, in fact, successful, but it is not likely that he forgot that Stratford stood in his path, especially as Stratford again opposed his promotion in 1333, this time to Winchester, when Stratford obtained the archbishopric of Canterbury.

The new government of Isabella proved as suspicious of Stratford as the old government had been and, as soon as she was safely in control, Isabella renewed the recognizance of debt which Stratford had made to the younger Despenser and enforced it as a surety for Stratford's good behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Stratford then emerged as a supporter of the earl of Lancaster in his revolt against Mortimer in 1328-9.<sup>4</sup> To this period belongs the extraordinary story in Birchington's *Life* that Mortimer attempted to murder Stratford who only escaped by flight.<sup>5</sup> In November 1328 Stratford was summoned by the king to answer as to why he had left the parliament of Salisbury without permission.<sup>6</sup> It was at his rebel town of Winchester that the Lancastrian rebels then assembled.<sup>7</sup> With Thomas Wake of Liddell, Stratford was employed as Lancaster's envoy to the Londoners.<sup>8</sup>

In these circumstances it is not surprising that Stratford emerged as a leading figure in the government after the overthrow of Mortimer and that it was he who, as chancellor, issued the pardons to the Lancastrian rebels.<sup>9</sup> At this point all his debts were pardoned<sup>10</sup> and the change of régime put Stratford, his brother and associates in the position of first importance in the government which endured until December 1340.

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<sup>1</sup>D. Hughes, *A Study of the Social and Constitutional Tendencies in the Early Years of Edward III* (1915), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>*Registrum Ade de Orleton*, ed. A. T. Bannister (Canterbury & York Soc., 1908), p. xliii.

<sup>3</sup>Table, no. 7.

<sup>4</sup>G. A. Holmes, 'The rebellion of the earl of Lancaster (1328-9)', *ante*, xxviii (1955), 84-9.

<sup>5</sup>Wharton, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup>*C.Cl.R. 1327-30*, p. 420.

<sup>7</sup>Holmes, *ubi supra*, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*C.Cl.R. 1327-30*, p. 530.

<sup>10</sup>Table, no. 7.

TABLE  
*Financial transactions of John Stratford with the royal government 1322-30*

<i>Nature and date of transaction</i>	<i>Debts to Stratford</i>	<i>Receipts by Stratford</i>	<i>Payments by Stratford to the king or his agents</i>	<i>Debts pardoned to Stratford</i>	<i>Sources and remarks</i>
1. Embassy to Pope John XXII July 1322-July 1323	£268 4s. 9d.	£200 £68 4s. 9d.			E 101/309/27 Received before 16 Aug. 1322 Allowed in no. 4 below
2. Recognizance for £10,000 due to Edw. II 29 June 1324				£10,000	C.Cl.R. 1323-7, p. 198. Cancelled 6 Feb. 1327, C.Cl.R. 1327-30, p. 24
3. Recognizance to Hugh Despenser the Younger, 8 Aug. 1324, for £1,000			£1,000		E 101/127/20/7, 8; E 159/98, recogniciones, Trin., m. 3v Paid by Jan. 1326 to Despenser
4. Recognizance to Edw. II for the movables pertaining to the bishopric of Winchester (£2,460 5s. 10d.)			£367 12s. 3¼d. £68 4s. 9d. £230 16s. 3d.		E 372/169, rot. compot, m. 3v (Pipe R. 17 Edw. II) <i>Ibid.</i> , Item Southampton (allowance of no. 8 below) E 372/170 (Pipe R. 18 Edw. II), Southampton, v. (allowance of no. 1 above) <i>Ibid.</i> , paid in cash Outstanding debt <sup>1</sup>
5. Recognizances to Robert Baldok for 800 marks (2 July 1324) and for 1000 marks (30 June 1324)			£533 6s. 8d.	£1793 12s. 6¼d. £666 13s. 4d.	E 159/98, recogniciones, Trin., mm. 2r, 3v Paid to Baldok Unpaid and cancelled by mandate to the exchequer of 6 March 1327 (E 159/103 m. 158v)



6. Recognizance for £100 to Edw. II in the exchequer	£80 6s. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.	[£19 13s. $\frac{1}{4}$ d.]	E 372/169, Res. Southampton (Pipe R. 17 Edw. II) Allowance of no. 8 below The balance apparently cancelled subsequently
7. Recognizance to Hugh Dispenser the Younger for £2,000 (13 Sept. 1326), renewed as recogni- zance to the king on 25 Feb. 1327	£167 18s. 11d.	£120 £712 1s. 1d.	C.Cl.R. 1323-7, p. 647; E 372/172, Item Somerset, v. (Pipe R. 1 Edw. III) Allowance of no. 9 below (E 372/172, Item Somerset, v.) <i>Ibid.</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>Ibid.</i> , paid in cash Pardoned in parliament, Nov.-Dec. 1330 ( <i>Rot. Parl.</i> , ii. 60 (no. 25); E 372/175, Somerset (Pipe R. 4 Edw. III))
8. Three missions to France Feb.-Nov. 1325	£781 5s. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£333 6s. 8d. £367 12s. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. £ 80 6s. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.	E 101/309/27; E 372/169 m. 25v In cash, 1324-5 Allowed in no. 4 above Allowed in no. 6 above
9. Embassy to France March-May 1327	£334 12s. 3d.	£166 13s. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. £167 18s. 11d.	E 101/309/40; E 368/125 m. 108 In cash Allowed in no. 7 above

<sup>1</sup> Cancelled by mandate to the exchequer of 9 Feb. 1327 (E 159/103, br. dir. bar.) and cancellation of recognizances on 6 Feb. 1327, *C.Cl.R.* 1327-30, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Allowance of a royal debt to bishop of Norwich acquired by Stratford. Balance of £1,712 1s. 1d. payable by annual instalments of 500 marks, starting at Easter 1327 (E 372/173, Somerset, v.).