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IN 1405 a young servant of the prince of Wales stepped ashore in the sheltered anchorage below Cardigan castle, from a ship which was bringing urgently needed ordnance for Andrew Lynne, the deputy-constable of the castle. William Botiller, for that was his name, found himself thrust into the exciting atmosphere of nervous tension which gripped the inhabitants and garrison of Cardigan. For the little town was the last English outpost in a county overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the Welsh under their leader, Owain Glyn Dwr, and as the ship skirted the South Wales coast, perhaps out of Bristol, a weather-eye had to be kept open for the French fleet, reported to be in those waters after the rebels' alliance with France in July 1404.¹

The Welsh, with their curious tongue, were no strangers to William, for he had been sent by Prince Henry on two earlier missions into Wales. In the early summer of 1403 he was detailed by his master to report on the garrison of Sir Richard d'Aston, steward of Denbigh, and this was very likely the first important mission that William had undertaken in his whole life.² Within a week or two he was off again, in charge of a supply train sent from Shropshire to Harlech and Aberystwyth castles, which were under close siege by the Welsh. He travelled overland on horseback, clambering over the mountains and wending his way through the winding valleys of mid-Wales, until twelve days had passed before he returned to the English border, having lost his horse on the way.³ Moreover, William was a Gloucestershire man in the days when there was no doubt about the affinities of nearby Gwent. His home remained in the county throughout his life, at Corse near the northern border, and Welshmen must have been a

¹ Public Record Office, Ministers Accounts 1222/12 m.2; J. E. Lloyd, *Owen Glendower* (Oxford, 1931), pp. 83-5, 91, 101-3.

² J. H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry IV*, iv (4 vols., London, 1884-98), pp. 243, 254, n. 4; P.R.O., Exchequer, K.R., Various Accounts, 404/24 f.11^r.

³ Wylie, *op. cit.*, iv, p. 245; P.R.O., Exchequer, K.R., Various Accounts, 404/24 f.12^r; Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 61. Probably as a clerk of the prince of Wales, William collected £33 6s 8d from the abbot of St Augustine's, Bristol in September 1403 and delivered it to the keeper of Prince Henry's 'secret treasure'. P.R.O., Exchequer, K.R., Various Accounts, 405/1.

familiar sight to him, either trading at the local markets, or sailing down the Severn, or raiding the prosperous farms of the valley.¹

His family origins, however, are difficult to unravel. Although there is no obvious connection with the Botillers of Sudeley, a statue of Sir Thomas le Boteler (or Botiller) of Sudeley (*d.* 1398) stands in the church at Upton-on-Severn in Worcestershire, a few miles from Corse.² John de Sudeley, the last male representative of his line, had died in 1367, leaving as his heir Thomas, the son of his sister and William le Boteler of Wem in north Shropshire. This was apparently the Botelers' earliest connection with Gloucestershire, and when Thomas came of age Sudeley was his.³ He married his wife, perhaps a daughter of Sir John Beauchamp of Powick, in 1385, and between then and Sir Thomas' death in 1398 his sons were born: John, the eldest, who was dead by 1410; William, who died a knight in 1417; and the long-lived Sir Ralph, who survived until 1473. All, in turn, succeeded their father as lord of Sudeley.⁴ The career of William Botiller must be isolated from that of Sir William Botiller of Sudeley (and, for that matter, from that of Sir William Butler of Warrington, Lancashire), although this is to be done rather by intuition than with certainty. The Lancashire Butler, a knight since 1399, died of dysentery at the siege of Harfleur in 1415, whilst Sir William of Sudeley (*d.* 1417) was probably too young in 1403 to be entrusted with vital missions in hostile country.⁵ Nevertheless, a connection between the Gloucestershire Botillers and William Botiller, the prince of Wales' minion, seems to be indicated, and the best possibility lies in an illegitimate union, the historian's refuge for uncertain births. Sir Thomas le Boteler, born about 1354, was getting on in years for a mediæval man when he married in 1385. William, who was still alive in the 1450s, must have been near 20 at least when he set off for Harlech and Aberystwyth in 1403, so that to claim him as the fruit of a youthful indiscretion of Sir Thomas is not entirely beyond belief.⁶ As such he would need a greater degree of conscientious enterprise to make his way in the world than was required of the legitimate sons of a landed gentleman. William soon found his niche in the ranks of the administrators of the Crown, and it is hardly

¹ *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1435-41*, p. 132; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1436-41*, p. 373; *ibid.*, 1446-52, p. 14.

² *Trans. BGAS*, vii (1882-3), p. 304. I am indebted for the information about Upton-on-Severn to Mr Irvine Gray, Records Officer for Gloucestershire.

³ G.E.C., *Complete Peerage*, xii (13 vols., London, 1910-40), pt. i, pp. 417-18; W. Dugdale, *The Baronage of England*, I (2 vols., London, 1675-6), p. 596.

⁴ *Complete Peerage*, xii, pt. i, pp. 418-19. There may have been another son, Thomas. L. T. Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland*, II (5 vols., London, 1907-10), pp. 54-5.

⁵ J. H. Wylie and W. T. Waugh, *The Reign of Henry V*, II (3 vols., Cambridge, 1914-29), p. 46; *Complete Peerage*, xii, pt. i, p. 419.

⁶ For later connections with Sir Ralph Botiller, Lord Sudeley, see below pp. 75, 76.

surprising that the royal marcher lordships in South Wales should claim his services.

His first appointment came on 10 May 1409 as receiver of the lordships of Brecon and Hay, which had been inherited in 1384 from the Bohun lords by Henry, earl of Derby, later to be King Henry IV. Brecon must have been a second home to William, providing a sheet-anchor during those years up to 1424 when he migrated from lordship to lordship in South Wales. He was still in office on 4 June 1412 and about to renew his contact with the Welsh rebels, for he and the steward of Brecon were then commissioned to treat with Owain Glyn Dwr for the ransom of a local gentleman, David Gam.¹ To date, his record was evidently eminently satisfactory, and full use was made of his services in the duchy of Lancaster. On 24 March 1411 he became receiver of Monmouth and the three associated lordships of Skenfrith, Grosmont and Whitecastle, as well as of the duchy manors in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire; but on 10 April 1413, less than a month after the death of his patron, Henry IV, the appointment was terminated. In the meanwhile, he had probably been among the squires who accompanied the king's son, Duke Thomas of Clarence, on his expedition to France in 1412. Suitably mounted and equipped, and promised 1s 6d a day as his wages, William sailed from Southampton in August, and after an unpleasant few days caused by adverse winds, the troops disembarked in Normandy.² His absence from Monmouth may account for his replacement as receiver, a post requiring constant vigilance, although William was back at Brecon before the year was out as porter of the castle for life and, by 16 February 1414, as receiver.³

The accession of a new king in no way stunted his career, for it had been in Henry V's service, when he was prince of Wales, that those first perilous journeys to Wales had been made. Thus, when the chamberlain of South Wales, John Merbury, was detailed to raise men-at-arms and archers for the French war in 1415, it was William Botiller who was entrusted in June with £435 to take to Merbury at Hereford for their wages. He had already conveyed gold and silver for some of the 300 men who, under the command of the earl of Arundel, were considered sufficient to defend Wales while the king was away. This was his small contribution towards the campaign that culminated in the great battle of Agincourt on 25 October.⁴ During the latter part

¹ R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, 1 (London, 1953), pp. 67-8, 647; T. Rymer (ed.), *Foedera, conventiones, literae...*, VIII (20 vols., London, 1704-35), p. 753. ² Wylie, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 73-7.

³ Somerville, *op. cit.*, pp. 647, 650; P.R.O., *Duchy of Lancaster, Miscellaneous Books*, 17 f. 77r.

⁴ P.R.O., *Min. Acc. 1222/14 m. 7-8*; Exchequer, L.T.R., *Memoranda Roll*, 198, *Brevia retornabilia, michaelmas, m. 15d*; Wylie and Waugh, *op. cit.*, I, p. 114, n. 2, p. 456 and n. 4; J. E. Lloyd (ed.), *A History of Carmarthenshire*, 1 (2 vols., Cardiff, 1935-9), pp. 255-6.

of the reign, William retained his old post of receiver of Brecon, combining with it the receiverships of Hay and Cantref Selyf.¹ By this time his talents as an administrator had attracted wider interest, for in March 1415 he was appointed one of the justices to preside at the forthcoming sessions in the lordship of Chepstow, part of the estates of John Mowbray, earl of Nottingham. Although a number of their own councillors were usually nominated to perform such duties, the marcher lords also called upon the services of certain gentlemen of ability who could supplement with their local knowledge the more impersonal and professional experience of the lords' household servants. This was William's task at Chepstow in 1415. Although the sessions lasted only three days, the justices were hard at work before 6 o'clock on the morning of the first day, 6 May.²

Just over a year before his death, on 10 June 1421, Henry V transferred this loyal servant from the Welsh estates of his duchy of Lancaster to the southern counties of the principality of Wales, which had been conquered for the Crown by his ancestor, Edward I. William served as chamberlain of Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire, an office identical with that of the more familiar receiver in the marcher lordships, during the following three years, with his headquarters at Carmarthen castle. There, in a white-washed Exchequer chamber, staffed with its own clerks and housing the bulk of the records of this part of the principality, he presided over the finances of the two counties. Times were calmer now, for the Welsh rebellion had been over in this locality for a dozen years and the royal administration was almost back to normal. Still, hostility and devastation had left their scars, most graphically on the financial accounts of the chamberlain and his subordinates. It was a herculean task for anyone to bring anything more than order to the situation, and it had to wait for William's successor as chamberlain, Sir Edward Stradling of St Donat's castle, to increase the revenue markedly.³ While he lived in that part of the country, William was employed in neighbouring lordships under the king's control: in October 1421 he sat on a commission into piracy in the lordship of Haverford, and a few months later, in February 1422, performed a similar task in Kidwelly.⁴ Meanwhile, when the king surrendered Brecon to the countess of Stafford in May 1421, the nearby

¹ Somerville, *op. cit.*, p. 647.

² T. B. Pugh, *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1415-1536* (Cardiff, 1963), pp. 8, 10, 49-50, 56, 64. For a similar use of both local and household men at the duke of Buckingham's sessions at Brecon in 1503, *ibid.*, pp. 118, 287-99.

³ *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1413-22*, p. 390; Ralph Griffiths, 'The Rise of the Stradlings of St Donat's', *Morganwg*, VII (1963), p. 23.

⁴ *C.P.R., 1416-22*, p. 418; P.R.O., Duchy of Lancaster, Misc. Books, 17 f.244r.

castle and town of Bronllys, the manor of Alexanderston, the lordship of Cantref Selyf and part of that of Pencelli became disputed territory between the parties. William and John Merbury of Herefordshire, as receiver and steward of Brecon, were thereupon granted custody of them on 9 July 1421 for two years; when no settlement materialized this was extended for a further three years in May 1423, although in fact they were both replaced by Sir Edward Stradling on 8 November 1424.¹

Yet another royal demise, that of Henry V in 1422, had therefore hardly affected William's fortunes, and his appointment as chamberlain of South Wales was renewed by the Council of the infant Henry VI on 30 September 1422.² Although his successor was appointed on 4 December 1423, William continued in office until 12 February, and after barely three months' rest he was despatched to the lordship of Monmouth on 27 May. Inevitably by this time, his job was that of receiver, and although it might be objected that the short terms he had hitherto served indicated a doubtful ability or choleric disposition, the government was obviously loath to dispense with his services. He remained at Monmouth until 20 February 1428, and soon after his appointment was rewarded for his faithful service with a life-maintenance in St Peter's abbey, Gloucester, on 16 November 1424.³ By then too William had been brought more closely into the governing circle of the Crown by becoming a king's serjeant, and he retained this position well into old age.⁴

Shortly afterwards William was recommended to the earl of Warwick, just as he had attracted the attention of the earl of Nottingham in 1415. As a result, by Michaelmas 1425 he had become Warwick's receiver of his lordship of Glamorgan and constable of Cardiff castle, offices he occupied for almost as long as his stay at Brecon. For eleven years, while William passed into middle age, he remained at Cardiff, a headquarters which must have stirred his memories of Carmarthen, where the duties were identical financially, though now he was also constable of the castle, as were all the receivers.⁵ During these years, Glamorgan seems to have absorbed a great deal of William's time and energy, for only once is he detected engaged in

¹ Somerville, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-82; *C.F.R.*, 1413-22, p. 400; N. H. Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, II (7 vols., London, 1834-7), p. 294; *C.F.R.*, 1422-30, p. 33; P.R.O., Min. Acc. 1157/5 m.8. At this time Merbury was also William's colleague as justiciar of South Wales, *C.P.R.*, 1416-22, p. 368; *C.P.R.*, 1422-9, p. 3.

² *Proc. P.C.*, III, p. 4; *C.P.R.*, 1422-9, p. 3.

³ P.R.O., Min. Acc. 1223/5 m.6; Somerville, *op. cit.*, p. 650; *C.Cl.R.*, 1422-9, p. 194.

⁴ *Ibid.*; *C.P.R.*, 1446-52, p. 470; P.R.O., Duchy of Lancaster, Misc. Books, 18 f.141r.

⁵ National Library of Wales, Bute Ms. 93/142 m.2; 88/G m.2; G. T. Clark (ed.) *Cartae et alia munimenta . . . de Glamorgania*, IV (6 vols., Cardiff, 1910), p. 1548; *C.P.R.*, 1446-52, p. 14; Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

extra-mural business. This was in May 1435 when he joined Sir Edward Stradling and Gruffydd Dwnn on an enquiry in the lordship of Kidwelly, part of the duchy of Lancaster estates he had served so ubiquitously in the past.¹

On his retirement from Glamorgan at Michaelmas 1436, William returned to the king's service. Finance was still his strong-point and by 13 July 1437 he was acting as deputy-chamberlain of South Wales in the absence of Sir Ralph Botiller, who had more pressing duties at Westminster and who may have left South Wales in all confidence to William as his half-brother.² Even when a new chamberlain, Lord Audley, was appointed in 1439, he may have seized the opportunity to retain a well-versed deputy, long versed in the running of the Exchequers of Carmarthen and Cardigan. At any rate, William Botiller emerges briefly as deputy-chamberlain again in February and July 1440. He had by this time acquired a house in Fleet Street, where he could keep his ear to the winds in that power-house of promotion, London.³ It served him well. His suggested half-brother, Sir Ralph Botiller, had become chief butler of the royal Household in January 1435, and two years later William was one of his subordinates as yeoman of the buttery or the 'pycherhous'.⁴ On 8 March 1437 he was granted, as a well-earned reward, the virtually duty-less office of rhaglaw of the commote of Talybolion in Anglesey with its fees, as well as the profits of the amobr, paid by tenants when their daughters married.⁵ Moreover, he had returned to the receivership of the disputed Breconshire lands of the duchy of Lancaster by 21 December 1439, when he was replaced, and on 12 July following William became receiver and chancellor, financial officer and secretary, of the lordship of Kidwelly.⁶ Already, from 3 July 1437 to 7 February 1438, he had been receiver of the lordship of Laugharne in Carmarthenshire, while it was temporarily in the king's hands.⁷

As the fifth decade of the 15th century opened, William had spent a generation in the service of the Crown, and a good number of years as an officer of two marcher lords. He was one among the hundreds of

¹ P.R.O., Duchy of Lancaster, Misc. Books, 18 f.34r.

² *C.Cl.R.*, 1435-41, p. 132.

³ P.R.O., Exchequer, L.T.R., Memoranda Roll, 212, recorda, easter, m.7d; Duchy of Lancaster, Misc. Books, 18 f.141r.

⁴ *Complete Peerage*, XII, pt. i, p. 420; *C.P.R.*, 1436-41, pp. 64, 280. The identification of William Botiller with the Household officer of the same name is based on the statement in 1451 that the latter had served Henry V and Henry VI for over thirty-five years. Below p. 76.

⁵ *C.P.R.*, 1436-41, p. 64.

⁶ *C.F.R.*, 1437-45, p. 123; Somerville, op. cit., p. 642. Stradling was still steward and receiver of Cantref Selyf at the end of 1428. P.R.O., Min. Acc. 1157/7 m.5.

⁷ P.R.O., Min. Acc. 1167/6 m.14.

civil servants who made royal and seignorial government work. Apparently educated and evidently highly-trained, by continuous employment he came near in the middle ages to the modern conception of the working man; if William Botiller did not arrive at his Exchequer at 9 and leave at 5 o'clock, at least he never experienced unemployment. Even at the ripe age of more than 60, not only was he at the head of the administration of Kidwelly, but in July 1444 he was nominated to preside over the sessions at Monmouth and Ogmores.¹ William, it might be thought with confidence, could look forward to a retirement in comfort and rewards in abundance. Yet, life had one last, cruel blow to inflict. He had never been an outstandingly efficient financier, working no miracles with the depleted resources of the Welsh lordships, but he had equally never been outstandingly inefficient or oppressive. He was highly valued by Henry VI and his advisers, for, although he had debts outstanding from the last reign, these were all pardoned and dismissed on 5 July 1437 and again on 8 May 1444.² Early in the new year, however, there were complaints about his behaviour as receiver and chancellor of Kidwelly and on 11 March 1445 he was suspended from office. He vainly tried to vindicate himself, pleading for an investigation into his actions, and an inquiry was held in August.³ In no way had he acted improperly, but William Botiller was never again appointed to office. It is not difficult to imagine the impact on him of dismissal after 50 years spent in public administration; already well past 60, the interests of a lifetime had been shattered. His personal life too was at this time blighted by tragedy. While paying a visit to St Albans in 1445 from lands which William had been granted in Hertfordshire, his wife, Rose, was wrongfully arrested and imprisoned. Although his appeals to the chancellor may have secured her release, she only survived a few more years. By September 1450 she was dead and William sold some of his Hertfordshire lands to a London fishmonger.⁴ But the king was not without compassion, nor, one imagines, Sir Ralph Botiller without influence. His life-grant of certain profits and fees from Anglesey was renewed for the last time on 18 August 1451 in return for, so the record goes, 'good service to Henry V and the king by the space of thirty-five years and more and in consideration of his age'.⁵

¹ Somerville, *op. cit.*, p. 642.

² P.R.O., Exchequer, K.R., Memoranda Roll, 220, *brevia directa*, easter, m.7d.

³ Somerville, *op. cit.*, p. 642.

⁴ P.R.O., Early Chancery Proceedings, 1/15/250, 13/156; *C.Cl.R.*, 1447-54, pp. 232-3 (William Botiller, the Household servant).

⁵ *C.P.R.*, 1446-52, p. 470. For Sir Ralph's important place in the government as chief butler (1435-58), king's chamberlain (1441-6), treasurer of England (1443-6) and steward of the Household (1447-57), *Complete Peerage*, xii, pt. 1, p. 420; F. M. Powicke and E. B. Fryde (eds.), *Handbook of British Chronology* (London, 1961), pp. 76, 102.

Devoted to the king in life, William was eventually to prove himself loyal unto death. Although now too old for local administrative duties, he was still maintained in the royal Household in November 1454, and when Henry VI set out to hold a Council meeting at Leicester in May 1455, William Botiller went with him.¹ But already the duke of York and his supporters were moving south, intent on confronting the king and his detested adviser, the duke of Somerset. The two forces clashed in the streets of St Albans on 22 May; King Henry received a wound in the neck, and when the fracas ceased William Botiller, well into the evening of his life at more than 70 years of age, lay dead.²

¹ *Proc. P.C.*, vi, p. 230.

² C. A. J. Armstrong, 'Politics and the battle of St Albans, 1455', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxxiii (1960), p. 71 and n.16. On 11 February 1444, when William was receiver and chancellor of Kidwelly, his son John was leased certain lands in the lordship, and 'John Botyllar of Cors' was alive on 3 March 1455. P.R.O., Duchy of Lancaster, Ministers' Accounts, 574/9077 m.2; *Trans. BGAS*, LXXIII (1954), p. 236.