

## THE BURNING OF THE JUBILEE BOOK

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On Saturday, 16 March 1387, during the mayoralty of the fishmonger Nicholas Exton, a remarkable event occurred in the history of the city of London: remarkable even by the standards of the 'turbulent London of Richard II'. Exton summoned a special meeting of the City's Common Council, reinforced by other more reputable and substantial men. So many arrived at the meeting that they could not be accommodated in the Upper Chamber where the Common Council normally met and so they had to move to the Guildhall below. Here the mayor, the sheriffs and the aldermen, together with the enlarged Common Council, perhaps in all some 150 citizens, discussed a certain book, called the Jubilee book which had given rise to great controversies, dissensions and disputes among the citizens, because it contained, so it was alleged, 'certain new oaths of the officers of the said city, and certain new ordinances, repugnant to the old and approved customs of the same'. Apparently it had often been asked in the Common Council of the city that the said quire, or book, should be burnt. Now, by the assent of the mayor and aldermen, and all those numerous citizens met in the Guildhall, 'it was agreed and adjudged, that the said quire, or book, should be burnt on the same day in the place without the Guildhall', presumably in Guildhall yard. (Memorials, 494). The burning of books, to become a comparative common place with the advent of popular heresy, was still uncommon in England. People (witches, murderous wives) were occasionally burnt and, as we were reminded a couple of weeks ago by Grace Seabourne, defective or putrid goods were sometimes burnt under the noses of those in the pillory who had attempted to pass them off upon the unsuspecting purchaser, but not books. What was the Jubilee Book that it should have aroused such passions and, ultimately, such fear?

In the aftermath of the Good Parliament of 1376 (dissolved 6 July 1376) in which three of the city's serving aldermen, Richard Lyons, Adam Bury and John Pecche, had been impeached, the citizens of London embarked upon a wide-ranging reform of the city's government. These 'constitutional' changes have been difficult to discern and analyse because they have become almost inextricably entangled in disputes and faction-fighting which were then engulfing the city. There were disputes between Grocers and Drapers struggling to dominate the export trade through Calais; between different groups of drapers fighting over the distributive trade in cloth, between victuallers who wanted to maintain the food monopolies and the other crafts (non-victuallers) who were anxious to open up a free market in food and so bring down costs and between those characterised as radicals who wished to change the way in which the city was governed and those, conservatives, who resisted the constitutional changes or, at least, once they were in place and found to be unsatisfactory, struggled to restore the old order. The more I have studied London in the late fourteenth century, the more convinced I have become that there is no single 'big issue' that caused the turbulence of London in Richard II's reign. 'Parties' such as they were, were evanescent and temporary groupings and a Namier-like approach to the 'politics' of this period is distorting and unhelpful. There were conflicting economic interests and, perhaps, class interests as masters fought to restrain the wages and opportunities of their workers and merchants who traded goods abroad came into conflict with artisans who made the goods. But we need, perhaps, to see through the miasma of these clashing economic interests and to search for some more abiding, perhaps more constitutional, concerns which also preoccupied the citizens of late fourteenth-century

London. The search for the Jubilee Book may help to direct our attention away from the Marxist focus on economic interests and towards the developing concern for the common good.

In the aftermath of the Good Parliament, there appear to have been considerable discussions in the city both about the way in which the mayor, sheriffs and aldermen should be elected and the 'manner of making ordinances'. One of the issues was whether the elections and the ordinances should be made by men elected for the purpose using the ward as the constituency or, on the other hand, by persons chosen by the misteries (LBH, 35). News of these discussions (or dissensions) reached Edward III who proposed to intervene and sent a letter of privy seal to the Mayor to this effect (29 July 1376, LBH, 35). The prospect of royal intervention galvanised the citizens into action: the commonalty of the city, speaking through Ralph Strode, the Common Serjeant (the traditional spokesman for the citizens at large) lodged a complaint about the behaviour of the aldermen recently impeached in Parliament and about the behaviour of recent mayors and aldermen who 'having disregarded their oath and the needs of the people', had made ordinances for their own private advantage, had granted lands and tenements under the Common Seal to various individuals without consulting the Commonalty. (LBH, 38, original in LBH in French). In response to this complaint the mayor, the grocer John Ward, together with five aldermen (only) and eight commoners summoned the remaining aldermen and a number of men from the 'principal misteries' to come to Guildhall at eight in the morning on Friday 1 August.

This was a momentous meeting, held at the Guildhall in the presence of the mayor, the Recorder, nine aldermen, two sheriffs and representatives of forty-one crafts. A number of 'reforming' measures were agreed: the three aldermen who had been impeached in the last Parliament were ousted and their replacements chosen within days and an addition was made to the common seal of the city and the keys of the seal entrusted to four named men. But the main concern of this meeting was to provide for an annually-elected 'standing committee' of men elected by the crafts (no more than six from each of the greater crafts and four or two from the other crafts according to size) who should be ready to advise the mayor and aldermen when it was necessary to revise the city's ordinances 'and that nothing should be done in secret'. Decisions taken by the mayor and aldermen without the assent of this body were to be null and void. This body of men was to come quickly when summoned and should, in any case, meet at least twice a quarter. No complaints were to be dealt with at such meetings unless they affected at least a whole ward, or a whole mistry. (i.e. no personal or sectarian issues to be aired in this forum). Finally the meeting chose two aldermen and six commoners 'to survey and examine the ordinances in the Guildhall, and to present to the Commonalty those that are of benefit (profitables) to the City and those that are not'. (LBH, 41). Having put these reforms in place the citizens wrote, on the same day, to Edward III to deny the existence of any serious dissension in the city and to inform him that that the common council of the city was to be elected from the misteries. The letter was taken to the king by two aldermen and six commoners and they received an acknowledgement the following day (August 2<sup>nd</sup> LBH, 36-37). A week later the names of the men chosen by 47 misteries were sent into the Guildhall: only the Grocers, Mercers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Vintners, Skinners and Tailors sent in six names, all the rest sent four or two names, making 154 in all. In compensation for the time spent on this new advisory council, those elected were to be exempted from inquests and jury service (LBH, 41-44). The reforming meeting of 1 August 1376 was remarkable for the range of the matters dealt with and for the speed and efficiency with which the proposed reforms were introduced. A full and detailed account of the meeting is written, in French, into the Letter Book H of the city.

(NB the only major reform not mooted and implemented at the 1 August meeting was the annual election of aldermen. In fact aldermen were, according to charter of Edward II 1319 to be elected on St Gregory's day, 12 March, each year and not re-elected. Clearly this had been a dead letter but in his charter of 12 November 1376 Edward III reaffirmed the intention that aldermen should be removed each year and, in consequence all the aldermen stood down in March 1377 and new men were elected, LBH, 58)

Interesting as the reforms are, I would like to focus our attention on the work of the eight man committee set up to survey and examine the city's existing ordinances. It is easy to lose sight of them in the rush of reforming ordinances and disputes that characterise London in 1370s and 1380s (NB Ruth Bird says almost nothing of this aspect of the reforming agenda). In May 1377 when the committee would have been at work for nine months, five men were removed from the consultative council because they had betrayed its secrets and had been remiss in their duties. Three of these men, William Essex, draper, Richard Norbury mercer and Robert Fraunceys, goldsmith were members of the ordinances committee (LBH, 64). How did their dismissal, perhaps for failure to attend to the work of the committee, affect its work? It was now reduced to five men. Then, in July 1378, two years after the committee had first been set up, the mayor and commonalty (presumably the consultative council) elected 38 men to supervise the city's liberties and to act as seemed most expedient' (LBH, 94) 'ad superindendum libertas civitatis et inde ordinand- prout eis melius videbitur (viderunt) expedire'. Finally, on Thursday 23 September 1378 'a book of ordinances — liber de ordinacionibus — was finally read to a congregation of the Common Council (LBH, 99). Because certain articles in the book seemed 'difficiles' and in need of 'pleniori declaracione' a further committee of three aldermen and five commoners were elected to confer with the 36 (recte 38) men previously elected in July, and to examine, correct and 'conscribendum' the articles in the book so that there might be unanimous agreement.

No sooner had this revising committee been set up than William Cheyne, the Recorder complained about his fees. Since he had taken up office (first appearance January 1377) an ordinance had been introduced prohibiting the city's Recorder from taking fees or robes from any other lord. Because of this his income had been considerably diminished. Clearly this was one of the new ordinances that was causing trouble. The Common Council referred the Recorder's complaint to the eight man revising committee which had just been set up. On the following day (LBH, f. xcii. b.) the committee reported that in addition to the £40 salary and robe allowed to the Recorder in the book of ordinances, the Recorder should receive a further 40 marks from the Chamber (This decision was later confirmed by the Common Council, 3 November 1378, LBFI, 100)

So, we may presume that, from September 1378 the new book of ordinances as finally revised was, as it were, operative in the city. There are no further direct references to it in the city's records: it seems to have formed the background, the work of reference, against which the continuing debates about the ways in which the city should be governed were played out. There is plenty of evidence for these continuing discussions. In November 1380 the question whether the Common Council should be elected by the crafts or by the wards was opened up once more but not, apparently, resolved (LBH, 156). Then, during the Great Revolt of June 1381, some Londoners on June 14, led by a brewer, Walter atte Keye from Wood Street, 'brought fire with him in order to burn the Guildhall and a certain book called 'le Jubyle'. Thwarted in this attempt the men moved on to the sheriff's counter in Milk Street where they broke open chests 'looking for a book concerning the constitutions of the city of London (called 'le jubyle') in order to burn it if he could find it' (Dobson, Peasants' Revolt 1st edn.

1970, 227-8; from *Coram Rege Roll, Michaelmas 5 Richard II* (KB 27/482), Rex, membrane 43; see also Reville, 206). This is the first occasion in which the book of revised city ordinances is called the Jubilee Book but it seems clear, from other references, that this is the same book on which the various committees had laboured so hard between August 1376 and September 1378. Now it was under attack.

But during the mayoralty of John of Northampton (October 1381 to October 1383) the Jubilee Book appears to have been safe: perhaps because John of Northampton had been on the original drafting committee: the volume may well, therefore, have incorporated measures for the governing of the city which he believed to be for the best. Indeed in January 1383 the clerks, sergeants and valets who served the households of the mayor and the sheriffs were required to swear to uphold the ordinances, presumably those in the Jubilee Book (LBH, 209). But with the fall of Northampton, and the election of Nicholas Brembre as mayor in October 1383, the tide of events began to flow against the new reforms in government. In November Richard granted an *inspeximus* charter to the city in which, among other things, there was a clause reiterating that the mayor should not be required to take any oath other than that customarily taken in the time of the king's grandfather at the Exchequer, any statute or ordinance to the contrary notwithstanding (LBH, 224). In January 1384 the elections to the Common Council returned to the wards (not the crafts) and, two months later, it was decided that aldermen might be re-elected after serving for a year (LBH, 227, 231). Then in June Brembre summoned a special meeting of the Common Council where a committee of 43 of the 'best and wisest' men of the city should be appointed to consider (i) how the franchise of the city, granted by royal charters, might be best exercised (ii) the administration of the Stocks market in order to produce more revenue for the Bridge and (iii) to examine the articles and ordinances contained in the book called 'Jubile' with the view of preserving the good ordinances and rejecting the bad' (LBH, 234-5). The committee were to begin their work on the following Monday (June 27<sup>th</sup> working for an hour between 8 and 9am, and to continue with the work every day, festivals excepted, until the business was finished. Twelve were to form a quorum and no one was to be absent without good cause on pain of a fine of 40 pence. So it is clear that these matters were to have a high priority. Then, on the last day of July 1384, the committee presented its preliminary findings to a meeting of Common Council: they offered a series of new regulations about the way in which meetings of Common Council were to be held, the ways in which both the sheriffs and the mayor were to be elected; they also made provision for the regulation of the franchise and the administration of the Stocks market as they had been asked to do. The ordinances were read (*lieux*), heard (*oyez*) and understood (*entenduz*) by the whole common council and the other good folk present there and granted and confirmed for the common good and to be observed for ever.

Clearly the provisions in the Jubilee Book had been revised. Its final *quietus* did not come until March 1387, nearly three years later, when it was decided that the Jubilee Book should not simply be revised but, indeed as we have seen, that it should be burnt. And so, apparently it was. Walter atte Keye, the brewer of Wood Street, finally had his way.

But the burning of the Jubilee Book by Mayor Exton and the men of the Common Council of March 1387 was not accepted without protest. A series of petitions was presented to the February (Merciless) Parliament of 1388 (corrected from 1386) by a number of the London crafts complaining about a number of measures taken by recent mayors of London including Exton's high-handed action in burning the Jubilee Book. The mercers, who presented their petition in English protested that 'the most profitable points of true governance of the city, compiled together by long labour of discreet and wise men, without counsel of true men, for

(that) they should not be knowen nor continued, in the time of Nicholas Exton mayor, utterly were burnt' (Chambers and Daunt, 35; RP, III, 225, PRO SC8/20/997). The cordwainers (leathersellers) drew up their petition in French. They claimed that Exton had been elected mayor simply by the choice of his predecessor Nicholas Brembre, contrary to the customs of the city which were comprised in a book called 'le Jubilee'. In this book had been written all the good articles pertaining to the good government of the city. Moreover the aldermen and the good commons of the city had been sworn to uphold and maintain these customs forever, but Nicholas Exton and his accomplices had burnt the book without the consent of the good commons of the city to the great destruction and overthrowing (anientissement) of many good liberties, franchises and customs of the city' (RP, iii, 226). Petitions were also presented, presumably making the same complaint in varying ways, by men of the Broiderers, Saddlers, Founders, Pinner, Painters, Armourers, Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, Bladesmiths, Tailors and Goldsmiths. The absence of petitions from any of the victualling crafts may, or may not, be significant.

So, that is the last we hear of the Jubilee Book, so called because it was initiated in August 1376 in the Jubilee, or fiftieth year, of the reign of Edward III. It was a book, clearly, which had taken two years to compile. It had been the work of several committees. It contained a collection, or selection, of city ordinances and copies of the oaths to be taken by civic officials. As the case of William Cheyne the Recorder suggests, there was an attempt to cut out malpractice and to focus the attention of the city's servants on the business of the city. Yet it was clearly not a 'harmless' or 'neutral' collection of city customs for it aroused strong passions, among those who wanted to see it burnt and among those who believed that the burning of the Jubilee Book had destroyed something of value, the work of many months, and that its destruction had annihilated the good liberties, franchises and customs of the city. Barrie Dobson, in printing the indictment of Walter atte Keye noted his frenzied search for the Jubilee Book in 1381 and observed that 'the exact nature of this controversial volume remains a mystery' (Dobson, op.cit, 227).

Let us turn now to a manuscript in Trinity College Cambridge, MS 0.3.11. I was led to this manuscript by the work of Anne Sutton and others on John Vale's book. It is a late 15c mss, almost entirely in English and emanating from the circle of Sir Thomas Cook, alderman of Vintry ward (1456-58), then Broad Street (1458-68), then Bread Street (1470-71). He was sheriff in 1453-4 and Mayor 1462-3. The mss is written almost entirely in a single neat hand and it is almost entirely in English. Although there are a few documents added later at the beginning and at the end (1483, 1484, 1494, 1521, 1532). The manuscript, although written in the same hand and at the same time (c.1458-71) yet divides clearly into two sections: ff.1-122 which are followed by 10 blank folios and then the second section (ff.133-157). The first section is extremely interesting in its own right, although it is not this section on which I propose to concentrate this evening. It seems to be a kind of aldermen's vademecum, compiled perhaps for, or in the household of, Thomas Cook. (see Lynne Mooney catalogue, 1995). There are lists of charters granted by the Crown to the city, a translation of Nicholas of Oresme's *de Moneta* items copied out from the city's letter books, a list of ward assessments for the 15<sup>th</sup>, a list of the city companies, items dating from the period of Cook's mayoralty, city customs relating to the markets, agreements with the city rectors about tythes, ordinances relating to brokers in London, wardmote articles and writs received by Thomas Cook as alderman of Broad Street, oaths to be taken by juries, ward officials and men entering the freedom. There are regulations about holding the sheriffs court, prototype writs and, interestingly, a series of civic customs about women trading sole, or with their husbands. There are prototype legal cases and gifts of goods and chattels. This section is full of useful

material well-chosen to help an alderman in carrying out his multifarious tasks. It is exactly the sort of collection in which I would expect to find a London chronicle but, in this case, there is no such chronicle. There is, however a note on the founding of London and Rome (London is older) and a short treatise on 'the exposition of vowels' in the Briton and Saxon tongues. The volume would have proved of considerable utility in the household of a late 15c London alderman.

Following the ten blank folios there are 34 carefully written folios, again in the same hand and, again, in English. These are the folios which, I now believe, constitute a copy of the Jubilee book. What leads me to this conclusion? Firstly the preamble or introduction:

'La preheme del The probleme in the newe booke of thancient custome and usages in the citee of London compiled and affermed bi the maire aldermen and communes of the same citee the yeer of kyng Richard the seconde the first yeer' (i.e. June 1377 to June 1378). The committee was at work compiling the Jubilee Book in the years August 1376 to September 1378. The page is torn (deliberately?) but it is clear that there is a very long list of crafts which includes such lowly crafts as fusters, woodmongers, tanners and paternosterers 'which persons aforesaid, considering many good articles touching the principal governance of the said city and the good customs and ancient usages of the same to be in diverse great books of the same city comprised, and that great labour and diligence was to search and seek in times convenable, and of which the commons of the city ne mown not be at a very great certainty without right great costages to officers, ordained and of one accord they have assented that all the articles ensuing to the honour of God...' So the preamble and the account of the meeting accord well with the various meetings of the summer of 1378. Clearly those who compiled this volume were concerned, not about economic supremacy of one particular group (last two items probably added after the original volume compiled) but, rather about how the city should be governed, how to make the city's officers accountable and how to make city government accessible and intelligible to the citizens at large.

It may at this point be reasonable to pause to consider what were the 'diverse great books of the city' to which the drafting committee had access and which could only be consulted with great labour and diligence. There were, of course, the city's letter books dating from the time of Edward I but to search in these would indeed be a considerable labour. Then there were the city's customals: the Liber de Antiquis Legibus compiled by Arnald Fitx Thedinar c1274; and the two books bequeathed to the city by Andrew Horn who died in 1328, the Liber Horn and the Liber Custumarum. There was another customal, known as D'Arcy's customal (Henry D'Arcy was mayor in 1337-9) which is now lost but which was still among the London books when John Carpenter was compiling Liber Albus in c. 1419. (Rikart, custom relating to women). Of these customals the only ones that would have been of much use to the compilers of the Jubilee Book were the Liber Custumarum and D'Arcy's Customal. Compared with these earlier volumes, the little Jubilee Book of just 25 small folios must have seemed extremely user-friendly and it was in English.

Of course it was not simply a compilation out of the city's older volumes. It interpolated material, tightened up procedures and attempted to make city officers, whether paid or annually elected, answerable to those who paid or elected them. The means of achieving these desirable goals was to be the oath, expanded to cover a wider range of responsibilities and to preclude more specific misbehaviour. But let us take the case of the mayor's oath. Here we have a version of the mayor's oath (in French) copied into Letter Book D c. 1320. The authors of the Jubilee Book have taken that oath but added clauses to it. Where the earlier oath simply required the mayor to treat the people of his bailiwick lawfully and

rightfully, the Jubilee book adds ‘without extortion to any doing by colour of your office’. Moreover, another complete clause has been added ‘And that ye be tender and take heed to the rights of orphans and of the chamber to save and to maintain after the laws and usages of the city ne suffer no orphan to be married within age.. .And that you attend to all the ordinances within this book in all their articles and them sustain to your power, ne assent without the common council of the said city to any ordinance or judgement contrary to that’. When John Carpenter inserted the mayor’s oath into the Liber Albus it was the earlier version that he included not the more dirigiste version of the Jubilee book. In a similar manner, the Recorder’s oath has been extended. As we have seen William Cheyne, who took up office shortly before January 1377, complained that since taking up office a new ordinance had been made whereby he was not allowed to receive any fee or robes from a strange lord or otherwise. This had led to a diminution of the profits of the office. And indeed the Recorder’s oath in the Jubilee Book contains a clause at the end ‘Ne no fees ne robes of any foreign lord ne of money ye shal nat bere, wear ne take during your office’. When the Jubilee committee considered the Recorder’s complaint they resolved the problem not by allowing him to take fees and robes from strangers, but by paying him more. Another complete clause has been added ‘And that ye be tender and take heed to the rights of orphans and of the chamber to save and. The Recorder, like the mayor, had also to swear to maintain the ordinances in the book. There seems not to have been a pre-existing oath administered to Common Councilmen and so the oath in the Jubilee Book is exactly the same as the one entered in Letter Book H under the date 9 August 1376 when all the men of the misteries (154) came to be sworn and to form the standing council of the city, except that the version in the Letter Book is in Latin and that in the Jubilee Book is in English. What the Jubilee Book includes, but which is not found in the Latter Book, is a ruling that any craft that failed to send in the names of its representatives was to be fined 6s and 8d ‘without any redemption’ and any individual so named, who failed to attend without good excuse, was to be fined 2s.

### **The Significance of the Jubilee Book**

It is emphatically not a collection of partisan ordinances, whether anti-victuallers or pro-anyone else. It is, rather, a piece of constitution-drafting: an attempt to provide the citizens with something they had not had before, namely an account of how the city was to be governed. Splendid as the Liber Ordinacionem and the Latter Books are, they are not user-friendly if, say, what you want to know is the procedure to be followed in electing the mayor. So the first thing to notice about the book is, if you like, its neutrality. This is borne out by the list of the men who, at different stages of its composition and revision were involved with the creation of the Jubilee Book. The original ‘Jubilee Committee’ comprised eight men: two drapers (including John of Northampton), two grocers, one mercer, one goldsmith, one fishmonger and one vintner. All of those men, apart from the grocer Robert Hatfield who died in 1379/81, were also involved later on various revising committees. If we look at the various consultative committees that were set up to approve/revise the ordinances in the Jubilee Book they are. Clearly, not partisan in the sense of dividing along the victualler/non-victualler line. In short, those who were involved in the creation of the Jubilee Book were not partisan. It may have owed its creation to the ‘reforming’ zeal of John of Northampton and his supporters in the late 1370s but it was not a ‘Drapers’ book’. Its creation was an attempt to clarify city government and to make it accessible and intelligible. It also gave a prominent role to the comparatively new institution, the Common Council (note that information about that comes at the beginning of the book) and, in that sense, it was a ‘radical’ compilation. It was the creation of a group of men who, in the aftermath of the self-

interested aldermanic government of the 1360s and early 1370s wanted a new, more open, more consultative, system for governing the city. The Jubilee Book was their blue-print for this new style of government. The problem was that there were strong economic rivalries abroad in London at this time and, of course, the newly-prominent Common Council became the forum for airing many of these disputes. The Jubilee Book may have brought a more democratic or consultative system of government to London but it did not, and probably for exactly that reason, bring a more orderly or peaceful system. Indeed the system of government envisaged in the Jubilee Book probably aggravated the tensions and conflicts in the city in the 1370s and 1380s.

### **The Mayor's election, 1383**

It was for this reason that so many Londoners, from a wide spectrum of crafts, agreed to revise and, ultimately, to burn the Jubilee Book. It was seen, probably wrongly, as the cause of the troubles and disputes that beset civic government. With historical hindsight we can see that the conflicts were the result of a number of factors (shifts in patterns of overseas trade, rise in wages, growth of consumer spending, drop in population, rise in living standards) and that the Jubilee Book (or the revised system of city government) was not the cause of these conflicts but, rather, it got caught up in those conflicts and, like an innocent victim, was destroyed. We know that the conflicts continued after the burning of the Jubilee Book. But the events of the early 1380s had, I would suggest, discredited the more radical attempts at reforming London government. Doubtless many of those who had helped to construct the Jubilee Book in 1376-78 (eg Geoffrey Cremelford and William Tonge who were on the original committee and the 1384 revising committee) must have been disappointed at the failure of a brave experiment.

One of the most striking, or radical, aspects of the Jubilee Book was that it was written in English. How do I know that it was written in English? It is, of course, quite possible that it was, originally, written either in Latin or in French and that the late 15c English version that we now have is simply a translation. The rest of the 'Cook' volume is a translation so the Jubilee Book may well be also. Obviously I am not able to judge the style, or forms, of the English and hence to be able to place it chronologically. So I gave the introduction to Professor Anne Hudson and, without telling her anything about the mss (except that it was late 15c) asked her to comment on the English. She pronounced that it was a mixture of forms, some which would be common in late 14c and 'decidedly old-fashioned a century later'. Also there were other forms which would 'be extremely improbable in a London text of the late 14c'. So, she concluded 'the language seems to me puzzling'. So, I rang her up and said, rather to her surprise, that that was much what I hope she would say. Could the explanation be, I suggested, that this was an original late 14c English text copied by a late 15c scribe? Anne Hudson thought that that explanation exactly fitted the conjunction of old and new forms which she had encountered in the text. So, supposing the Jubilee Book was written in English, does this not help to explain its 'radicalism'? What, perhaps, was 'radical' or disturbing or unsettling about it was its form, as much as its content.

It might be argued that this would be an impossibly early date for such a book to be written in English. Nothing written in English has survived among the city's records before November 1383 (just after Brembre has been elected mayor and in the aftermath of the rioting at the October mayor's election) when three proclamations about conventicles, the sale of fish and nightwalking issued by Brembre were copied into the city's Letter Book (LBH, 221:

Memorials, 480-8). Note date. But although the city may have been slow to use English 'officially' (cf national government) yet it is clear from the surviving London guild returns that the crafts and, parish fraternities, were drawing up ordinances and oaths in English from a much earlier date. The Carpenters appear to have drawn up ordinances in English as early as 1333, the Pouchmakers in 1356, the curriers in 1367-8, the guild of the Virgin in St Stephen Coleman Street in 1369, the guild of St Anne in St Lawrence Jewry in 1372 and the Joiners in St James Garlickhythe in 1375. These are just the guilds who made returns in 1388 which have survived. What I am suggesting is that English was a much more 'official' or 'governmental' language in London in mid-14c than the surviving records would suggest. The men who came together to compile the Jubilee Book were not illiterate louts. Many of them doubtless knew Latin and/or French (Thomas Carleton) but they were also used to using English in the books or ordinances or oaths associated with the crafts and fraternities to which they belonged. If the governing of their crafts could be conducted in English, why not that of the city? In this way city government would be made truly accessible and city officers would be truly accountable. It may have been this use of English which was the most destabilizing aspect of the Jubilee Book. The final entry in the book (before what I judge to be additions) on f.154v reads: 'All pleaters that pleaten within the city shall pleat in English and in no other manner so that the lay people mowen know the manner of the pleas'.

It then goes on to regulate the behaviour of attorneys, -- no cry or noise-- , so that the people of the law and the good men of the city 'mowen bien harkening and hearing in due manner of their needs and business that they have to pursue in the courts'.

Here again the emphasis on access, intelligibility, participation is clear. But, of course, the entry of 'lay people' into what Steven Justice has called 'clerkly space' caused monks and royal officials to throw up their hands in horror in 1381 and it seems to have provoked a similar reaction in London in 1384-87. When 'lay people' entered clerkly space then there were riots, unruly debates, shouting (rather than reason) and a plethora of opinions. Better to return to the old and safe ways...

### **The author of the Jubilee Book**

Is it possible to detect a 'moving spirit' behind the creation of the Jubilee Book? At first I thought, largely because of the convoluted language of the preamble, that the author might be Thomas Usk, secretary of John of Northampton's 'party'. It could be Usk and, indeed, it could be a number of now- anonymous clerks, the men who were writing out the ordinances and oaths for the crafts and fraternities. The likely candidates would be the current chamberlain (like Andrew Horn earlier) or the Common Clerk (like John Carpenter in the early 15c). Both these men dominated civic administration in their day. But neither the Chamberlain (William de Eynesham 1374-78) nor the Common Clerk (Henry Perot 1375-99) seem to have made much mark in the city. The man who dominates city record-keeping in this period, and appears frequently in the pages of the Letter Books is Ralph Strode, the Common Pleader or Common Sergeant. I would like to suggest that he may have been the 'moving spirit' behind the Jubilee Book. As many of you will know, Ralph Strode was an associate and friend of Chaucer. Troilus and Crisevde is dedicated to 'moral Gower' and 'philosophical Strode'. He had been a fellow of Merton College (1359-60), engaged in academic debate with Wyclif in the early 1370s and (if this is the same man) was elected Common Sergeant of the city in 1373 (left Oxford and got married). Derek Pearsall believes that the Oxford Ralph Strode and the London one are one and the same man 'The presumed

shift of the same Ralph Strode from the university to a career offering more opportunity for wealth and public advancement, and perhaps also the opportunity to get married, is many times more plausible than the existence of two Ralph Strodes, more or less exact contemporaries, of equal eminence'. (Pearsall, Chaucer 134). And of course, this is just the time when Chaucer was living in London. But why do I think that Ralph Strode may have been the moving spirit behind the Jubilee Book?

Firstly it is worth considering the office that Ralph Strode held from 1373: the Common Serjeant was, very specifically, the officer of the Commons and conducted prosecutions on their behalf. He is 'their advocate and mouth as the Recorder is the mouth of the Mayor and Aldermen', (Masters, Guildhall Miscellany 1967, 380). It was his duty to present to the mayor and aldermen, or to a congregation of the citizens, petitions, complaints and infringements of the customs of the city. And he had a particular responsibility for city orphans, speaking on their behalf, watching over their interests and bringing their guardians to account.

Ralph Strode took up office in November 1373 and, in October 1375 was granted a house over Aldersgate (LBH, 15). It was he who, on behalf of the commonalty of the city, on 1 August 1376 brought forward the 'grievous complaint' of the Commonalty to the Mayor and Aldermen which set in train the various reforms (including the Jubilee Book) which I described at the start of this paper. So he is there, from the start as the spokesman for the reformers. It may be in recognition of his work in searching through the city's old books that Strode, in October 1377, was granted the Aldersgate house for life, not simply during his tenure of the office of Common Sergeant. (Later cancelled, then granted a pension in lieu) So, Strode is very active in the city at the years leading up to the complaints that led to the reforms, and in the years when the book was being compiled. He ceased to be Common Sergeant in 1381 but was retained to act as counsel to the city. (Died c.1387?)

But his high profile and obvious abilities are not, I agree, sufficient reason to justify my suggestion that he was the 'author' of the Jubilee book. There are some signals, perhaps, in the content of the book itself. Earlier I read out a clause that had been added to the mayor's oath and is not found in other copies of the mayor's oath 'And that ye be tender and take heed to the rights of orphans and of the chamber to save and to maintain after the laws and usages of the city ne suffer no orphans to be married within age...'. A similar clause is to be found in the Recorder's oath. From the pages of the Letter Books it is very clear that Ralph Strode was extremely active in promoting and protecting the rights and goods of orphans in his capacity as Common Sergeant, and so it may have been he who tried to ensure that other city officers should also take care of civic orphans.

The oath of the Common Sergeant as recorded in the Jubilee Book is interesting. There does not exist, I believe, any earlier version of the oath of the Common sergeant but there is a 15c English version copied into LBD (p. 196-7) and a French version in Liber Albus (ii, 122). The later version ends with this final clause 'And attendaunt ye shal be on the mair aldermen and comyns for the causes and nedis of this Cite at alle tyme that ye shall be requirid and chargid'. The Jubilee Book version (Strode) is 'and the commune needis of the citee at al tymes that yee shalbe required bi the Communes in al places wher neede shalbe trewly yee shal shewe and tel and entrently pursue for the commune profite of the citee'. There is no mention in Strode's version (if so it is) of the oath, of the responsibility of the Common Sergeant to the Mayor and Aldermen but, solely, to the Commons of the city.

So, finally, if the Jubilee Book was burnt, how did it survive to be copied in the 1470s? Clearly I have to argue that there was more than one copy. The book, perhaps the most formal copy which was kept and used in the chamber of the city, was indeed burnt. And, of course, the public burning symbolised the overturning of a policy, the return to the old ways of doing things, the old ways of governing the city (although there were changes, cf. decline of serfdom). This copy of the Jubilee Book was probably preserved in a private household. Perhaps one of the committee members had a copy? Or Strode himself? It was not so long that it could not be copied reasonably quickly. I don't think that it was available to John Carpenter and it seems to me to be of considerable significance that he chose to compile his *custumal* in Latin in spite of the fact that English was becoming increasingly the language of government. But the attempt to make civic government accountable, open, and consultative was not forgotten but lived on in the consciousness of London citizens. When, many years ago I stumbled across Ralph Holland and the radicals of the 1430s and 1440s I was surprised at the sophisticated level of their grasp of the way in which city government worked, or could work. I should not have been so surprised if I had been aware then, as I am now, of the contents of the Jubilee Book and of the reforming programme of which it was an expression. Historians, by focussing on the economic rivalries and the conflicts of strong personalities (aided and abetted by their supporters) have failed to appreciate the underlying consensus which attempted to produce a blue-print for a more broadly-based, open and intelligible system of government. Just because a copy of the Jubilee Book was publicly burnt in 1387 we should not lose sight of - to use the words of the petition of the good folk of the mercery to Parliament in 1388 — 'the long labours of discrete and wise men' who compiled together 'the most profitable points of true government'.