

Henry Knighton, the Commons and the crisis of governance in the 1380s

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Abstract

This discussion provides the first in-depth investigation into the meaning and significance of a quite exceptional petition presented by the parliamentary Commons in the reign of Richard II. The petition survives as a unique copy in the chronicle of Henry Knighton: it was not recorded on the parliament roll. Knighton inserted the petition into his more general account of the Merciless Parliament of 1388. In this discussion I argue that the petition is most likely to have been presented in the parliament that met in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and as a result holds great constitutional significance.

I have been teaching a 'Special Subject' on the reign of Richard II for many years.¹ Each time my students and I turn our attention to the Merciless Parliament of 1388, when the king was purged of his closest advisors and favourites, we are confronted with one of the most important, and also one of the most puzzling, expressions of popular discontent dating to the fourteenth century. This comes in the form of a petition recorded by the Leicester-based chronicler Henry Knighton in his general account of this parliament (see Appendix).² It is a petition presented in the name of the 'commons of your said realm', which almost certainly signified the Commons in parliament; yet there is no sign of this petition in the official record of parliament, the parliament roll, nor any indication that it was recorded elsewhere. The puzzle surrounding the document concerns not just its unusual provenance, but to a far greater degree its content, which presents an extraordinarily damning indictment of the state of the realm and the abject failure of royal government. Possibly because of significant interpretative problems, the petition has never before been subjected to detailed analysis.³ Historians have for the

¹ I inherited this 'Special Subject' from my predecessor at Nottingham, Dr. A. K. McHardy. I owe Dr. McHardy an enormous debt of gratitude for her continuing interest in my teaching, our wonderfully productive research collaborations and her hugely important contributions to scholarship on the reign of Richard II, not least the publication of *The Reign of Richard II: From Minority to Tyranny, 1377–97*, ed. and trans. A. K. McHardy (Manchester, 2012). My thanks to Dr. McHardy for her valuable critique of an earlier version of this paper, to Prof. Michael Jones for checking my transcription and to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. All errors are my own.

² British Library, Cotton MS. Tiberius C. VII, fos. 216r–217r. The Appendix provides a slightly modified transcription and translation of the petition provided by Geoffrey Martin in *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. and trans. G. H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), pp. 442–50.

³ It is mentioned in passing, and at that only in a footnote, in N. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, Conn., 1997), p. 194 n. 72; and is not considered at all in C. Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377–99* (Oxford, 2008). Nor is it discussed in the introduction to the Merciless Parliament, in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson and others (Leicester, 2005), CD-ROM version (hereafter *P.R.O.M.E.*). There is limited discussion in A. Galloway, 'The literature of 1388 and the politics of pity in Gower's *Confessio amantis*', in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. E. Steiner and C. Barrington (Ithaca, N.Y., 2002), pp. 67–104, at pp. 81–2.

most part confined their remarks to commenting on its neglect.⁴ In what follows I take a close look at this petition and offer a new date and a new context. I also suggest new perspectives on the role of the Commons as agitators for reform in the 1380s, and on their interaction with the Lords in the formulation of a common parliamentary agenda at a time when a prolonged crisis in the governance of the realm had created a deeply felt sense of political malaise.

But first, let us turn to the form and content of the petition. The fact that Knighton introduces the petition with a short preamble underlines the point that this was a separate document incorporated by the chronicler into his work to flesh out his main narrative. Like other chroniclers, Knighton drew on many types of sources to inform his writing, some of which were summarized or paraphrased, while others were reproduced as verbatim copies of the original texts.⁵ Our petition falls into the second category; the fact that it is copied out in Anglo-Norman French, in contrast to the use by Knighton of Latin, underlines this fact. Knighton's preamble is short and to the point. It declares that the Lords and Commons, 'seeing the monstrous and most wicked oppressions made by some of the king's advisers ... with one assent proposed to the king to have amendment and remedy, in the following form'. Knighton's identification of the petition as the work of both Lords and Commons is noteworthy, as is the emphasis he places on their common purpose. In fact, the Lords were the intended *recipients* of the petition with the king, not its co-authors alongside the Commons. The address clause of the petition makes this clear when it states that 'the humble commons of your said realm show the matter and the harm that have come about ...' (#2). In this preliminary part, the Commons present a general plea to the king and 'to all other our lords of the realm' to provide a remedy for the 'perils and damage which will appear from one day to the next if they be not soon redressed' (#2). The remaining sections, or subject areas, detail points that are more specific: the earlier ones identify problems; the later ones outline remedies.

This, then, places the document more squarely within the tradition of a parliamentary common petition, though there are some important divergences from the standard form of a common petition. The petition was conceived as a single, consolidated text written to articulate a unified programme of reform. It has subclauses, or subsections, but each builds on what precedes it to present a comprehensive and all-encompassing critique of the state of the kingdom. The later 'remedial' stages of the petition seem to respond to the earlier 'petitionary' parts. This format contrasts markedly with the conventional lists of common petitions written up in the parliament roll. These usually comprised a series of self-standing requests, each written out with a separate address clause, and each dealing with topics usually quite different and unrelated to those aired in the preceding or subsequent petitions.⁶ The petition recorded in Knighton's chronicle is also quite different to the only other set of common petitions not to be recorded on the parliament roll in Richard II's reign. These were presented in the Cambridge Parliament of September 1388 and recorded in the Westminster Chronicle; in form and in content they stand much closer to a conventional set of common petitions, addressing a range of

⁴ 'Rather astonishingly, this petition appears to have escaped attention' (J. J. N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom, 1377-99* (London, 1972), p. 237). 'The petition has not received the attention it deserves' (A. Tuck, *Richard II and the English Nobility* (London, 1973), p. 126 n. 3).

⁵ Knighton's modern editor, G. H. Martin, has identified at least 110 texts that Knighton used in writing his chronicle (*Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. xxxii-xl). See also discussion by C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: the Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), pp. 15-16.

⁶ G. Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 5; and *Early Common Petitions in the English Parliament, c.1290-c. 1420*, ed. W. M. Ormrod, H. Killick and P. Bradford (Camden Society, 5th series, lii, Cambridge, 2017).

different topics on behalf of a wide selection of lobby groups.⁷ This explains why I refer to the document recorded by Henry Knighton as a single petition, and as a ‘petition of the Commons’ or Commons’ petition, rather than as a common petition or set of common petitions.⁸ These are technicalities, but important nonetheless.

The content of the petition is intensely political in nature. It is, in essence, a scathing critique of the state of the realm, and of the particular failings of government, followed by a comprehensive scheme for reform and revitalization. In virtually all the key areas of royal governance – the conduct of royal agents in the localities, the discreditable actions of senior royal justices, the squandering of the proceeds of taxation, the neglect of the defence of the realm, the financial oppression of the poor and the obstruction of parliamentary process – the rule of the king is discredited. It is to be noted, however, that criticism is directed not just towards the king and his officials: insofar as the unruly localities are concerned, the officials of ecclesiastical and seigneurial lords are also blamed. The problem thus lies with corrupt and ineffective authority in general. Significantly, responsibility for restoring the situation and ensuring that the crown is ‘honourably governed in all honour and honest delight’ (#11) is not in the first instance given to the king, but is to be entrusted to the ‘ordinance of his nobles and the most wise of those here [in parliament] assembled’ (#7), in a specially constituted reform committee. This was therefore a programme which aimed not so much to reform the king’s governance as to substitute it for the rule of a council acting on his behalf.

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In seeking to uncover the context for these complaints, historians have inevitably been guided by the dating ascribed to them by Henry Knighton. The petition appears in that part of his chronicle which deals with the events of the Merciless Parliament of 1388. The Merciless Parliament met in two sessions, the first between 3 February and 20 March, the second between 13 April and 4 June. Knighton’s own coverage of this assembly is rudimentary and disjointed. In the first part of his account, he lists the names of the royal justices who were arrested on the first day of parliament, before explaining that they had been incarcerated for helping the king overturn the legal basis of the commission of government set up in 1386.⁹ He then gives the names of the courtiers who were tried for treason by the Lords Appellant, detailing the terms of the sentences of outlawry passed against those who were not present in parliament to face their accusers.¹⁰ Then there is a lengthy exposition of the proceedings taken against the Lollards, a topic that Knighton seems to have attached more significance to than the parliament roll would suggest was actually the case in parliament itself.¹¹ At this point the petition from the Commons is inserted.¹² There is then discussion of a visit of a Flemish mission seeking peace,¹³ before Knighton returns to the principal business of the parliament, the trials of Richard’s servants and friends, for which the chronicler includes the full and lengthy text of the parliamentary appeals.¹⁴ Coverage of the Merciless Parliament ends with

⁷ *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381–1394*, ed. and trans. L. C. Hector and B. F. Harvey (Oxford, 1982), pp. 356–68. For discussion, see A. Tuck, ‘The Cambridge Parliament, 1388’, *English Historical Review*, lxxxiv (1969), 225–43.

⁸ As such, it represents a consolidated schedule of reform reminiscent of an earlier phase of petitioning by the Commons in parliament, for which see G. L. Harriss, ‘The Commons’ Petitions of 1340’, *English Historical Review*, lxxviii (1963), 625–54; and Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 133–41.

⁹ *Knighton’s Chronicle*, pp. 430–2.

¹⁰ *Knighton’s Chronicle*, p. 432.

¹¹ *Knighton’s Chronicle*, pp. 432–43.

¹² *Knighton’s Chronicle*, pp. 442–50.

¹³ *Knighton’s Chronicle*, pp. 450–2.

¹⁴ *Knighton’s Chronicle*, pp. 452–98.

Knighton's own account of the discovery of the royal judge, Robert Tresilian, and the grisly fate to befall him and the other victims of this aptly named assembly.¹⁵ The point to underline is that the Commons' petition is not embedded within a secure, tightly controlled chronological narrative of the events of the Merciless Parliament; rather, it is incorporated, along with other miscellaneous documents, into a loosely ordered and rather muddled compilation.

Historians have tried hard to make the contents of the petition fit with the circumstances of the Merciless Parliament. One of the problems is that the petition is devoid of detail that would allow precise dating. Petitions were not routinely dated, but often their contents provide sufficient clues to allow a chronological context to be recovered.¹⁶ The petition recorded by Knighton has only one such significant intimation. This is its reference to rebellion. In the first clause, the petition notes the harm that has come about to the crown, nobles, gentlemen and all the estates of the realm 'by the rising and disturbance lately amongst the lesser people of the kingdom' (#2). Later on, in the fifth clause, further reference to rebellion is made: 'And there are many reasons, very redoubtable lord, why the said commons might rise ... not least that you and your lords have for so long wasted time in this parliament' (#6). J. J. N. Palmer considered this second reference to mean that an uprising was *in progress* at the time when parliament was sitting and so quite rightly ruled out the Peasants' Revolt, for no parliament met during the period of the rebellion in the summer of 1381.¹⁷ Apparent validation of Palmer's judgement, and of Knighton's dating of the petition to 1388, was to be found in the work of Thomas Favent, the enigmatic London-based political writer who wrote a lengthy account celebrating the events of the Merciless Parliament.¹⁸ In his work Favent describes the delays to beset the trial of Richard II's close friend and ex-tutor Simon Burley during parliament, because Burley had powerful protectors who sought to lessen his sentence or else gain his release altogether. Favent notes that the Commons became exasperated by these delays and wished to depart from parliament to attend to their own business – they were evidently not *that* concerned about Burley's fate. But he then says that 'there was tumult among the lower commons in diverse regions of England, for example, in Kent and its vicinity: because of Simon, an insurrection had silently risen up', at which point the arguing over Burley ended, and he too joined the list of courtiers who came to an unfortunate end in this assembly. It was the occurrence of what Palmer described as 'fairly extensive peasant risings in southern England in the spring of 1388' that appears to have provided the crucial evidence linking the petition recorded by Knighton with the tumultuous events of the Merciless Parliament.

On this basis, those who have considered the petition, however fleetingly, have suggested that it was, in effect, an indictment not of Richard's rule, but of the rule of the Lords Appellant. Thus, the editor of the modern edition of *Knighton's Chronicle*,

¹⁵ *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 498–505.

¹⁶ Where petitions are enrolled, this is not usually a problem because rolls are normally dated. But loose, it is altogether a different matter. The methodological challenges presented by the absence of contemporary dating is usually associated with private petitions, which ceased to be enrolled after the first quarter of the fourteenth century, but a good number of common petitions also exist as single, undated (and unenrolled) requests (*Early Common Petitions*).

¹⁷ Palmer translates the phrase 'queux les ditz comines leveront' as 'the Commons have revolted', which, when combined with the subsequent clause, suggests that revolt had broken out because of the delay to parliament, and therefore that the two events were synchronized (Palmer, *England, France and Christendom*, p. 237). With slight modification, I adopt the translation in the modern edition of *Knighton's Chronicle*.

¹⁸ For recent discussion of Thomas Favent, see G. Dodd, 'Was Thomas Favent a political pamphleteer? Faction and politics in later fourteenth-century London', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxvii (2011), 397–418.

Geoffrey Martin, suggested that ‘it [the petition] appears a vivid reflection of popular discontent with the Appellants’ conduct by the summer of 1388’.¹⁹ In a similar vein, Nigel Saul, writing of the delays to Burley’s trial, noted that ‘there were risings in the south [of England] in April [1388], and shortly afterwards the commons submitted a petition highly critical of the Appellants’.²⁰ More recently, Clementine Oliver writes that the petition ‘tells us of the growing unpopularity of the Appellants during the period of their attack against the Ricardians’.²¹

There are, however, serious problems – three, to be precise – with this perspective, and it is to these that we will now turn. First, if we accept that the petition, although addressed to the king, was really an attack on the Appellants’ failings in government, we must consider whether the Appellants had been long enough in power to have done so much damage to the realm. Richard II’s forces, led by Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford, had been roundly defeated at Radcot Bridge on 20 December 1387. The king met with his magnate opponents in the Tower of London on 30 December 1387, after which (when Richard had possibly been temporarily deposed) it was agreed that parliament would be called to bring to trial the king’s unpopular ministers. The Appellants effectively took control of government on 1 January 1388, which meant they had only a month to leave their mark on the governance of the realm before parliament opened on 3 February. It is possible that the petition was not presented until the second session of parliament, when the trial of Burley took place (13 April to 5 May), but even if this were the case, one might still question whether sufficient time had passed for the Appellants to be so closely associated with the underlying defects of government. We know that by the time the Cambridge Parliament sat, from 10 September 1388, there *was* widespread disenchantment with Appellant rule, manifested notably in the campaign of the Commons to restrict the distribution of badges and liveries;²² but there is little evidence – other than that found in Knighton’s petition – to support the idea that this discontent was fully formed and openly voiced at the time of the Merciless Parliament.

Some of the issues raised in the petition, especially its focus on the fiscal burden and financial mismanagement, also seem at odds with the particular circumstances of the Merciless Parliament. In the petition the Commons lament the heavy and unsupportable burden of taxation that had been endured in recent years, commenting on the fact that ‘these five years past they have year by year been put to various tallages’ (#5). They also declare later that ‘any further charges upon your said kingdom would be unbearable and not to be sustained without utterly destroying it’ (#10). Yet in the two years prior to the Merciless Parliament, only half a fifteenth and tenth had been levied and the collection of this had been completed by 2 February 1387: no one had been paying direct taxes for a full year before the Merciless Parliament met in February 1388.²³ To claim in 1388 that the kingdom was buckling under the weight of unreasonable financial demands thus seems, on the face of it, to have been rather straining credibility.

¹⁹ Knighton’s *Chronicle*, p. 442 n. 2; see also his comment (p. lxxi) that the petition ‘reveals substantial discontent in the spring of 1388, when the reformers had achieved an imposing tally of executions, but nothing in the way of administrative reform’.

²⁰ Saul, *Richard II*, p. 194 n. 72.

²¹ C. Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering in Fourteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 179.

²² Tuck, ‘Cambridge Parliament’; N. E. Saul, ‘The Commons and the abolition of badges’, *Parliamentary History*, ix (1990), 302–15; and R. L. Storey, ‘Liveries and commissions of the peace, 1388–90’, in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. F. R. H. Du Boulay and C. M. Barron (London, 1971), pp. 131–52.

²³ M. Jurkowski, C. L. Smith and D. Crook, *Lay Taxes in England and Wales, 1188–1699* (Kew, 1998), pp. 65–6.

Elsewhere in the petition the Commons ask the king to ‘examine straitly your wars’ with the view to ensuring that ‘in this parliament the taxes, other grievances, and the charges imposed heretofore upon your commons for want of good counsel ... may cease and be remitted in support of your said commons’ (#9). Here again, we must be careful with the chronology. In the course of the high summer of 1388, the Appellant regime was to prove itself no better at waging war than when governance and military strategy had been in the hands of Richard II and his advisors, but the ignominious fate to befall the earl of Arundel’s naval expedition in July and the humiliating defeat of English forces at Otterburn on 5 August both occurred after the conclusion of the Merciless Parliament and cannot, therefore, have informed the Commons’ jaundiced perspective on military matters.²⁴ To claim that the Commons opposed the bellicose ambitions of the Appellants and their associated costs during the Merciless Parliament is also to ignore the fact that M.P.s granted the Appellant regime a lay subsidy of half a fifteenth and tenth to be spent (as was specified) ‘on the expedition [of the earl of Arundel] to be made by sea’; and, in a highly unusual move, this grant was made not at the end of the parliament, as was now the custom, but midway through the first session, on 10 March.²⁵ Such was the sensitivity attached to the timing of the grant that M.P.s made a particular point of stressing that this break from convention should not be used as a precedent. These actions do not suggest a body of M.P.s stridently opposed to military expenditure. One wonders too, how the Commons’ decision to earmark £20,000 from the proceeds of indirect taxation for the ‘costs, labours and expenses’ of the Appellants²⁶ sat with their complaint in the petition that taxes ‘wrongfully imposed upon your poor commons ... [had not been] applied to any exploit or need of your wars against the purpose for which they were granted’ (#5). It would surely have been the height of hypocrisy for the Commons to complain about misappropriation of supply in their petition while at the same time channelling state finance into the pockets of a handful of noblemen as a reward for their public service – the same noblemen with whose rule and performance in government the Commons were also, apparently, so thoroughly displeased.

The second problem with the traditional approach further pushes into the limelight the question of the Commons’ relationship with the Appellants. It is now firmly established that the Commons were the willing partners of the Appellant Lords in the trials of the king’s favourites.²⁷ In some respects they represented the more radical voice in parliament, for it was the M.P.s who bayed for the blood of Nicholas Brembre and it was they who relentlessly pushed for the prosecution of Thomas Rushook, bishop of Chichester, and Simon Burley.²⁸ Given the striking political resonance that existed between M.P.s and Appellants, it is odd that the Commons should have been at the same time so damning of the Appellant’s inability to govern the realm effectively. It is possible that the petition was compiled by a rogue element from within the Commons, but this seems unlikely. In the generality of its content, its elaborate and accomplished style, and its engagement with parliamentary processes, the petition is conventional and mainstream in form and purpose rather than subversive. It is written as though M.P.s, collectively, are its authors and there is no clear reason to doubt that this was indeed the case. But why was the

²⁴ Palmer, *England, France and Christendom*, pp. 127–34; Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 196–9; and J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years’ War*, iii: *Divided Houses* (London, 2009), pp. 647–60.

²⁵ *P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of Feb. 1388, Roll 1, item 11.

²⁶ *P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of Feb. 1388, Roll 1, item 16.

²⁷ See, e.g., Tuck, *Richard II*, pp. 121–6. See also J. S. Roskell and others, *The House of Commons, 1386–1421* (4 vols., Stroud, 1992), i. Appendix C1, pp. 185–91.

²⁸ *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 286, 308, 318, 330.

petition not entered on the parliament roll? If we accept the view that the petition was conceived as a critique of Appellant government, the obvious explanation is that its content was so embarrassing to the Appellants that it was suppressed from the official record and only found its way into Knighton's chronicle by chance.²⁹ Certainly, there is no clear indication that the Appellants acted on the concerns expressed in the petition.³⁰ But silencing the voice of popular discontent in this way would have been a serious violation of constitutional principle, and it will have made a mockery of the Appellants' claims to be acting in the interests of the broader political community. It will also have risked seriously alienating the M.P.s upon whose support the Appellants depended to give their purge of the royal household and administration the veneer of political legitimacy. It will have been, in short, a profoundly risky political strategy to adopt, reminiscent more of the high-handed rule of the king whose authority the Appellants wished to curtail than a group of nobles trying to position themselves as the champions of the king's long-suffering subjects. There is, moreover, the awkward fact that a set of common petitions already exists on the parliament roll for the Merciless Parliament. There is little to suggest any clear correlation between the two sets of requests.³¹ Why the Commons should have compiled *two* lists of common petitions remains unexplained.

Possibly the most plausible explanation for the petition – if we accept that it was presented in 1388 – is that it was straightforwardly a set of demands being made of the king himself. This explanation brings us to our third set of problems, but before considering them it is worth exploring the hypothesis in more detail. For one thing, it would make better sense of Knighton's preamble, which states that the petition sought to address 'the monstrous and most wicked oppressions made by some of the king's advisers' (#1),³² and it chimes more clearly with the overall tone and content of the petition. Moreover, scholars who assume that the petition, though addressed to the king, really articulated criticisms of the Appellants, ignore the highly personalized nature of the condemnation of the king. Early on, for example, it is noted that 'the peace and true justice of your land, which you [i.e. Richard II] are bound to maintain, has not been upheld equally as between rich and rich, and poor and poor' (#3). The consequence of misappropriation of supply and the impoverishment of the realm was said to be that 'you [i.e. Richard II] have not the power to defend your land or to maintain your royal estate' (#5). The many other reasons why the Commons might rise were to be 'declared to your Highness' (#6). And the petitioners declared (or threatened?) that 'there is need so to change the governance of yourself and your land that you, our liege and natural lord, shall throughout your land and beyond ... be

²⁹ This is a suggestion made by J. R. Maddicott, 'Law and lordship: royal justices as retainers in thirteenth and fourteenth century England', *Past & Present Supplement*, iv (1978), pp. 67–8, because of its complaints about royal justices and demands for limitations to the fees and gifts they received. Note also Tuck's suggestion that 'preoccupied with high politics, the government took no action on the petition' (J. A. Tuck, 'Nobles, Commons and the Great Revolt of 1381', in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 194–212, at p. 209).

³⁰ See below, note 33.

³¹ Though note that one common petition requested a review of the chief courts of the king (i.e. chancery, two benches and the exchequer) and for insufficient persons to be removed therein, which chimes with the anti-corruption sentiments of the petition (*PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of Feb. 1388, Roll 1, item 42).

³² Parts of the petition also allude to the king's evil counsellors, and there is the curious reference at #5 (discussed more fully later in the discussion), to 'those who rise know no other remedy except to arrest those manipulators of your council who call the great men of your council traitors to you and your kingdom'. There are clear lines of symmetry with the charges levelled in 1388 against the king's friends, who were accused (among other things) of 'preventing the great men and the good counsellors of the king from showing their good will towards their liege lord' (*PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of Feb. 1388, Part 2 (Appeals), third article). I remain unconvinced, however, that the Appellants would have been described as 'those who rise'.

honoured and respected and perfectly loved by the people for good and just government' (#8). It is true that diplomatic convention demanded that all requests should be directed through the king, no matter how politically weakened he might be, but the prominence of the king in the text suggests that rather more than the niceties of diplomatic convention were being observed. Moreover, the king was given a surprisingly open brief when it came to the committee to examine his wars (he was to consult 'so many of your nobles as you choose to summon' [#9]) and in the formation of the general reform committee proposed at the end of the petition he was to 'name six or eight or *whatever number you choose*' (#11) (my italics) and it was left to him to decide how and what was to be done.

However, a petition urging the king to accept the appointment of a reform committee seems an unlikely scenario in the circumstances of the Merciless Parliament, when all real authority was vested in the hands of the Appellants. In the enrolled common petitions of this assembly a petition already referred to the appointment of a continual council, only this was framed very much more as one might expect in the political circumstances of this assembly: it did not seek to persuade the king of the need for such a body, but instead laid down the unnegotiable terms and conditions for its service.³³ If the petition in Knighton's chronicle had been presented to articulate deeply-held discontent with the rule of the king, it would presumably have met with the approval of the Appellants, but the Appellants did not require a petition of this nature to allow them to implement far-reaching reform. On the other hand, if the petition was conceived to serve a propaganda purpose, to articulate discontent with Richard's rule in order to legitimize Appellant opposition, this raises the question: why did the Appellants not have it publicized more widely, not least by having it enrolled on the parliament roll? At the very least one wonders why there is no hint of this petition, or the sentiments attributed to it, in the otherwise notably full accounts of the Merciless Parliament provided by the Westminster Chronicler.

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In multiple ways, then, the dating and contextualization of this petition to the Merciless Parliament of 1388 raise difficult methodological problems. It is hard to see the petition easily fitting the circumstances of either the Appellants, Commons or king in this tumultuous assembly. At its heart there is a fundamental disconnect between the form and content of the petition, on the one hand, and the circumstances of Appellant rule in 1388, on the other hand. For what remains of this discussion I should like to explore alternative explanations and new sets of contextual reference points. This approach rests on the underlying assumption that Knighton got the dating of his petition wrong. He would not be first chronicler to have misdated events or to have his facts muddled: such mistakes would have been easy enough to make when a chronicler came to write up his work sometime after the events he was recording.³⁴ Knighton himself also had form when it came to misdating – or misplacing – miscellaneous documents within his chronicle.³⁵ And the chances of misdating and misplacing the petition will have been enhanced by the fact that, like modern historians, Knighton will have had no explicit

³³ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of Feb. 1388, item 23. The remit of this council appears to have been quite different to the reform committee envisaged by the Commons in their petition. In the petition outlining the responsibilities of the council on the parliament roll for the Merciless Parliament the principal focus was control of the king and household and protection of the royal estate, as was made clear in the gloss given to its appointment by the Westminster Chronicler (*Westminster Chronicle*, p. 333).

³⁴ *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. lvii–lviii.

³⁵ E.g., his misplacement of William Barton's condemnation of Lollardy (*Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 270–7; and G. Martin, 'Knighton's Lollards', in *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. M. Aston and C. Richmond (Stroud, 1997), pp. 28–40, at p. 33).

dating clause or other clearly distinguishing chronological references to help him place its contents within the overall scheme of his work. The haphazard way in which he reconstructed the main events of the Merciless Parliament corresponds with a situation in which he was not totally secure with the provenance of the material he had to hand. The clear implication is that he was not in possession of a detailed or accurate picture of the main events of the Merciless Parliament itself.

Of all the alternatives to the Merciless Parliament as the setting for this petition, two other parliaments of Richard II's reign offer the most promising lines of enquiry. The first possibility is that the petition was presented in the parliament that met between 1 October and 28 November 1386, that is, the parliament immediately preceding the Merciless Parliament. This assembly, sometimes described by modern historians as the 'Wonderful Parliament', is chiefly known for the impeachment of the chancellor, Michael de la Pole, and for the appointment of a 'great and continual council', whose members were charged to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of royal government. There is much to be said for this possibility. The first, and most compelling, point is that the remit of the reform council mirrored remarkably closely the broad sweeping proposals for changes to royal government that are outlined in the petition.³⁶ The work of the commission was essentially split between judicial and financial matters.³⁷ In respect to its judicial remit, the council was empowered to 'hear and receive all manner of complaints and quarrels of all our lieges who wish to sue and complain ... about all manner of acts of duress and oppression ... which cannot well be amended or determined by the course of the common law'.³⁸ It clearly met the concerns outlined in the petition, in particular the allegation that the 'great judges of the laws of your land' (#4) were not discharging their professional responsibilities with due even-handedness.

Of its financial remit, the terms of the appointment of the council – as noted in the letters patent and the statute roll – were set out in especially elaborate detail. In the narrative used to justify the reforms and inquiries, there is a clear resemblance between these texts and the petition. In the petition, it was stated that 'charges [had been] imposed heretofore upon your commons for want of good counsel, which make the land poor and quite void of wealth' (#9). In the preamble to the commission, it was noted that it was misgovernance caused 'by singular and insufficient counsel' that had led to the impoverishment of the king and the kingdom, and this in turn had led to 'oppressions and importable charges [being imposed] on his said people'.³⁹ The members of the council were therefore charged to make a comprehensive review of the crown's finances, in particular by scrutinizing the expenditure of the household, the income derived from prerogative revenue, the extent of grants and alienations made to 'undeserving' persons, the administration of taxation, the fiscal burden of annuities, the abuse of the system of exchequer tallies and the charging of unreasonable rates of interest on loans made to the crown. These aspects of the work of the council

³⁶ The most detailed account of the work of the council is provided by W. M. Ormrod, 'Government by commission: the Continual Council of 1386 and English royal administration', *Peritia*, x (1996), 303–21. See also Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 164–9, for a summary. Its members comprised: two archbishops (Courtenay of Canterbury and Neville of York); two bishops (Wykeham of Winchester and Brantingham of Exeter); the earl of Arundel; Lords Cobham, Scrope and Devereux; and the three principal officers of state (bishop Arundel of Ely, chancellor; bishop Gilbert of Hereford, treasurer; and John Waltham, keeper of the privy seal) (*P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1386, item 18).

³⁷ *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1385–9*, p. 244; *Statutes of the Realm* (11 vols., in 12, Record Comm., 1810–28), ii, 40–3. The monk of Westminster also included the text of the commission in his chronicle (*Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 167–77).

³⁸ *Statutes of the Realm*, ii, 42.

³⁹ *Statutes of the Realm*, ii, 40.

correlated closely with fiscal concerns expressed in the petition, in particular the allusions made to financial misappropriation and heavy taxation, and the requests to have the estate of the king and the crown examined closely (#5 and #9). The concern of the petitioners to have the ‘extortions of [the king’s] officials in the counties’ (#3) addressed also seems to have been tackled towards the end of the exposition of the council’s terms of operation, where it was stated that ‘all defaults and misprisions found in the other courts [besides the household], places, officers and ministers’ were to be duly corrected and amended.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, the commission was charged to inquire of the ‘maintainers and takers of quarrels, embracers of inquests and of officers and ministers made by brocage⁴¹ and of their broggers’.⁴² The authors of the petition also singled out ‘maintainers of quarrels’, and those who sold the law ‘for doubt or for hatred, or for gift or for covetousness’ (#8).

Some of the circumstances of the parliament of 1386 could also fit with other references made in the petition. Particular emphasis is placed on the financial burden faced by the people and, towards the end, the petitioners ask that taxes ‘may cease and be remitted in support of your said commons’ (#9). At the start of the parliament of 1386 the chancellor Michael de la Pole (in)famously demanded from the Commons a subsidy of four fifteenths and tenths, a grant that, had it been imposed, would have raised in the space of a single year the eye watering sum of £152,000.⁴³ This was an outrageous and unprecedented amount of money to be demanded and would explain why so much of the petition focuses on the impoverishment of the people and financial incompetence of the crown. The emphasis placed in the petition on the defence of the kingdom also accords with the difficult circumstances England found itself in during the parliament of 1386, when the country, all through the summer and into the autumn, stared into the abyss of a full scale French invasion, the likes of which J. J. N. Palmer described as ‘the most deadly threat to England throughout the entire Middle Ages’.⁴⁴ Further, in two separate parts of the petition, reference is made to the harmful influence of individuals whose subversion of power in the localities made them into what were described as ‘Second Kings’ (#3 and #8). In 1386, the obvious candidate for such an epithet was Simon Burley, one of Richard’s closest friends and a prominent victim of the Merciless Parliament in 1388.⁴⁵ In the course of the 1380s, Burley was established in Kent as both landowner and office-holder: his almost instantaneous elevation into the senior ranks of the country’s elite, together with his heavy-handed and tactless use of authority, had upset the existing balance of local power and made him powerful enemies.⁴⁶

Finally, the petition warns against popular revolt because, it states, ‘you [i.e. the king] and your lords have for so long wasted time in this parliament’ (#6). In 1386, parliamentary proceedings were almost certainly delayed as a result of Richard II’s decision to leave Westminster for his manor of Eltham, in the hope that this would derail the impeachment

⁴⁰ *Statutes of the Realm*, ii. 42.

⁴¹ A legal term meaning brokerage or brokage: the corrupt jobbing of offices.

⁴² *Statutes of the Realm*, ii. 41.

⁴³ *Knighton’s Chronicle*, p. 354.

⁴⁴ Palmer, *England, France and Christendom*, p. 74. For discussion of the great ‘invasion scare’ of 1386, see J. W. Sherborne, ‘The defence of the realm and the impeachment of Michael de la Pole in 1386’, in *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. J. Taylor and W. R. Childs (Gloucester, 1990), pp. 97–116, reprinted in J. Sherborne, *War, Politics and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. A. Tuck (London, 1994), pp. 99–118; and Fletcher, *Richard II*, pp. 143–6.

⁴⁵ J. L. Leland, ‘Burley, Sir Simon (1336?–1388), soldier and courtier’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2011), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/4036.

⁴⁶ Saul, *Richard II*, p. 164; *Reign of Richard II*, ed. and trans. McHardy, no. 80c (pp. 145–7).

of his chancellor de la Pole.⁴⁷ The ruse did not work, for the Commons ended up sending Thomas, duke of Gloucester and Thomas Arundel, bishop of Ely to Eltham on their behalf, where they famously threatened the king with deposition unless he co-operated. Significantly, this was an encounter only Henry Knighton recorded.⁴⁸ Was the petition written up and sent by the Commons with Gloucester and Arundel to inform their discussions with the king at Eltham? There are clear similarities between the text and what was recorded as having been said by the duke and bishop: the common people had contributed massively to the king's wars and were now in consequence greatly impoverished; the king and crown were now also as a result severely weakened, and the kingdom as a whole enfeebled; the reputation and renown of England was at a low ebb; this state of affairs had come about as a result of the bad counsel and misrule of the king's ministers; if no remedies were forthcoming, there was a risk of unrest among the people.⁴⁹

The Wonderful Parliament is a better fit for the petition than the Merciless Parliament because it correlates more closely to the political circumstances of the earlier assembly, but there remain significant interpretative problems. As we have noted already, the petition refers to the unbearable financial burden imposed on the common people (#5), but in the five years preceding 1386, taxation had not been granted by parliament at a level as to suggest complete and utter ruin. Following the Peasants' Revolt, the level of taxation had, in fact, decreased noticeably.⁵⁰ Also, in 1386, while the threat of French invasion loomed large, there is no evidence to suggest that wholesale destruction of property and ships had recently occurred, as the petition suggests (#5). Then there is the curious reference to 'those who rise know no other remedy, except to arrest those manipulators of your council who call the great men of your council traitors to you and your kingdom like people who know neither right nor reason' (#5). There is nothing in 1386 that might plausibly explain this remark. Indeed, in 1386, it was *the Commons* who wished to take action against 'the manipulators of the council'. Finally, it is curious that a chronicler who supplies the best-informed and most detailed account of the parliament of 1386 should nevertheless omit from his chronology of this assembly a document of such great constitutional importance. If the petition had been written to inform the discussion with the king at Eltham, why did Knighton not also include it in his general account of the proceedings of this meeting?⁵¹ Indeed, why was it not recorded in the parliament roll itself? For these reasons, then, the parliament of 1386 also seems an unlikely fit for the petition.

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⁴⁷ No specific timespan is given for Richard's absence, but Knighton introduces his account of the assembly by declaring that 'the king stayed at Eltham for the greater part of the parliament' (*Knighton's Chronicle*, p. 353). Later on, in their speech to the king, Knighton has Gloucester and Arundel taking the king to task over his apparent absence from parliament for over forty days (*Knighton's Chronicle*, p. 356). This was almost certainly an exaggeration. De la Pole was dismissed from office on 23 October. Assuming by this point Richard had returned to parliament, it means he will have spent up to three weeks away from the assembly since its opening on 1 October.

⁴⁸ *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 354–62.

⁴⁹ *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 358–60 (for those parts of the interview at Eltham that correspond with the petition).

⁵⁰ Between 1382 and 1385, a single grant of a fifteenth and tenth was made in October 1382; half a grant was made in October 1383 (though in the event only half of the proceeds were collected); a half grant was made in May 1384; a single fifteenth and tenth was granted in November 1384; and one and a half fifteenths and tenths in October 1385 (Jurkowski, Smith and Crook, *Lay Taxes*, pp. 62–5. This will have raised in the region of £160,000. In comparison, between 1377 and 1381, the proceeds from lay subsidies (including the three poll taxes) amounted to £219,000 (J. W. Sherborne, 'The cost of English warfare with France in the later fourteenth century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 1 (1977), 135–50, at p. 149).

⁵¹ It has been suggested that the account of the dialogue between Gloucester/Arundel and the king had been supplied to Knighton by Gloucester himself (*Knighton's Chronicle*, p. lxix). It is also possible that one or more of the M.P.s who represented Leicester/Leicestershire, where Knighton was based, conveyed the news of the interview

This leaves, as the only other plausible alternative, the parliament of 1381. In 2003 Claire Valente suggested this assembly as the most likely context for the petition and on close inspection the proposal looks promising.⁵² It would make sense of the reference to five years of various tallages, and finds particular resonance with the comment that these taxes had not been fairly adjusted to each person's means, which was surely a reference to the notoriously regressive poll taxes of January 1377, 1379 and November 1380.⁵³ It would make sense too of the emphasis placed on the inadequate defence of the realm and the unfortunate fate to befall the poor commons, whose 'houses had been burned, their villages and persons held to ransom, and their ships destroyed' (#5); in the late 1370s the south coast of England suffered a series of devastating raids, which caused widespread destruction and an all-pervading sense of vulnerability and loss of faith in the abilities of the martial classes.⁵⁴ It would also make much better sense of the reference to rebellion, which surely referred to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. In fact, the petition as a whole hinges on the fact that, as expressed in its opening clause, 'the rebellion and uprising [*levé et Rumour*] lately amongst the lesser people' (#2) now made a process of governmental reform and national renewal not just desirable but essential. The particular choice of the term *Rumour* to describe the uprising is noteworthy, and closely reflected the choice of vocabulary in the parliament roll of 1381 where the word appears on no fewer than twenty-nine occasions. Finally, the year 1381 is a better fit for the wide-ranging criticism about corrupt authority and falling standards in public office, since this was a crucial backdrop to the general malaise that had fuelled the revolt: dissatisfaction with the corrupt practices of the law was a particularly prominent strand in the rebels' grievances and actions.⁵⁵

It also explains the curious reference to 'those who rise know no other remedy, except to arrest those manipulators of your council' (#5). In the parliament of November 1381, the first to meet after the Peasants' Revolt, the Commons found themselves in a politically ambivalent position. On the one hand, such an unprecedented challenge to the political status quo represented the gravest of threats to the ruling classes and invited condemnation

to the chronicler, though it is worth bearing in mind that no member of the Commons is known to have been present with Gloucester and Arundel when they met with the king at Eltham. Another more intriguing, and hitherto overlooked, possibility, is that the account came into the possession of Knighton via Walter Scarle, M.P. for Rutland. Scarle was a committed supporter of the reform programme in these years, and was chosen by the Appellants to administer the oath of loyalty to them in Rutland. He also served on the commission to enquire into the value of the estates of the most prominent victim of the Merciless Parliament, Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford (Roskell and others, *House of Commons*, iv, 317–18). Most importantly, however, there is a chance that Walter Scarle was in some way related to John Scarle, who served as clerk of parliament throughout the years of opposition to the king. John Scarle strongly sympathized with the opposition movement against Richard II, and almost certainly used his prominent administrative position in the Merciless Parliament to manage parliamentary business on behalf of the Appellants. Later, in the 1390s, John Scarle became a feoffee to Thomas Arundel. Did this association date back to the 1380s and to the parliament of 1386? It is perfectly possible that John Scarle had attended the meeting at Eltham in his capacity as a senior royal clerk. For discussion of Scarle, see A. K. McHardy, 'John Scarle: ambition and politics in the late medieval church', in *Image, Text and Church, 1380–1600: Essays for Margaret Aston*, ed. L. Clark, M. Jurkowski and C. Richmond (Toronto, 2009), pp. 68–93, at pp. 77–84.

⁵² C. Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 169 n. 30, 185 n. 67.

⁵³ See above, note 50. Direct taxation had been levied continuously for the previous five years (i.e. since the first poll tax granted in January 1377), after an eighteen-month period of respite – the last payment of the subsidy granted in 1373 had been collected on 10 June 1375 (Jurkowski, Smith and Crook, *Lay Taxes*, pp. 55–62).

⁵⁴ E. Searle and R. Burghart, 'The defense of England and the Peasants' Revolt', *Viator*, iii (1972), 365–88.

⁵⁵ A. Harding, 'The revolt against the justices', in *English Rising*, ed. Hilton and Aston, pp. 165–93; and S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, 1996), pp. 40–66.

in the strongest possible terms; on the other hand, many of the matters that had roused the rebels into attacking the agents and symbols of the establishment resonated strongly with the political interests of those classes of men whose representatives were returned to the lower house in parliament, and of the M.P.s themselves.⁵⁶ Added to this was a growing alarm among the gentry in the months following the revolt that the government's repression had been too heavy-handed and risked the outbreak of further unrest: what M.P.s wanted was reform rather than repression.⁵⁷ In this short passage, we find an unmistakable expression of the second standpoint, a sympathetic appraisal of the rebels' motivations based on the rather startling assertion that they – the rebels – had little choice but to 'arrest' those who, against 'right and reason', had cast aspersions on the 'great men' of the king's council. This was tantamount to discharging the rebels from all blame, and it implied that the manipulators of the council had got what they deserved. In order to legitimize the need for reform, then, the Commons needed, to some degree, to legitimize the actions of the rebels. To this end, the petition presented the rebels as victims of misgovernance, rather than as criminals or revolutionaries. They were not described as *rebels*, as such, but as the 'poor commons'. The choice of these words was a conscious attempt to underline the common cause that existed between M.P.s and the wider population.⁵⁸ It was the impoverishment of the realm, and of the king's subjects, as a result of bad governance, which above all had pushed the 'lesser people of the kingdom' (#2) to the brink. References to poverty abound in the petition: the word 'poor' is used on no fewer than fourteen separate occasions.

There was, in fact, very good reason for the M.P.s attending the 1381 parliament to be fearful of the consequences of royal indifference to the demands for reform. As we have seen, historians have struggled to explain references to popular rebellion in 1388, but in 1381 it was not just the Peasants' Revolt of the summer months that might have underpinned M.P.s' fears, but more recent developments in one of the two counties that lay at the epicentre of the revolt in the summer: Kent. On 15 October 1381 a trial took place at Westminster of a group of conspirators led by John Hardyng, who, it was claimed, had risen in arms at Linton (near Maidstone) on 30 September, conspiring to kill the king as well as a group of prominent Kentish gentry.⁵⁹ From the confession of

⁵⁶ As noted in the remarks of William Stubbs, 'The rising had been occasioned by the misgovernment of the country under the very administration and influence of the very men against whom the commons in parliament had been struggling for many years' (W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England* (Library edn., 3 vols., Oxford, 1880), ii. 501). See also G. Dodd, 'A parliament full of rats? *Piers Plowman* and the Good Parliament of 1376', *Historical Research*, lxxix (2006), 21–49, at pp. 41–3, 45–7; and J. Watts, 'Public or plebs: the changing meaning of "the commons", 1381–1549', in *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies*, ed. H. Pryce and J. Watts (Oxford, 2007), pp. 242–60, who notes that the use of the term *commons* in parliament to describe the rebels following the rebellion may in part have been an attempt to vindicate the aims of the rebels (pp. 249–50).

⁵⁷ Tuck, 'Nobles, Commons and the Great Revolt', pp. 205–12; Saul, *Richard II*, p. 79; and, most recently, H. Lacey, *The Royal Pardon: Access to Mercy in Fourteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 149–59.

⁵⁸ Such solidarity is distinctly less likely to have been articulated in 1388, a year that saw the enactment of a new statute of labourers that sought (among other measures) drastically to curtail the freedom of movement of labourers (*Statutes of the Realm*, ii. 56–8 (iii–ix)). See Tuck, 'Cambridge Parliament', pp. 236–8; A. Middleton, 'Acts of vagrancy: the C version "autobiography" and the Statute of 1388', in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, ed. S. Justice and K. Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia, 1997), pp. 208–317, at pp. 216–46; C. Given-Wilson, 'The problem of labour in the context of English government, c.1350–1450', in *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. J. Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 85–100; and C. Given-Wilson, 'Service, serfdom and English labour legislation, 1350–1500', in *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. A. Curry and E. Matthew (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 21–37.

⁵⁹ For this and what follows, I have drawn on W. E. Flaherty, 'Sequel to the Great Rebellion in Kent of 1381', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, iv (1861), 67–86; and A. J. Prescott, 'Writing about rebellion: using the records of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381', *History Workshop Journal*, xlv (1998), 1–27.

one of the defendants (turned approver), a certain John Cote, we learn that the principal aim of the conspirators had been to force Richard II to repeat and confirm all the liberties and charters that he had promised the rebels at Mile End, or else they would kill him and all his great men. In a fascinating twist, it was also recorded that the conspirators had received certain men from the north (possibly pilgrims visiting Canterbury), who had reported that John of Gaunt had freed all his villeins. On hearing this news, Hardyng and his associates had reportedly declared that if true they would make the duke king of England. All these additional details were brought before the court on 4 November, the second day of parliament, and the trials of Cote and another approver, William Delton, took place in mid-November, two weeks into parliament. So it is probable that knowledge of the case was widespread within and around Westminster when parliament was in session. Indeed, present in parliament as one of the M.P.s representing Kent, was Sir John Freningham, one of the foremost targets of Hardyng and his associates, and a man who had been lucky to escape with his life during the main revolt in the summer.⁶⁰ It was to Freningham that Hardyng's conspiracy had initially been revealed, and it was Freningham himself who had broken it up and arrested the plotters. The prospect of a further uprising was not merely scaremongering or politicking on the part of M.P.s, but must have seemed a very real possibility. The Commons had among their number an individual who could personally vouch for the urgency of their task in settling the realm.

There is, finally, the reference in the petition to the delay to parliament. The parliament of 1381 had been due to meet on 16 September, but in late August it was postponed until November.⁶¹ When it finally met, much of its time was taken up trying to achieve a resolution to the quarrel between John of Gaunt and Henry, earl of Northumberland, who Gaunt accused of failing to offer adequate assistance during the Peasants' Revolt.⁶² According to Walsingham, 'Parliament had been protracted for a long time to no purpose because of this dispute'.⁶³ He then went on to remark that 'the present parliament then proceeded to deal with the affairs of the king and kingdom. But proceedings went on for a long time to little purpose, and nothing of any effect was achieved'. As we shall see, for the first three weeks of the assembly the Commons were left to their own devices to formulate an agenda for reform. One suspects this was in part because the Lords were distracted by the conflict between the two noblemen. In the aftermath of the revolt, and with the possibility of new unrest in their minds, one can understand why M.P.s should have felt so exasperated by these developments. It is also worth remembering that parliament was prorogued over the Christmas period and not reconvened until 24 January 1382. The parliament roll is unclear about what business remained to be addressed, though it pointedly notes that prorogation was necessary because 'the more serious

⁶⁰ Freningham had only recently been heavily involved in county administration, since 1377, but in this time he had acted as J.P., attended parliament (October 1377) and served as sheriff of Kent (1378–9). He was also one of the tax surveyors appointed in May 1381 to investigate the evasion of the third poll tax. During the Peasants' Revolt he had been taken captive by the rebels and made to swear an oath in support for their activities (B. Webster, 'The community of Kent in the reign of Richard II', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, c (1984), 217–29, at p. 225 n. 42; and Roskell and others, *House of Commons*, iii. 128–30).

⁶¹ *Reports From the Lords Committees for All Matters Touching the Dignity of a Peer of the Realm* (5 vols., London, 1820–9), iv. 688–9, 691–2; and *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1381–5*, pp. 79, 81.

⁶² *P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 1; and *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 20–2. For discussion, see A. Goodman, *John of Gaunt: the Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1992), pp. 89–91; and K. Towson, 'Hearts warped by passion: the Percy–Gaunt dispute of 1381', in *Fourteenth Century England III*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 143–53.

⁶³ *The St Albans Chronicle, 1: 1376–1394: the Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, ed. J. Taylor, W. R. Childs and L. Watkiss (Oxford, 2003), p. 573.

and weighty matters of business, most necessary for the benefit of the kingdom, still remained largely unsettled because of other concerns [put] before ... the same parliament'.⁶⁴ In all likelihood, prorogation was necessary because the king's ministers and councillors had not yet had time to address all the common petitions presented in the first session.⁶⁵ Thus, what may especially have fuelled the anxiety of those who compiled the petition was the realization that M.P.s would be returning to their constituencies for Christmas without any answers to, or reassurance about, the concerns expressed in their conventional petitions.

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These circumstances point the petition firmly in the direction of the parliament of 1381; but why was it not recorded on the parliament roll, and how do its contents relate to what was recorded? The parliament roll for this assembly is especially detailed, and provides a good summary of the discussions that went on between the Lords and Commons as they reflected on the cataclysmic events of the summer and the measures that needed to be taken to avoid further disorder. This is fortunate as it makes it possible to pinpoint where Knighton's petition is most likely to have fit within the developing framework of these discussions. At the very start of parliament, after the chancellor had declared the reasons for summoning parliament, the Commons withdrew to Westminster Abbey to discuss the 'charge' that had been given to them; that is to say, whether they agreed with the proposal to reverse the grant of manumission that the king had given to the rebels at the height of the rebellion, and what they thought were the 'the causes, motives, and principal reasons for the aforesaid uprising and insurrections'.⁶⁶ After three weeks, the M.P.s returned to Westminster Palace. Evidently, they had struggled with the remit given to them. Through their Speaker, Sir Richard Waldegrave, they asked for further clarification, and since this concerned the repeal of manumission, it appears that this had been the principal cause of the difficulties in the lower house.⁶⁷ What, exactly, had caused division is unclear. Possibly there was anxiety about countermanding the king's decision, especially if the king himself was not altogether desirous of reversing his earlier grand gesture,⁶⁸ or, more likely, there were concerns about the consequences of the king going back on his word, and the possibility that this might cause further dissent (a concern that was not entirely without foundation, as the Hardyng conspiracy highlights). But in the end M.P.s readily agreed to the suggestion.⁶⁹ With this matter settled the Commons next requested an intercommuning committee made up of selected prelates and secular lords to help them with the remaining business.⁷⁰ This evidently concerned the causes of the

⁶⁴ *PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 64.

⁶⁵ Walsingham makes clear that it was in the second session that 'proposals and decrees were made' (*St Albans Chronicle*, i. 577–8).

⁶⁶ *PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 8.

⁶⁷ This much was indicated in the speech given by the treasurer, Sir Hugh Seagrave, when he elaborated on the 'charge' given to parliament by the chancellor, William Courtenay, noting that 'if you [i.e. the M.P.s] wish to enfranchise and make free the said villeins by your common agreement, as he has been informed some of you wish to do, he will assent to your request' (*PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 8 (my emphasis)). There may have been important constitutional nuance to the debates that raged among M.P.s, for which see Tuck, 'Nobles, Commons and the Great Revolt', pp. 202–3.

⁶⁸ See B. Harvey, 'Draft letters patent of manumission and pardon for the men of Somerset in 1381', *English Historical Review*, lxxx (1965), 89–91, for evidence suggesting that Richard II continued to grant freedom to serfs even after the revolt had ended.

⁶⁹ *PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 13.

⁷⁰ On the importance of intercommuning in this period, and especially in the 1370s and 1380s, see G. Dodd, 'The Lords, taxation and the community of parliament in the 1370s and early 1380s', *Parliamentary History*, xx (2001), 287–310.

rebellion, since the reason given by the M.P.s to have the advice of the Lords was that ‘those matters bore weightily upon the estate of the realm’.

Yet even after the committee had met, the Commons remained unsure of what proposals they wished to make, for they requested that all the estates gathered together in parliament should discuss among themselves what measures needed to be taken, before reporting back to them ‘so that an effective remedy could be ordained’.⁷¹ This request was refused, however, for it was pointed out that only after the Commons had reported their conclusions to the king and Lords would the latter make known their advice. This response was presented as a point of process, as part of the ‘good and ancient customs and form of parliament’, which may well be true; but it also gave the Lords a procedural advantage in that it required the Commons to show their collective political hand before the Lords showed theirs. The Commons evidently withdrew once again to consult among themselves and a short while later they returned to present their thoughts. It is clear, however, that their conclusions had still received input from the intercommuning committee since they noted that they had ‘diligently consulted on the matter with the prelates and lords assigned to them for the purpose’.⁷² We will return to this important detail. There then followed what I will now term a summary of their main conclusions and proposals. In response, a new committee of peers, comprising many of those who had served on the intercommuning committee, was formed to ‘investigate and examine the estate and governance of the person of [the king]’.⁷³ The remit of this committee had evidently been shaped by the preliminary conclusions set out in the summary. It was at this point that the Lords found their voice, and noted in rather moralizing fashion, that if reforms were to be implemented throughout the realm it was necessary to begin with the king himself before turning to every other person from the highest to the lowest degree. The Commons deliberated further and produced a more extensive schedule of articles that they evidently hoped would inform the agenda of the reform committee. These included a thorough investigation into the proper functioning of the household, chancery, exchequer and central law courts.⁷⁴ Senior chancery clerks, royal justices, serjeants-at-law and the great officers of the exchequer were charged to begin the process of scrutiny, and certain unnamed merchants – some returned to parliament as M.P.s, others attending because of their mercantile expertise – were similarly charged to investigate the adverse economic conditions afflicting the realm.⁷⁵ The advice of the merchants was enrolled at the end of the parliament roll, and enacted into legislation.⁷⁶

The obvious place to insert Knighton’s petition into this rather protracted parliamentary process is at the point when the Commons returned from their deliberations and the results of their discussions were recorded in summary form on the parliament roll;⁷⁷ this then led to the setting up of the reform committee. The close correlation between the summary and Knighton’s petition is striking. The summary, like the petition, begins by stating that if reforms were not forthcoming, the kingdom would be ‘utterly ruined and lost forever’; like the petition, it notes the oppressive taxation that had afflicted the commons and the poverty that had resulted from this; it laments the poor state of the kingdom’s defence; and like the petition it casts a half sympathetic eye on the participants

⁷¹ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 16.

⁷² *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 17.

⁷³ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 18.

⁷⁴ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, items 19–27.

⁷⁵ C. D. Liddy, ‘The estate of merchants in the parliament of 1381’, *Historical Research*, lxxiv (2001), 331–45.

⁷⁶ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 107; and *S.R.*, ii. 17–20 (items ii–iv).

⁷⁷ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 17.

of the rebellion who, as a result of the said ‘outrages, recently committed against [them] more generally than ever before, made them feel so greatly oppressed’. Crucially, like the petition, the summary notes the existence of the maintainers of quarrels, who are described in very similar terms to those in the petition: they were said to behave like ‘kings in their shires’ (the phrase, used twice in the petition, is ‘Second Kings’: #3 and #8). The analogy was also deployed by the *Anonimale Chronicle* to describe the commission headed by Thomas Bampton to investigate the incidence of tax evasion in Essex in early June 1381: Bampton was ‘held to be a king or great lord in that country because of his manner of behaving’ (*tenu en pais come roy ou grande seigneur pur sa grande portee*).⁷⁸

There is certainly sufficient overlap between the two texts to support the suggestion that the petition was a product of the parliament of 1381, but there are also some notable discrepancies that cast doubt on the notion that the entry in the parliament roll was a straightforward summary of the contents of the petition. The summary alludes to the ‘outrageous number of servants in the [royal] household’; it specifies that faults are to be found in chancery and the courts of king’s bench and common pleas; and it directly implicates the purveyors of the royal household as the most significant oppressors of the ‘poor commons’ in the localities. It is also noticeably more forthcoming about the need to sack the king’s ‘evil officers and counsellors’. None of these matters is raised in the petition. What is more, while the petition is very clearly the product of deliberations by the Commons on their own – it is addressed to the king and the Lords – the summary, as noted already, is of conclusions that had the input of ‘the prelates and lords assigned to them for the purpose’. The logical conclusion to be drawn is that the petition was drawn up even earlier in parliamentary proceedings, and the most likely explanation is that it contained the preliminary thoughts of the Commons during the first three weeks of parliament. This is a schematic outline of the different stages of discussion in parliament indicating when the petition is likely to have been compiled:

- Chancellor gives parliament its ‘charge’.
- Commons deliberate for three weeks by themselves. **PETITION** written at this point.
- Full parliament reconvenes; the Speaker asks for further clarification about the charge; the Commons agree to reverse the grant of manumission.
- Commons ask for an intercommuning committee.
- Commons still unsure; they request to be given reports from all the estates: request refused.
- Commons further deliberate (probably with intercommuning committee); the **SUMMARY** is produced.
- Reform committee formed, made up of Lords, charged to scrutinize the household.
- Commons produce a **SCHEDULE** of detailed reform articles to inform the work of the reform committee.

The timing of the petition opens up some important lines of enquiry about how the Commons formulated a political agenda, and how this agenda evolved and adapted as M.P.s encountered members of the Lords. In particular, if my deduction is correct, the petition offers a unique insight into the impact of intercommuning on parliamentary proceedings, for what the parliament roll records is the deliberation between both the Commons and

⁷⁸ *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1333–1381*, ed. V. H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927), p. 134.

members of the intercommuning committee; only the petition outlines the discussion of the Commons prior to intercommuning discussions. This hypothesis would, furthermore, make sense of the omission of the petition from the parliament roll itself, for the priority of the clerk of parliament was to make a record of what had been discussed and agreed upon in ‘full’ parliament, when the Lords were joined by the M.P.s, or else the deliberations of the Lords on their own; his remit did not usually extend to what M.P.s talked about among themselves.⁷⁹ Since the contents of the petition were very quickly superseded by the deliberations of the intercommuning committee, and the resulting summary, one suspects that a decision was taken at the point when the record of the assembly was being written up to omit the petition as an unnecessary distraction from the main points that had eventually been agreed to.

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In comparing the contents of the petition with what was later recorded on the parliament roll in the summary, it becomes clear that while the overall thrust of the texts was similar, in some places there were differences of emphasis. In some respects, the summary is more sure-footed and harder-hitting. Whereas the petition refers only indirectly to the law courts and to misconduct in certain parts of government (#4), the summary states that fault in governance can be found universally, throughout government, and it lists all the main departments of state. Whereas in the petition the Commons urge the king to ‘ordain the estate of yourself and your crown’ (#9), the summary bluntly refers to the ‘outrageous number of servants in the ... household’. Whereas the petition refers obliquely to the need not to ‘spare those who have offended’ (#8), the summary forcefully asserts that it is necessary to remove ‘evil officers and counsellors as soon as they can be identified’. In other respects, the divergences are more subtle. The petition quite emphatically states the petitioners’ desire to have taxation substantially reduced, if not abolished altogether (‘now in this parliament the taxes ... may cease and be remitted’ [#9]) and there is a dire warning about the consequences of further impositions (‘any further charges upon your said kingdom would be unbearable’ [#10]). In the summary, the allusion to taxation is more muted, and in fact focusses narrowly on the charge that taxes have been ‘forcibly levied from [the commons]’. The accusation that the proceeds of taxes have been misappropriated for costs other than defence is forcefully made in the petition, where it states that ‘the greater part of the said taxes [are] ... not yet applied to any exploit or need of your wars, of the defence of your kingdom ... against the purpose for which they were granted’ (#5). In the summary, the same point is made more gently: the realm is said to be no better defended, in spite of the ‘great sums [that] are continually granted and levied from the commons’. Both the petition and summary describe the damage to have been inflicted on lords as a result of failures in government and the social unrest these had caused, but only in the petition is allusion made to the loss of honour by the crown and the loss of prestige and reputation to England abroad (#2, #3 and #8). And only in the petition is there a special plea to the king that he ought to ‘especially cherish the honourable chivalry of all [his] lordships, giving courage to the worthy to sustain your honour and defend your realm from the harm done by great wrongs, extortions, and all oppressions’ (#8). On the other hand, only in the summary is it stated that the presence of an outrageous number of servants in the household (as well as the courts and departments of state) is a factor of considerable importance in explaining the faults of governance.

⁷⁹ On the discretion exercised by the clerks of parliament on what to include – and exclude – from the parliament roll, see W. M. Ormrod, ‘On – and off – the record: the Rolls of Parliament, 1337–1377’, in *Parchment and People: Parliament in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Clark (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 39–56.

These divergences suggest subtle differences in the respective political worldviews of M.P.s and Lords, for while the parliamentary community as a whole appears to have been united in its core belief that a process of national renewal was needed, how these objectives were to be achieved evidently elicited a range of perspectives. With the exception of their criticism of the ‘great judges’, the Commons seem initially, at least, to have identified abuse of office principally as a local phenomenon. But after discussions with the Lords, the focus instead turned to the reform of central government: only the oppressive practices of local purveyors remained, and these had not been mentioned in the petition. The identification in the petition of ‘ministers of Holy Church’ and ‘officers of other lords in the counties such as seneschals and clerks of courts baron’ (#3) as among the principal abusers of their position in the counties would presumably have been an unwelcome emphasis for the Lords, besides which, bringing such officials back into line lay beyond the realistic power of the medieval state. Although both the petition and summary pointedly refer to the existence of ‘second kings’ in the shires, the petition defines such individuals in terms of their abuse of office, whereas the summary describes them more broadly as the ‘embracers of quarrels’.

The fiscal agenda outlined in the petition is also notably downplayed in the summary. Possibly this was the result of the superior knowledge, expertise and authority that the Lords of the intercommuning committee were able to bring to their discussions with the Commons. Perhaps they used the opportunity to enlighten the Commons about how taxes had been spent in the past, and to explain why taxes would still be required in the future, while the war lasted. Significantly, the Commons returned to the matter of the future fiscal burden when they set out the final schedule of articles for the reform committee to consider. Here, in what is a striking correlation with the sentiments expressed in the petition, they requested the Lords to ‘consider the wars, wisely and considerably to reduce them if it can be done, for the relief of the king and kingdom’.⁸⁰ They also asked to be informed by the reform committee of their ‘remedy’ to this matter before the end of parliament. But no such remedy, or ordinance, was forthcoming. It is worth remembering that Richard II was only fourteen years old in 1381 and many of the men who had been chosen to consult with the M.P.s in the intercommuning committee and/or were appointed to the reform committee were, or had been, closely associated with the running of government since the king’s accession in 1377.⁸¹ They therefore had a good grasp of the challenges facing the kingdom but were also, to some extent, implicated in the policies that the crown had pursued during this time. This created a delicate situation for the political community in aftermath of the Peasants’ Revolt, for where exactly did responsibility for the failings of government lie? Who, in particular, was to blame for the lamentable state of the kingdom’s defence

⁸⁰ *P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 25.

⁸¹ Those members of the intercommuning committee of the parliament of 1381 who had served on one or more of the continual councils appointed in July 1377, October 1377 and October 1378 were: William Wykeham, bishop of Winchester (October 1378); Richard, earl of Arundel (July 1377 and October 1378); William Ufford, earl of Suffolk (October 1378); and John Cobham (July 1377). William Courtenay, archbishop of Canterbury elect (July 1377 and Oct 1377) and Hugh, earl of Stafford (October 1377), together with Wykeham, Arundel and Ufford, had all served on the continual councils and were also appointed (with others) to serve on the committee charged to examine the household in 1381. For discussion of the workings of government in this period, and full lists of the personnel of the continual councils, see G. Dodd, ‘Richard II and the fiction of majority rule’, in *The Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. C. Beem (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 103–59. Note the comment by Nigel Saul that the disbanding of the third continual council in January 1380 came about largely as a result of dissatisfaction with its handling of the war (Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 49–50). See also the incisive comments in Tuck, *Richard II*, p. 46.

– a criticism that came through especially strongly in both the petition and the summary. Perhaps it was a reflection of the slightly blurred and contradictory position that the Commons found themselves in – in wanting to apportion blame for the rebellion on those who had run government on the one hand, while at the same time hoping for the cooperation and collaboration of these same individuals to resolve the faults of government on the other hand – that explains the cryptic remark in the petition about the rebels arresting ‘those manipulators of your council who call the great men of your council traitors’. This might have been an unconvincing sop to John of Gaunt, unconvincing because the rebels would hardly have ‘arrested’ anyone who described Gaunt as a traitor to the realm.⁸²

In his preamble to the petition, Knighton directly attributed the sufferings of the realm to the ‘monstrous and most wicked oppressions made by some of the king’s advisors’, and claimed that the Lords and Commons had presented the petition jointly because they ‘perceived them to grow in evil-doing day by day’. It was a perspective which suggested that the chronicler had not paid too much attention to the contents of what he had copied out, but it also underlined the point that to Knighton at least, writing about the Merciless Parliament, it was not members of the nobility, including the Appellants, who bore responsibility for the ills of the kingdom, but those who had counselled the king. But those were the circumstances of 1388. In 1381 those responsible for causing the revolt were less easy to identify. In their petition the Commons are notably cautious, seeking the safety of attributing responsibility to unspecified royal officers and justices. Midway through, however, there is a short, but significant, declaration to the effect that ‘there is need so to change the governance of yourself [i.e. the king] and your land’ (#8). The point is not elaborated further. In the summary, however, the king’s councillors are introduced more directly as a group requiring attention: the king’s ‘evil officers and counsellors’ were to be removed, ‘as soon as they can be identified, and [replaced by] others worthier and more virtuous in their stead’; and further on, ‘the person of the king and his council should be surrounded with the most worthy and discreet lords and bachelors to be found and had within the kingdom’.⁸³ This was a subtle, but important, shift of emphasis, for the implication, now clearly articulated, was that it was those with whom the king had chosen to associate himself who had to shoulder much of the blame for the rebellion.

⁸² The rebels hated Gaunt with great intensity, for which see *The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381*, ed. R. B. Dobson (London, 1970), p. 128 (*Anonimale Chronicle*); p. 133 (Thomas Walsingham); p. 143 (Froissart). For discussion, see R. Hilton, *Bondmen Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973), pp. 158–60.

⁸³ *P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 17. The only notable dismissal from the household that took place in this parliament was that of the king’s confessor, Thomas Rushook, for which see Tuck, *Richard II*, p. 56; Saul, *Richard II*, p. 125; and R. G. Davies, ‘Rushook, Thomas (d. 1393)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2012), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/24284. Archbishop Courtenay was also replaced as chancellor by Richard le Scrope, but the circumstances behind his removal, and whether it was forced or voluntary, remain unclear (R. N. Swanson, ‘Courtenay, William (1341/2–1396)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2021), doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/6457). It has been suggested that Courtenay was behind the policy of repression following the revolt, which may have made his position difficult in light of the Commons’ desire to restore the goodwill of the population (Saul, *Richard II*, p. 77). Equally, it is possible that the animosity between Gaunt and the archbishop explains the latter’s resignation (J. Dahmus, *William Courtenay Archbishop of Canterbury, 1381–1396* (Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 162–3). There was clearly clamour for reform to be made in the chancery, and in a common petition the Commons asked that the office should be occupied by ‘the most wise and the most enterprising’ (*P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 20). In the absence of contemporary comment, it is probably the case that Courtenay was happy to relinquish his responsibilities to the veteran administrator Richard le Scrope. It is to be noted that Courtenay was still appointed, in his capacity as archbishop, to the committee charged to reform the household.

The introduction of the king's choice of counsellors, and the closely linked subject of his household, may have indicated how the parliamentary agenda was evolving as discussion between the Commons and members of the Lords progressed. Whereas the petition seems genuinely, and for the most part, to have sought to identify underlying issues that had caused the outbreak of the Peasants' Revolt, the summary instead turned more clearly to matters that were of immediate concern in the months *since* the revolt had been crushed. Long ago J. A. Tuck noted that there was a discernible increase in the extent to which the king engaged with government in the months following the rebellion.⁸⁴ The king was now finding his feet, politically speaking, and in consequence government was becoming less transparent. Evidently, this was the cause of disquiet within some sections of the political community. What better way was there, therefore, of reinstating a measure of control over Richard II than to link the danger – imagined or real – of the young king falling victim to the insidious influence of unscrupulous counsellors with the outbreak of the greatest act of rebellion the kingdom had witnessed and the threat of further unrest? It was undoubtedly a disingenuous political manoeuvre, but a deft one nevertheless. It explains the initial allusion by the Commons in their petition to the governance of the king, and then the much more explicit point made by the Lords – on their own – that if reform were needed, it was required of the king in the first instance (as the 'principal member' of the realm), before 'progressing from person to person'.⁸⁵ To be sure, the Commons had hinted in their petition that there were matters concerning how the king governed that needed to be addressed, but it was only once they had met with members of the Lords that questions about Richard's counsellors and the size of his household were openly aired and articulated.

The suspicion has to be, therefore, that M.P.s were pushing at an open door, and that the concerns they had about the king were not only shared, but possibly felt more strongly, by many members of the Lords. That suspicion becomes stronger when it is noted that the 'committee to examine the household' seems to have arisen primarily from discussions between the king and Lords, separate from the Commons – the remit of this committee was distinctly narrower than the responsibilities first envisaged by the Commons for the general reform committee they had requested in their petition (#11). It is also important to note that the only concrete political 'reform' to be made in light of the proceedings of this assembly came from the Lords, in the form of the appointment of Richard, earl of Arundel and Michael de la Pole to be with the king in his household, apparently in perpetuity, 'to accompany the person of the king, and belong to his household, to advise and govern his person, et cetera'.⁸⁶ Their appointment in this role established an important, and dangerous, precedent for parliamentary interference in the running of the royal household. It reinforced the notion that when faults were to be found in the governance of the realm, blame should be placed squarely on the shoulders of the king's friends and allies, whether or not they deserved this opprobrium.

⁸⁴ Tuck, *Richard II*, p. 54. See, however, the note of caution sounded in W. M. Ormrod, 'The Peasants' Revolt and the government of England', *Journal of British Studies*, xxix (1990), 1–30, at p. 21 n. 104; and more recent comments in Fletcher, *Richard II*, pp. 85–6.

⁸⁵ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 18. See also *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of Oct. 1382, item 42, where the Commons petitioned, 'Considering the great restlessness of [the] commons ... that good governance be set in place around your honourable person so that you may live honestly and regally within the revenues of your kingdom'.

⁸⁶ *PR.O.M.E.*, parliament of 1381, item 38. The assembly left its mark on the statute roll, but the measures enacted were less overtly political in nature: they included legislation on bullion, the price of wine, and the export of goods on English ships, as well as statutes recording the king's general pardon, the repeal of manumission and a set of regulations governing the operation of the exchequer (*Statutes of the Realm.*, ii. 17–23).

It was an approach to the challenges and problems facing Richard that spelled trouble for the future, and which ultimately led to the dramatic denouement of the Merciless Parliament in 1388, where this discussion first began.

As for the young king, the events of the summer of 1381 must have had a profound impact. Some historians have speculated that the shock of personally confronting thousands of rebels propelled the king into the authoritarian tendencies of his later years.⁸⁷ This may be true,⁸⁸ but it should be remembered that the rebels of 1381 took great care to express their loyalty to the young king. For those rebelling in 1381 it was not the king who was to blame for the many faults in the kingdom but the king's advisors. The rebels wanted Richard to be *more* involved in the running of government, not less. The contrast this presented with the views expressed in parliament later in the year must surely have hit the king with some force. So too, the unfairness of parliament's conclusions. Surely, what the petition recorded by Knighton, and the summary in the parliament roll, pointed to was not the shortcomings of the king's first steps in assuming responsibility as king, but the profound weakness, grave errors and basic mediocrity of an administration run, for most of the time since the king's accession in 1377, by committee. The parliamentary moratorium on the Peasants' Revolt will simply have reinforced in the king's mind the message declared by the rebels in 1381: that is to say, that England could not be ruled properly without a king exercising full control. How far Gaunt, specifically, was associated with the failings of the regime that led to the rebellion in 1381 is difficult to discern, but it possible that just as the Commons took their cue from the rebels in demanding the reform of government, so too Richard II took his cue from the rebels in seeking to distance himself from his powerful royal uncle, in the months and years following the revolt.⁸⁹ Historians have long recognized that in the years leading up to Gaunt's departure for Iberia in 1386 he and the court increasingly separated, but no one appears to have considered the possibility that this was in part because Richard felt his uncle to be a political liability, an individual who had presided over a regime whose discredited policies had directly led to a cataclysmic breakdown in social relations in 1381 and whose continued association with the king risked undermining, rather the strengthening, the king's reputation and the support he received from his subjects. The separation of the king from his uncle may in part have received impetus by the duke's involvement in the turbulent politics of the capital, and his particular animosity towards Nicholas Brembre.⁹⁰ Brembre had taken a notably conspicuous role in bringing the rebellion to a close, a role that surely further underlined the failings of Gaunt, who was

⁸⁷ Tuck, 'Nobles, Commons and the Great Revolt', p. 208; S. Walker, 'Richard II's views on kingship', in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England: Essays Presented to Gerald Harriss*, ed. R. E. Archer and S. Walker (London, 1995), pp. 49–63, at pp. 51–2; and N. Saul, 'The kingship of Richard II', in *Richard II: the Art of Kingship*, ed. A. Goodman and J. L. Gillespie (Oxford, 1999), pp. 37–57, at pp. 48–9. G. Harriss, *Shaping the Nation: England, 1360–1461* (Oxford, 2005), p. 449, describes the 'fear and contempt [Richard II felt] for his lesser subjects' following the revolt.

⁸⁸ An alternative narrative explaining the actions of the rebels was articulated by the chancellor, Michael de la Pole, in his opening speech to the parliament of November 1383, a narrative which stressed the importance of the king's subjects obeying their king. De la Pole stated that 'the disobedience and rebellion occurring in the past, and daily persisting against the lesser ministers of the king, such as sheriffs, escheators, other collectors of the subsidies and the like, were the source and principal cause of the treacherous insurrection lately made by the commons of England in the same kingdom' (*P.R.O.M.E.*, parliament of Nov. 1383, item 6).

⁸⁹ Richard's resolve to assert his own style of kingship in the aftermath of the revolt was shown, in particular, in his controversial handling of the Mortimer inheritance, for which see M. King, 'Richard II, the Mortimer inheritance and the March of Wales, 1381–84', in *Fourteenth Century England VIII*, ed. J. S. Hamilton (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 95–118, at pp. 105–6, 110, 112.

⁹⁰ R. Bird, *The Turbulent London of Richard II* (London, 1949), ch. 5; and Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 97, 106.

far removed from the capital at this moment of supreme danger for the young king. Nor too should we overlook the possibility that the petition directly informed the king's apparently ambivalent attitude towards war, for it was in the early 1380s – if we accept older interpretations of the period – that the king came increasingly to seek a settlement with France, to end the war and to end his reliance on parliament for taxation.⁹¹

The revolt thus pushed the king and political community in different directions: both sought to limit the power of the other in the genuine belief that this would ensure better governance and avert further unrest. The result, after 1381, was an uneasy, unsatisfactory and ultimately unworkable power-sharing exercise, in which no side took (or was able to take) full responsibility for tackling the urgent matters at hand, and so looked to blame the other for not resolving them. The ambiguities and complexities of this power dynamic were underlined in the famous outburst of Richard, earl of Arundel, in the Salisbury Parliament of April 1384, in which he declared that the kingdom stood on the brink of destruction as a result of 'bad government' and a 'state of decay'.⁹² The king rounded on the earl: 'If it is to my charge that you would lay this, and it is supposed to be my fault that there is misgovernment in the kingdom, you lie in your teeth. You can go to the devil!'. This was a pointed reminder to the earl that the king could not be denied the full authority necessary to rule effectively and yet at the same time be blamed for all that was wrong within the kingdom. The parliament of 1381 was thus pivotal in establishing an oppressive climate of political mistrust and recrimination. As subsequent events were to show, these circumstances proved impossible to reconcile without a major political showdown and the complete destruction of the king's base of support at the end of the decade.

But what of Knighton himself? The appearance of the petition in that section of his chronicle which recorded the events of 1388 remains a mystery. On one point, however, some light might be shed. In 1381 one of the borough representatives returned for Leicester was Richard Knighton.⁹³ I have not been able to establish any definite link between the M.P. and chronicler, but there does seem to be, on the face of it, a possibility that a family connection existed, and that it was Richard Knighton who supplied Henry with the original document produced by the Commons. Why it was not then transcribed directly into the chronicler's narrative is not clear. Perhaps it was Henry Knighton's forgetfulness and disorganization that is to blame. Knighton, unlike the Westminster Chronicler and Thomas Walsingham, was not especially drawn to the affairs of parliament, and it may be that the document's misplacement reflected his indifference to what went on there. One factor that increases this possibility is the suggestion by V. H. Galbraith that the chronicle was not started until c.1390:⁹⁴ the passage of time and the chronological ambiguity of the petition could have been key factors in Knighton's accidental misplacement of the document in his narrative. A more intriguing possibility is that the misdating of the petition was deliberate. Perhaps the chronicler regarded its contents as an embarrassing critique of his patron, John of Gaunt, and sought to deflect criticism by assigning to it a different political context.⁹⁵ Or perhaps Knighton's motivation was rooted more in his

⁹¹ Palmer, *England, France and Christendom*, esp. pp. 48–9; and Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 137–8, 142–3. For a more recent, alternative, perspective, see Fletcher, *Richard II*, ch. 6.

⁹² *Westminster Chronicle*, p. 69.

⁹³ *Return of the Names of Members of Parliament*, i: *Parliaments of England, 1213–1702* (London, 1878), p. 208.

⁹⁴ V. H. Galbraith, 'The chronicle of Henry Knighton', in Fritz Saxl, *1890–1948: a Volume of Memorial Essays From His Friends in England*, ed. D. J. Gordon (London, 1957), pp. 136–45, at p. 139. Note Geoffrey Martin's more cautious appraisal of the dates of compilation (*Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. xxvii–xxviii).

⁹⁵ I owe this suggestion to Dr. McHardy.

sympathies with the Appellants: by placing the petition in the Merciless Parliament the chronicler maybe saw an opportunity to recycle earlier criticism of royal government in a bid to underline the legitimacy and necessity of the drastic action taken against the king in 1388 – assuming, that is, that the petition was regarded as a critique of the king rather than the Appellants themselves. One final possibility is that the petition came back into circulation in 1388 on the initiative of someone or some persons other than Henry Knighton, but for similar reasons, that is, to underpin the political agenda of that time. This scenario has Knighton wittingly, or even unwittingly, attribute the petition to the events of the Merciless Parliament because he felt the document to be genuinely ‘current’ to the events of the assembly, even if its origins lay in events that occurred at the start of the decade.

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In bringing the various strands of this analysis together, it should be stressed that my intention has not been to offer proof of the new dating for the petition that Knighton recorded in his chronicle. In the absence of irrefutable evidence, dogmatic certainty is a luxury best avoided. However, it is my hope to have marshalled a sufficiently robust set of arguments to suggest that the parliament of 1381 is the most likely provenance for this mysterious petition. These arguments rest on a number of highly suggestive textual and contextual convergences: the fears expressed about rebellion; the reference to ‘second kings’ and corrupt local officials; the complaints about the duration of parliament and inadequate coastal defences; the desire to end unreasonable levels of taxation and cut back on war; the broad remit of the reform committee; and the ambiguous position of the king. The parliament of 1381 provides a better ‘fit’ for the contents of the petition than the Merciless Parliament, but it is significant nevertheless that it is not straightforward to date, for in broad terms the criticisms the petition contained – of ineffectual government, corrupt officials, burdensome taxation and a king misguided by evil advisors to the exclusion of his natural and best-qualified counsellors – formed a familiar and predictable mantra of parliamentary complaint throughout the first half of Richard II’s reign. Moreover, in these years, M.P.s frequently placed their hopes for change in the constitution of reform committees comprising select members of the Lords. The uncertainty surrounding the petition recorded by Knighton is thus in part attributable to the chronicler’s own error – or deliberate misdating – but also because much of its contents has broad historical relevance to much of Richard II’s reign before c.1389.⁹⁶

My placing of the petition in the parliament of 1381 throws new light on the interaction of the Lords and Commons. It points to an effective and interdependent working relationship between the two political bodies, but also one that operated on an unequal footing. Left to their own devices, the Commons expressed great concern about the state of the realm and the threat of further social unrest, but they looked to the Lords to make the changes necessary to address these matters. M.P.s were deeply troubled about the state of governance and the possibility of renewed rebellion, but the records of this assembly – now including Knighton’s petition of the Commons – indicate a political community struggling not only to comprehend the enormity of what had happened in

⁹⁶ This is not the only document of the period whose dating has attracted scrutiny. Chris Fletcher has questioned whether the so-called ‘Advice’ of the Lords was a product of the Merciless Parliament rather than the parliament of 1385, to which it has traditionally been attributed (*PR. O.M.E.*, parliament of 1385, Appendix, item 1); Fletcher, *Richard II*, pp. 141 n. 69; 178 n. 8, engaging with J. J. N. Palmer, ‘The parliament of 1385 and the constitutional crisis of 1386’, *Speculum*, xlvii (1971), 477–90. It is equally possible that the ‘Advice’ was generated in response to the appointment of the ‘great and continual’ council of 1386.

the summer but also to find a proper focus for what needed to be done. The result was a comprehensive ‘wish list’ of reform extending across all sectors of government, but which was so ambitious that it ended up almost defeating itself, by becoming merely a series of high-minded principles and statements of good intent. In the end, both M.P.s and Lords contented themselves in the belief that the nation’s woes could be resolved by placing the king under supervision and subjecting his household to close scrutiny. But in doing this, were they not really addressing the consequences, rather than the causes, of the revolt? It was a convenient way of sidestepping some of the more deep-seated problems facing England at the time. As with much else the Commons petitioned about in this period, the historical value of the petition recorded – and misdated – by Henry Knighton lies in the fears and aspirations it articulated, not in concrete changes that it brought about.

Appendix

British Library, Cotton MS. Tiberius C. VII, fos. 216r–217r, Henry Knighton’s Petition of the Commons

Editorial convention: in general, with one or two minor deviations, my transcription and translation follow closely Geoffrey Martin’s edition in *Knighton’s Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. and trans. G. H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), pp. 442–51. However, where ‘i’s and ‘u’s have been used as consonants, ‘j’s and ‘v’s are given. I have retained the idiosyncratic capitalization of the original, except for the word *Dieu*. Apostrophes and *e* acute accents have been introduced as appropriate.

Transcription

[#1.] Communes petunt remedium a rege de oppressionibus. Magnates et communes regni uidentes oppressiones immanes et scleratissima facta quorundam consiliatorum regis tam erga maiores quam minores, et de die in diem in suis maleficiis inualescere sencientes, in presenti parlamento unanimi assensu suggererunt regi pro emendacione et reformacione habenda sub hac forma.

[#2.] A nostre tresdouté Seignur le Roy, et a touz noz autres seignurs du Roialme, monstrent lez humblez Comines de vostre dit Roialme lez causez et damagez advenuz en displesaunce du Dieu et de seynt esglise, en deshonneur de vous et de vostre Coroune et de tous voz noblez et gentiles et a touz estatez du dit Roialme, par la levé et Rumour ore tarde advenuz par lez petitez gentz de vostre dit realme, ensemble oue lez perilles et damages qe de jour en autres apierent, s’ils ne soyent hastyment redressez, en destruction de saynt esglise deinz vostre realme, en disheritaunce et dishonneur de vous et de vostre corowne, et damages de touz ceaux de vostre Realme, Riches et povers, dez queux perilles vous ne lez voz gentz de vostre terre ne poient eschapiere si pluis hastyve remedie par ascunementz dez prelatiz, Countez, Baronez, et dez pluis sagez de vostre Realme ne soit ordeigné.

[#3.] Primez a cause qe le peas et droite justice en vostre tere a quele vous estez tenuz amaigtenere n'ad esté sustenuz egalment par entre Ryches et Ryches, povers et povers, et nomement par entre Ryches et povers sicome Dieu et droit demanderont, vostre pover peple ount esté anyntez par extorcions de voz officers en paais, come Eschetours et autres Commissours dez officers et mynistres de seynt Esglise, par Officers dez autres seignurs en pays, come seneschalles et Clerkes dez Courtres de Byrone, et nomement par iij. oue par iiij. en chescune Conté appellez seconde Royez qe au pigne vostre pover peple ne purront vivere, ne porter lour charge en eyde de vous et de vostre realme quant bosoigne y fuisse, par quelez defautez vous et vostre realme ont esté mys en graunt disclaundre en chescune terre.

[#4.] Et outre ceo voz graundez jugez dez lez loyes de vostre terre nient fessauntz en touz temps ne as touz personez egale execucion solonc lez voz loyez ordeignes, einz sount enclynes deschuere leffence dez maundementz par privé seale, oue per graunt seale, encontre voz bonez loyes, et lez priers dez autres seignurs oue queux ils sount de retenuz, q'ils ne fount parfaire lour devoyre a queles ils fount jurrez, tout outrement en destruction de vostre dit pover comine s'il ne soit plus hastymment redressé.

[#5.] Item tresdouté seignur, parla oue vostre dit pover comine ne solont de en temps de voz nobles progenitours porter taxus ne tallages ne autres chosez especiales deinz iiij. / ove v. aunz une, si ont cestez.v. anez par devant de an en ane mys mes a diversez tallagez nient agalment adgitez a chescune persone solonc sone estate d'avoire, mes totedys et continuelment la plus graunt quantitate dez ditez taxes tortuosement sur mys a vostre povere commune, et nentymens a nule espoite ne petisse dez voz guerrez et en deffence de vostre realme par la Costers de miere en contur la chose graunties, eins ount estez sur lez costiers du miere en divers parties de vostre Roialme lez maysones de lez povers Comines arsez, lez villagez et lez personez raunsonés, et la nave tote outrement destruytz, et la terre tote voydé et povrer de tote maner de tresoure, qe vous navez dont vous poiez vostre terre defendre ne vostre estate reale tenere, a graunt doloure et poissance de touz vous sages, pur le peple qe se leva ne saveyt altre chose faire forsque aretter governours de vostre counsayle, appellantz lez plus graundez de vostre consayle Traytours a vous et a la Roialme come gentz qe bien ne savoient ne resone.

[#6.] Et plusours autres enchesones, tresredouté seignur, purroit homme declarere a vostre hautesse pur queux lez ditz comines leveront, s'il a fuisse pur long tariance de vous nostre seignur et noz autres seignurs en cest presente parlyment, esperance en Dieu qe si bone remedye soit ordeigné pur lez diffautez susdytes come appartient lez ditz diffautez, et touz autres qe busoignerent apenser serrount redressez, en plesaunce du Dieu, honour, et profite a vous et de tous noz autres seignurs et comines du Roialme.

[#7.] Purquoy, seignur, vous bonez gentz vous purrent humblement pur salvacion de vous et Dieu et de la Coroune, la quele ils sont

tenez amaygtener pur lour ligiance, qe vous plese assentiere as eux qe lez deffaultes et perilles avaunditez, et aultres que purront advener, puissent estre oustez et redressez par ordinaunce de voz noblez et pluis sagez au present assemblé, sembillantz au vostre dit comine tresdouté seigneur qe si sage et parfite remedye ne soit mys en cest present parlyment lem doute de celle perille venaunt apres qe homme ne serra de puissaunce pur l'amender la quele ne voile Dieu pur sa mercy, Amen.

[#8.] Et queux defautez remedier, tresdouté seigneur, si bien de ceux come par lez damagez et perilles semblables advener, il semble a vous humblez Comines, par congé et par commaundment de vous qe primerment qe est bosoigne demutere la governayle de vous et de vostre terre, qe vous, nostre liege et naturele seigneur, parmy vostre terre dehors et en touz voz autres seignuries, fuisse honuré et doutez et parfytement amez de peple pur bone et justice governayle, c'est assayvoyre, treshonuré seigneur, en droite justice fesauntz as tieux persones si biene as povers come as ryches egalment, solonc lour desert, si bien en voz hautez courtes come ayllours en chescune pays, cherisancez lez bonez et vaylantz de touz lez estates de vostre realme solonc lour degre et desert et nomement le honorable chyvalrye de touz voz / seignuries, endonantz la corage a lez bonez pur sustyner vostre honour et deffendre vostre realme dez damagez en puissaunce tortes, extorsions, et touz oppressiones faitez et affaire devers povers de vostre terre en touz pays <par les> riches, ne vaylaunce espernes qe fuisse ent atient, et asutomés quelle ne fuisse prunes sanz pardone solonc la desert de trespas, si biene de gentz esprituele concome dez lanes, mittaunt payn s'il vous plect en cest present parlyment come il semble a vous et a nous voylauncez seignuries et baronage sur voz hautys justicez, et touz vous autres officers et commissours queconques, pur faire droite et dieu justice en tous cases si bien as povers come as ryches, sanz doune ove fee prendre d'ascune autre de vous, sanz vendre lez loyes, pur doute ove pur hayne, ove pur doune ou pur covitisse, oustantz le povere en chescune pays de meistymours de querelles et touz ceux qe sont appellez secondes Royes extorciones, au confort et le relever de voz povers comines, par quele remedye et ordynance lealment teneux et executez en tout temps quant bosoigne soit vous nostre seignuries de dieu ameez, et parmy tote vostre realme honourez pur droiture, qe dieu le voille ottroiez pur sa mercy etcetera.

[#9.] Tresdouté seigneur, de rechief a vostre haute noblie souverengment en plesance de dieu et de seynt esglyse, pur honour de vous et de vostre Corone longment continuere, pur ease et tranquillité de tut vostre comine, ordeigner par vous nostre seigneur et voz nobles a vous appellez, de teux et tauntz come vous plect appellere l'estate de vous et de vostre coroune et de voz guerrez regardere et destreitement examyner, a tiele entent qe le honour de vous nostre seigneur et de vostre coroune soient honestement sustenez, sanz enblessement de vostre roialté en touz chosez

appendantz qe par vous et voz ditz nobles, s'il vous plest, ore a cest parlyment lez causes dez taxus, autres grevances, chargez, portes pardevaunt de vostre comine par defaute de sage avysement qe font la terre povere et anientz tut voidé de tresoure puissent estre cessez, et appetiés en supportacion de vostre dit comine taunque ils puissent lour mesme relever de lour poverté et la realme enrichesser par sage governaylle.

[#10.] Entenduz a vostre hauteesse noblye, nostre treshonuré seignur, s'il vous plest, qe lez guerrez devant sustenuz ne lour biens paravant donez et degastez, ne autres chargez assetz purront estre especifyez a vostre dit realme, et importable et sustener saunz outrement la destruer qe Dieu ne voille, suppliauntz humblement a vostre haute et royal nobleye qe pour Dieu et vostre honour la dit mater destrement et effectualment purroit estre determyns au present au souveraigne plesancez de Dieu, encrese et renomes de vostre bone gouvernement, si bien dehors come dedeinz vostre dit realme, en parfait ease / et prosperite de tut povere comine par les ployte, de quele article tresredouté seignur vous purrez purchasser de dieu et de vostre poeple parfitement leurs amours en tote lour pouare, et corage qe dieux coe voille par sa gracious petie, Amen.

[#11.] Et pur la gracious esloite de bone gouvernement sovereynement pur parfournier lez requestez avout requies et declariez supplient lez ditz humbles comines a vous tresdouté seignur, et a touz noz autres seignurs ore assemblez, qe de plus sage de vostre realme et de plus vertuose de quele estate q'ils soyent, vous plest faire estre nomez. vj., viij., oue taunt de noumbre qe vous plest, et loure faire chargiere ensi toust come ceo poet estre distingment, et par bone payne et surement qe endroit dez damagez et perillez avaunt nomez, et plusours autres qe nous ne savoms ne poemes pincer ensemble, et dez lez remediez avaunt només et de touz altrez purvyauncez et remediez qe enboisoignent, pur lonour et bien de vous nostre seigneur et tut le comine, ils diligentz soient en tout loure pouare de sustener vostre honour et Roialté et la prosperité de tut vostre Roialme, espirancz en dieu et lour sceu et travaylle que nulle de ditz meschiefs ne nule tiele semblabez jammes n'avendra en vostre dit realme, einz par l'eyde de Dieu et par lour remediez et puruyance en temps q'ils ent serront chargez de ent ordeigner et occuper, s'ils facent loure devour, vous nostre seignur et vostre Coroune serrez honorablement governez en totez honurez et honestez plesance, et tut la poeple enquietz, par quelez gouvernementz enserres vous nostre <seignour> de dieu chierez et de vostre poeple parfytement ameez et doutez, et tut la Roialme quietz, qe voille dieu coe ottroiere, Amen.

Translation

#1. The commons seek a remedy from the king for their sufferings. The lords and commons, seeing the monstrous and most wicked oppressions made by some of the king's advisors, upon both the greater and the lesser, and perceiving them to grow in evil-doing

day by day, with one assent proposed to the king to have amendment and remedy, in the following form.

#2. To our very redoubtable lord the king, and to all other our lords of the realm, the humble commons of your said realm show the matter and the harm that have come about, to the displeasure of God and Holy Church, to the dishonour of you and of your crown, and to all your nobles and others of noble birth, and to all the estates of the said realm by the rebellion and uprising lately amongst the lesser people of the kingdom, together with the perils and damage which will appear from one day to the next if they be not soon redressed, to the destruction of Holy Church within your realm, to the disinheritance and dishonour of yourself and your crown, and to the harm of all those of your realm, rich and poor, the which perils neither you nor the people of your land will be able to escape if some swift remedy be not ordained by means of the prelates, earls, barons, and the wisest of your kingdom.

#3. Firstly because the peace and true justice of your land, which you are bound to maintain, has not been upheld equally as between rich and rich, poor and poor, and particularly between rich and poor, as God and right demand, your people are crushed by the extortions of your officials in the counties, such as escheators, and other commissaries of officials, and ministers of Holy Church, by officers of other lords in the counties such as seneschals and clerks of courts baron, and especially by the three or four within each county who are known as Second Kings, so that your poor people are scarce able to remain alive, or to support their charges in aid of you and of your kingdom when there is need, by which defects you and your kingdom are much defamed in every land.

#4. And beyond that your great judges of the laws of your land do not do at all times and to all persons equal execution according to what your laws ordain, being inclined to excuse offences upon orders made under the privy seal or the great seal, against your good laws, or at the prayer of other lords whose retainers they are, wherefore they are not able to perform their duty to which they have been sworn, and that utterly to the destruction of your poor commons if it be not soon redressed.

#5. Also, very redoubtable lord, whereas your said poor commons in the time of your noble progenitors used not to have to bear taxes, tallages, or other special charges save once in every four or five years, these five years past they have year by year been put to various tallages, not fairly adjusted to each person's means, but always and continually with the greater part of the said taxes wrongfully imposed upon your poor commons, and yet not applied to any exploit or need of your wars, or the defence of your kingdom upon the sea-coasts, against the purpose for which they were granted. And therefore on the coasts in divers parts of your kingdom the poor commons' houses have been burned, their villages and persons held to ransom, their ships altogether destroyed, and the land left empty and bare of all manner of wealth,

so that you have not the power to defend your land or to maintain your royal estate, to the great grief and distress of all your wise counsellors, for those who rise know no other remedy, except to arrest those manipulators of your council who call the great men of your council traitors to you and your kingdom, like people who know neither right nor reason.

#6. And there are many other reasons, very redoubtable lord, why the said commons might rise, which might be declared to your Highness, not least that you and your lords have for so long wasted time in this parliament, trusting in God that effective remedy might be ordained against the above said defects as they appear, and all the other matters which need attention would be redressed, to the pleasure of God, and honour and profit to you and to all the other lords and the commons of the realm.

#7. Therefore, sire, your good people pray you humbly for the salvation of yourself, and God, and the crown, which they are bound by their allegiance to maintain, that it will please you to agree with them that the defects and dangers aforesaid and others which could arise should be expelled and redressed by the ordinance of your nobles and the most wise of those here assembled, it seeming to your said commons, very redoubtable lord, that if well-considered and complete remedy be not applied in this present parliament then such dangers will thereafter arise as none will have the power to avoid, the which in His mercy may God forbid. Amen.

#8. And to remedy those failings, very redoubtable lord, as well for them as for the other losses and perils likely to come, it seems to your humble commons that, by your leave and command, firstly there is need so to change the governance of yourself and your land that you, our liege and natural lord, shall throughout your land and beyond in all your other dominions be honoured and respected and perfectly loved by the people for good and just government, that is, truly honoured lord, to see right and justice done to all persons, as well the poor as the rich, evenly and according to their deserts, as well in your high court of justice as elsewhere in every land, cherishing the good and valiant of all the estates of your realm according to their degree and desert, and especially the honourable chivalry of all your lordships, giving courage to the worthy to sustain your honour and defend your realm from the harm done by great wrongs, extortions, and all oppressions, visited upon the poor of your land in all parts by the rich, not seeking to spare those who have offended, nor punishing them except according to the desert of the offence, as well spiritual persons as the laity, laying such charges, if it please you, in this present parliament, as shall seem fitting to you and to your worthy lordships and baronage, upon your high justices and all your other officers and commissioners whomsoever to do right and due justice in all causes, as well to the poor as to the rich, without taking gift or fee from any other but you, without selling the laws for doubt or for hatred, or for

gift or for covetousness, withstanding the power in all counties of maintainers of quarrels, and the extortions of all those who are called Second Kings, to the comfort and relief of your poor commons, for which remedy and ordinance, faithfully observed and executed at all times when need arise, shall you our lord be beloved of God, and honoured throughout your realm for righteousness, which God grant you of his mercy, etc.

#9. Very redoubtable lord, may it commend itself to your high and noble sovereignty, to the pleasure of God and of Holy Church, and for the honour of yourself and of your kingdom, long to continue, and for the ease and tranquillity of all your commons, through you our lord and such and so many of your nobles as you choose to summon, to ordain the estate of yourself and your crown, and to regard and examine straitly your wars to such purpose that the honour of you, our lord, and of your crown shall be honestly maintained, without embellishment of your regality in any of the things thereto pertaining, that through you and your said nobles, if it please you, now in this parliament the taxes, other grievances, and the charges imposed heretofore upon your commons for want of good counsel, which make the land poor and quite void of wealth, may cease and be remitted in support of your said commons, so that they may themselves relieve their poverty and the land be enriched by sound governance.

#10. And be it understood by your noble Highness, our most honoured lord, if it please you, that with the wars heretofore sustained and the resources granted and wasted, any further charges upon your said kingdom would be unbearable and not to be sustained without utterly destroying it, which God forbid, beseeching humbly your high and royal nobility that for God and your own honour the said matter be now carefully and effectively settled, to the sovereign pleasure of God, the increase and renown of your good governance as well without as within your said kingdom, in the perfect ease and prosperity of all the poor commons, by the performance of which, very redoubtable lord, you shall obtain of God and of your people entirely their love, with all their heart and strength, which may God will in his gracious mercy. Amen.

#11. And for the gracious achievement of sovereign good government, to effect the requests heretofore set out and declared, the said humble commons beseech you, very redoubtable lord, and all our other lords now assembled that of the wisest of your kingdom, and the most worthy, of whatever degree they be, it shall please you to name six or eight or whatever number you choose, and charge them to do all that can distinctly and by careful thought and assuredly be done in the matter of the aforesaid dangers and perils, and many others of which we do not know and cannot distinguish, and for the aforesaid remedies, and all other provisions and remedies that may be needed for the honour and well-being of you, our lord, and all the commons, and that they shall work

diligently with all their power to sustain your honour and regality and the prosperity of your whole realm, trusting in God and in their own knowledge and labours, that none of the said mischiefs nor any like them shall ever arise in your realm, and thus with the help of God, and by their remedies and provision in the time that they are thus charged to ordain and consider those things, if they perform their duty, then shall you our lord and your crown be honourably governed in all honour and honest delight, and all the people in peace, for ensuring which governance shall you our lord be cherished of God, and by your people perfectly loved and respected, and all the realm peaceful, which may God wish and grant. Amen.