

William FitzOsbert and the Crisis of 1196 in London

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The death of William FitzOsbert is one of the most famous and dramatic incidents in the history of medieval London.¹ In 1196 long simmering tensions concerning the manner in which the burden of taxation was being divided finally boiled over. The advocate for the poor and middling members of the community, William FitzOsbert (also known as William *cum barba*, or Longbeard), took refuge in St Mary le Bow church but, following a brief siege that culminated in the burning of the steeple, he was captured and brutally executed. Accounts of the incident, written by contemporary chroniclers, provide a glimpse into the urban political community. The chroniclers have important things to say about the sources of conflict within civic society, but this paper focuses on assessing the significance of this incident for our understanding of civic governance in medieval London. The accounts of the rise and fall of William FitzOsbert are intriguing, because they show dissension within the civic community, and describe how a significant faction of discontented citizens attempted to express their views and agitate for change. The chronicle accounts provide evidence that allows historians to consider the role of popular pressure in civic politics, at a time when the city was acquiring a new political identity.²

To contextualize the evidence provided by the chroniclers, some initial comment needs to be made about the nature of the governance of London. There were substantial changes to the structure of civic government in the second half of the twelfth century, and many of these changes gave the Londoners more control over their own affairs.³ The Londoners acquired more influence over the appointment of

key crown officials, such as the sheriffs,⁴ and new civic offices, such as the mayoralty, were created.⁵ Government, however, was still largely conducted through assemblies of which the most important were the folkmoot and the husting.⁶ Thirteenth-century documents show that the former was closely associated with the crown and the sheriffs, and was held in St Paul's churchyard.⁷ The husting, which can be traced back to the tenth century, emerged in the twelfth century as the principal court for the city of London, closely associated with the mayor and the Guildhall.⁸ There was a strong, and still continuing, tradition of public meetings and debate in twelfth-century London.⁹

In the early 1190s, taxation was the immediate cause of the tensions between the rich and poor people of London. King Richard I needed funds to support his wars and crusading ambitions, and he placed a severe burden on the entire kingdom. In 1188 there had been a levy for the aid of Jerusalem, known as the 'Saladin Tithe'. In 1193 the people had been called upon to contribute to the king's ransom and then, just a year later in 1194, there had been another tax.¹⁰ These levies came over and above the regular sums extracted from the city, such as the farm, which was paid once a year. The crown's exceptional demands on the city brought taxation to the forefront of the civic political agenda.

The evidence from this period suggests that the task of collecting a levy and determining each individual's contribution was left to the Londoners themselves. The city was divided into wards, each overseen by an alderman. This system permitted the uniform administration of government at a neighborhood level. Mid-twelfth century evidence contained in the Pipe Rolls tersely notes that taxes were being organized through the wards.¹¹ More evidence is provided by an early thirteenth-century manuscript preserved in the British Library, which shows aldermen holding wardmoots, to which the men of the ward were summoned.¹² At these meetings the aldermen announced the need for taxation, obtained consent to it, and began organizing the process of collection. Individuals were requested to contribute a portion of their total wealth, irrespective of whether it was in the form of land or movable goods, and it seems to have been an established convention that wealthy Londoners would pay at a higher rate than poorer people. One of the most important signs of wealth was the possession of a stone house, or of land that was held with heritable title, such that it could be passed on to an heir.¹³ Men who had these sorts of possessions were singled out and required to contribute at the higher rate.

The crown made important demands on the Londoners in the early 1190s, but left responsibility for dividing the burden of taxation and the task of organizing collection to the people of the city. The process of assessing and collecting taxes was a communal activity that required groups of neighbours to co-operate. That taxation, more than any other aspect of civic government, should have aroused conflict between neighbours and exacerbated existing tensions, particularly between the rich and the poor, is not surprising. Every time a new levy was imposed, the Londoners had to consider how the wealth of the community was distributed, then to reach a decision concerning the appropriate contribution from each individual.

The evidence for this paper is drawn primarily from the writings of four chroniclers: William of Newburgh, Gervase of Canterbury, Roger of Howden and Ralph Diceto.¹⁴ They were all living at the time events took place in London, and their accounts offer insight into the crisis. William of Newburgh's account is at once the longest and most detailed. He was probably born in Yorkshire in 1136, and was educated at, and served as a canon in, the Augustinian priory of Newburgh, founded in 1145.¹⁵ At the request of Ernald, abbot of Rievaulx, he composed his history during the period 1198-1201.¹⁶ In his writings, Newburgh claims to have derived information about the crisis in London from an eyewitness, a *virī veracis*, who heard FitzOsbert speak.¹⁷ Gervase of Canterbury was a younger man. He became a monk of Christ Church Canterbury in 1163, started writing history in 1185, and began work on the *Chronica*, which includes a section on FitzOsbert, in 1188.¹⁸ Historians have debated the identity of Roger of Howden.¹⁹ Judged by the material which he discusses, his principal interests lay in the north of England.²⁰ John Gillingham has argued that Howden traveled widely, often in royal service, and that the content of his writings in turn bears witness to his journeys.²¹ In contrast to the other chroniclers, a great deal is known about Ralph Diceto. He was a prominent public figure and had connections with the royal court. He attended the university of Paris, served as archdeacon of Middlesex, and by the late 1180s, when he began writing history, was dean of St. Paul's cathedral in London.²² He was associated with some of the most prominent personalities of the age.²³ It is very likely that he was an eyewitness to the earlier events of the FitzOsbert crisis and, indeed, begins his account in the first person, stating that 'around this time I noticed that there was bad feeling and conflict in the city of London between the rich and the poor'.²⁴

These are the four writers whose accounts provide the core of our evidence for the events in London. By virtue of his position as dean of St Paul's, Ralph Diceto certainly had first hand knowledge of the conditions in London and, like the other authors, he belonged to the realm of the clerks, involved in royal administration and the church, rather than the world of London tradesmen and merchants. William of Newburgh and Gervase of Canterbury were both members of monastic communities, and Howden was probably in royal service. They were all, therefore, contemporary and independent witnesses, reasonably well placed to obtain information about events in the city.

The chroniclers were attracted to the story of the death of William FitzOsbert because of its sensational finale, but also because they were troubled by the outbreak of mob violence and the destruction of a church. In their descriptions of the crisis all the chronicles address the issue of the collapse of order, and offer various explanations for why it occurred. The chroniclers were outsiders to civic politics, and while none of them could be described as a champion of FitzOsbert, neither were they unconditionally supportive of the established London leadership.

The chroniclers differ dramatically in terms of how they view FitzOsbert's role in the crisis, and the amount of credence which they give to the poor Londoners' concerns about the administration of taxation. Howden provides an almost sympathetic account of the complaints of the poor and middling citizens, offering at the beginning of his narrative the opinion that they were inspired by genuine grievances.²⁵ By contrast, taxation does not even enter into Gervase of Canterbury's account, and he prefers to portray William FitzOsbert and the credulous masses as responsible for the incident.²⁶ The interpretations of Diceto and William of Newburgh lie between the two extremes of Howden and Gervase of Canterbury. Both assert that disputes over taxation triggered the crisis, but they go on to argue that FitzOsbert exploited the situation, using it as a pretext for pursuing a self-seeking agenda.²⁷ As a group, therefore, the chroniclers were not by any means unanimous in their understanding of the causes of the crisis, but they largely favoured the established civic leadership at the expense of FitzOsbert and the poorer Londoners.

Irrespective of how much blame they chose to assign to the London leadership, as against their critics, the chroniclers provide insights into the manner in

which the Londoners reached collective decisions. Even William of Newburgh and Gervase of Canterbury, who had very little sympathy for the supporters of FitzOsbert, had to justify their interpretation of the causes of disorder in the city by offering a portrait of the collapse of the system of governance. The accounts were all written shortly after the event and thus, when considered within the context of what is known about London government from other documentary sources, they offer a useful contribution to historical understanding of this important period in London's history.

Even if FitzOsbert had not died so dramatically, he would still have left a mark on the historical record. He inherited property from his father, Osbert the Clerk, in or before 1185-6, and he leased part of the property to his brother to raise money for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.²⁸ He also had a prominent role in London's contribution to the third Crusade, and he was present in the crusaders' ship when it was beset by a storm, and St Thomas of Canterbury appeared to comfort them.²⁹

By the early 1190s, however, he was back in London and now involved in civic politics. The chroniclers' narratives focus on FitzOsbert himself, and provide detailed biographical information. According to Newburgh, FitzOsbert was born in London and was supported by his elder brother while he attended school. He was endowed with 'a sharp mind', was 'moderately educated but unusually eloquent'.³⁰ He was nicknamed Longbeard because of his striking beard which 'made him more conspicuous in meetings and assemblies'.³¹ Howden states that FitzOsbert was 'a man versed in the law'.³² Gervase of Canterbury, who was one of FitzOsbert's most hostile critics, adds that 'he was most eloquent'.³³ Even allowing for the chroniclers' exaggeration of FitzOsbert's charisma, which was intended to explain why he secured a following among the masses, it seems clear that he must have been an articulate and sophisticated man, with a forceful personality.

Newburgh tells us that FitzOsbert initially owed his prominence to 'the favour of some people [by which] he obtained a position in the magistracy of the town'.³⁴ There is no evidence that FitzOsbert ever served as a sheriff or alderman, thus the nature of his position is something of a mystery. That he became an influential figure without holding high office forces us to question the connections between serving as alderman or sheriff during this period, and political importance. Since aldermen probably gained their position through inheritance or purchase, rather than di-

rect popular election, it is perhaps not surprising that at public meetings they might be upstaged by a charismatic speaker such as FitzOsbert.³⁵

The political debate within the city was focused not on the extent of the crown's demands, but on the manner in which they would be met. There was a perception amongst the less privileged members of society that the rich were not paying their full share of the levies. Howden tells us that 'strife originated amongst the citizens of London, for not inconsiderable aids were imposed more often than usual because of the king's imprisonment and other incidents, and in order to spare their own purses the rich wanted the poor to pay everything'.³⁶ Diceto relates that he noticed that tension was building 'between the rich and the poor concerning the apportioning of the taxes payable to the treasury according to everyone's means'.³⁷ Newburgh claims that FitzOsbert maintained that 'on the occasion of every royal edict the rich spared their own fortunes and because of their power placed the whole weight on the poor and defrauded the royal treasury of a large sum'.³⁸ The chroniclers were aware that the poor and middling were using notions of equality and responsibility to criticize the manner in which the burden of taxation was shared. The resentment of the poor was directed not at the crown for imposing the taxes, but at the rich Londoners, for not paying their fair share.

The chroniclers use a variety of terms to describe FitzOsbert's supporters, including *paupers*, *plebs*, and *cives Londoniarum*.³⁹ It seems likely that the chroniclers chose their terms to emphasize the plebeian status of his supporters, and thus discredit the movement. In fact, FitzOsbert's supporters probably included many people who occupied the middling level of society and had wealth worth taxing. Indeed, when Hubert Walter, Justiciar of England, became involved in the crisis and sought to bring pressure on the citizens to hand over FitzOsbert, he ordered the arrest of London merchants visiting fairs in the surrounding counties.⁴⁰ While this gesture may have been partly intended to force the Londoners to stop fighting amongst themselves and to reach a consensus, it was the members of the mercantile community protecting FitzOsbert who would have been most affected.

The chroniclers suggest that FitzOsbert's interest in the issue of taxation was connected to his conflict with his older brother. FitzOsbert was not an exceptionally wealthy man, and he was a younger son from a wealthy family. One of the last traces

of the event in official records is to be found in the 1196 Chancellor's Roll, which states that FitzOsbert's holdings in London were now in the hands of Richard FitzJohn.⁴¹ When FitzOsbert was executed, his London property was forfeited to the crown. During his lifetime, however, FitzOsbert was a comfortably but not exceptionally wealthy individual.

The chroniclers argue that FitzOsbert's attack on the richest Londoners developed out of a campaign against his brother. Diceto tells us that FitzOsbert 'in his meetings pursued to the death his carnal brother [Richard FitzOsbert] and two other men of good repute as if they were guilty of betraying the king'.⁴² Newburgh describes Richard FitzOsbert as a 'citizen of London' and characterizes William FitzOsbert as an ungrateful younger sibling who accused his brother 'of betraying the king'.⁴³ He states that FitzOsbert 'could not bear the wealth and glory of certain citizens or magnates, whom he realized he did not equal', and that he went as far as claiming before the king 'that his brother had conspired against his life'.⁴⁴ At first glance, this suggestion would seem likely to be a convenient fabrication, intended to simplify the task of narration by reducing a complex political crisis to a battle between brothers. Remarkably, however, this conflict can be confirmed from an independent source.

A document preserved in the rolls of the *curia regis* confirms that in a November session of the court in the sixth year of the reign of Richard I (1194), Richard FitzOsbert, Robert Brand, and Jordan Tanner were accused by William FitzOsbert of having held a meeting in Richard FitzOsbert's stone house at which treasonous statements were made. Richard was accused of resenting the obligation to pay royal taxes. Jordan Tanner was held to have expressed a desire that the king never return home, and Robert Brand was charged with declaring that London would never have any other king except the mayor.⁴⁵ In the small world of London politics, it is perhaps not surprising that family disputes could become intertwined with civic political struggles.

All the chroniclers suggest that FitzOsbert was organizing the people under his leadership. Newburgh describes how he disrupted public meetings, Gervase of Canterbury and Howden both assert that FitzOsbert had more influence in London than the appointed leaders of the city, and Diceto, the dean of St Paul's, suggests that FitzOsbert bound the people to himself with oaths and that his rhetoric was respon-

sible for a riot in St Paul's.⁴⁶ In disrupting official meetings, and by binding the citizens with oaths, FitzOsbert threatened the established political order. FitzOsbert was also prepared to appeal to the king. Perhaps drawing on contacts made during the crusades, when tension in the city rose, FitzOsbert went to seek Richard's support. Newburgh relates that FitzOsbert 'deemed it necessary to go overseas to complain to the prince that he suffered the enmity... of the powerful'.⁴⁷ Howden also asserts that FitzOsbert traveled 'to the king overseas [and] he obtained his peace for himself and the people'.⁴⁸ The results of this journey are unknown, but they did nothing to defuse the growing tensions.

FitzOsbert might not have come to such a brutal end if he had not aroused the ire of Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury, and justiciar of England. In the absence of the king, Hubert Walter was responsible for maintaining order in the realm. He personally intervened in the crisis, 'convoked the common people, spoke to them squarely . . . and admonished them to give hostages for being loyal to the king'.⁴⁹ The Londoners handed over hostages, but FitzOsbert, 'supported by the crowd proceeded with a show of pomp and organized public meetings on his own authority'.⁵⁰ Having reached the conclusion that FitzOsbert needed to be removed before the disturbances could be suppressed, Hubert Walter attempted to convince the Londoners to hand him over peacefully. Hubert Walter ordered the apprehension of Londoners caught outside the city and Howden notes that 'at Stamford Fair [March 31] some merchants... were arrested'.⁵¹

In early April, however, Walter resolved to end the troubles, by force if necessary. Summoners sent to bring FitzOsbert to trial were intimidated by the latter's supporters. When armed men, with the assistance of 'noble citizens' came to arrest him, FitzOsbert and his adherents fought them off, and FitzOsbert personally killed one of the officers.⁵² He then fled with some supporters to St Mary le Bow church, where he sought refuge in the tower. Diceto and Newburgh record that while the archbishop considered his next action, more soldiers were sent into the city to ensure the docility of the common people. To the discomfort of some of the chroniclers, the archbishop decided not to respect the sanctity of the church, and the steeple was burned to force FitzOsbert out. Newburgh, placing the blame for the fire on the soldiers of Hubert Walter, plausibly suggests that FitzOsbert was forced out of the church when it was 'besieged with fire and smoke'.⁵³ Diceto presents a rather farfetched scenario in which FitzOsbert himself starts the fire.⁵⁴ Howden also lays

the blame at the feet of Hubert Walter, whom he describes as trying to force FitzOsbert from the church. Furthermore he notes that the monks of Canterbury, to whom the church belonged, were 'indignant' that their own archbishop had trespassed on their ecclesiastical rights.⁵⁵ Perhaps this explains why Gervase of Canterbury, who was very hostile to FitzOsbert, but also a monk of Canterbury, chose to use a passive grammatical structure to note that the church was burned, and thus tactfully avoid assigning responsibility.⁵⁶

Captured, FitzOsbert was taken to the Tower, tried, and then brought to Smithfield for execution. All the chroniclers provide gruesome accounts of the execution, but Gervase of Canterbury presents an especially bloody description, relating that FitzOsbert was dragged 'through the center of the city to the elms, his flesh was demolished and spread all over the pavement and, fettered with a chain, he was hanged that same day on the elms with his associates and died'.⁵⁷ It was a dramatic finish for a man who had come to represent the hopes of the middling and lower orders of London society. While his execution seems to have snuffed out the immediate threat of a revolution in London, it did not prove to be the end of FitzOsbert's influence.

The gruesome execution, while demonstrating the crown's power, also turned FitzOsbert into a martyr. It is clear that his supporters cast a religious significance over his death. Gervase of Canterbury relates that 'a sudden rumour spread through the city that William was a new martyr and shone through miracles'.⁵⁸ People started seeking out his place of execution. Newburgh notes that the gibbet was stolen and 'the earth underneath, as if it were consecrated by the blood of the hanged man . . . was scraped away by the fools in small bits until a considerable ditch was formed'.⁵⁹ Even in death FitzOsbert was a threat to order, and Newburgh remarks that the 'multitude continually kept watch' at the execution site 'and this very vain error became so strong that it could have misled even the wise'.⁶⁰ The intensity of the admiration which was lavished upon him at his death testifies to the strength and depth of his support within the population at large.

Again, the authorities resorted to violence. Gervase of Canterbury records that 'an ambush was laid and those who came at night-time to pray were whipped'.⁶¹ Newburgh credits the royal authorities with this initiative and adds that 'the administrator of the realm punished with suitable ecclesiastical severity the priest who

was at the head of the whole superstition, and sent an armed guard to chase away the multitude of rustics'.⁶² The incipient cult of FitzOsbert was forcefully suppressed.

The rise and fall of William FitzOsbert was an exceptional episode in the political history of twelfth-century London: the public execution of a prominent public figure was clearly not part of the normal political process. Nevertheless, in the course of explaining how the crisis occurred, the chroniclers indicate some of the fundamental mechanisms whereby the Londoners reached collective decisions. The chroniclers' accounts of this incident, therefore, shed light on a number of aspects of London governance.

Prominent and established Londoners dominated the ranks of the mayors, sheriffs and aldermen.⁶³ Susan Reynolds has made the important observation that there was no discernable change in the leadership of the city during or immediately following the crisis.⁶⁴ The very stability and cohesiveness of the authorities, far from indicating that the incident was of only minimal importance, suggests that in the mid-1190s the civic leadership was disconnected from the population.

One of the most interesting issues which the chroniclers raise is the role of popular pressure in shaping communal civic policy in the late twelfth century. The crisis clearly shows that the poor and middling Londoners did not unquestioningly defer to civic authority. The chroniclers maintain that the lower orders were willing to express their opinions, and indeed that they believed that their interests should play an important role in determining the policy of the community. The chroniclers also make clear that there were recognized mechanisms whereby public opinion could be made manifest. Public meetings provided a vehicle for the expression of sentiments of dissatisfaction, and indeed it was possible for a man such as William FitzOsbert, who was not in the first rank of London merchants, to acquire influence by articulating the critical opinions of an angry section of the population. Furthermore, even though poor and middling men did not serve as mayors or sheriffs, their opinions ultimately mattered in civic politics, because they were not easily coerced. When a restive section of the population opposed their methods of organizing taxation, the authorities could not implement a policy. The influence of the high officials over the community, therefore, should not be overstated.

Another point which the accounts of the chroniclers emphasize is the important role played by the crown in London's internal politics. Irrespective of the decla-

ration of the commune in London, the creation of the mayor, and the increase in local influence over the appointment of prominent officials, the crown was prepared forcefully to intervene in London affairs. During the build-up to the crisis, it gave support to both FitzOsbert and the established London leaders, probably in the hope that matters could be settled peacefully. When an impasse was reached, and the conflict between the citizens seemed to be on the verge of becoming violent, the crown, acting through Justiciar Hubert Walter, reacted fiercely to restore order.

As a final note, while the contemporary chroniclers took a dim view of FitzOsbert's actions and characterized him as a demagogue, less than a century later, in the hands of Matthew Paris, FitzOsbert was transformed from a villain into a hero.⁶⁵ Paris presents a stridently sympathetic portrait of FitzOsbert, describing him as the leader of a movement which resisted the unreasonable impositions made upon the poor by the mayor and aldermen. He calls the attack on St. Mary le Bow church a 'sacrilege' and claims that FitzOsbert's death placed him *inter martyres videtur merito computandus*.⁶⁶ Paris's account, in addition to providing a perspective which contrasts with those of the earlier chroniclers, provides evidence that FitzOsbert lived on in the popular imagination. In part, this was because of the dramatic nature of his death, but it was also because taxation and conflict between the rich and the underprivileged continued to be relevant issues that excited passions and sparked debate.

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Notes

- 1 The incident has received surprisingly little attention from twentieth-century historians, perhaps because it is in chronicles, rather than administrative records, that it is recorded. For two nineteenth-century perspectives, see F. Palgrave, ed., *Rotuli Curiae Regis: 1194-1199*, 2 vols., (London, 1835) vol. 1, pp. vii-xviii and J. H. Round's entry, 'FitzOsbert, William' in the DNB,

vol. 7 (1889-90), pp.189-190. The most recent article on FitzOsbert is G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Bearded Revolutionary', *History Today* 19 (1969), pp. 679-87. For views on the significance of the event, see S. Reynolds, 'The Rulers of London in the Twelfth Century,' *History* 57 (1972), p. 350, C. N. L. Brooke and G. Keir, *London 800-1216: the Shaping of a City*, (London, 1975), pp. 48-9, 235, 248, G. A. Williams, *Medieval London*, (London, 1963) p. 4, and D. Keene, 'William FitzOsbert', *New DNB* (forthcoming). I am particularly grateful to Derek Keene for letting me see a copy, in advance of publication, of his entry on William FitzOsbert.

- 2 Appraising the role of members of the lower ranks of society in political events of the twelfth and thirteenth century is not easy, and in general the sources provide such limited information that it is difficult to judge whether the poor and middling even had an awareness of the issues that preoccupied their social superiors. Carpenter, however, has shown how, in the mid-thirteenth century, peasants were capable of understanding the relationship between local issues and questions concerning the community of the realm, see D. Carpenter, 'English Peasants in Politics, 1258-1267' *Past and Present*, no. 136 (1992), pp.3-42. The Londoners had a tradition of self-government, but it is nevertheless difficult to find sources that elucidate how the Londoners reached communal decisions. The crisis of 1196 is an exceptionally well-documented event.
- 3 For a bibliography of secondary works on this complex topic see D. Keene, 'London in the Early Middle Ages' in P. L. Garside (ed.), *Capital Histories: A Bibliographical Study of London*, (Aldershot, 1998) pp. 13-26, esp. pp. 21-23. The research of Susan Reynolds and C. N. L. Brooke has had an enormous impact on the field and their books and articles are fundamental, especially S. Reynolds, 'The Rulers of London', pp.337-357 and Brooke and Keir, *London 800-1216*, chapters 8-9.
- 4 The first signs that the Londoners were seeking to participate in the selection of the sheriffs appear in the early twelfth century, *Pipe Roll Society*, Pipe Roll, 31 Henry I, p.148, S. Reynolds, W. de Boer, and G. Mac Niocaill, (eds.), *Elenchus Fontium Historiae Urbanae*, (Leiden, 1988), pp. 62-64; and W. de Gray Birch, (ed.), *The Historical Charters and Constitutional Documents of the City of London*, (London, 1887), p. 4; S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the*

- History of Medieval Towns*, (Oxford, 1977) p. 104. It is not until the 1190s that the Londoners had firmly established their privilege of selecting the sheriffs, however, Brooke and Keir, *London 800-1216*, chapter 8, esp. pp. 208-222, Reynolds, 'Rulers of London,' p.343.
- 5 On the early history of the mayoralty see, Brooke, *London 800-1216*, chapter 9., esp. pp. 245-248, Reynolds, 'Rulers of London,' pp.348-350, J. H. Round, 'The First Mayor of London,' *The Antiquary*, vol. xv (1887), pp.107-111, D. Keene, 'London from the Post-Roman Period to 1300' in D. M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, 3 vols., (Cambridge, 2000), vol 1., pp. 208-9.
- 6 Historians have speculated that the folkmoot was older than the husting, but there are so few twelfth-century references to the folkmoot that Reynolds has suggested that c.1100 the husting might already have superceded it as the principal forum of civic governance, Reynolds, 'Rulers of London,' p. 339, see also Brooke and Keir, *London 800-1216*, p. 249. The folkmoot is alluded to in Henry I's charter to the city, de Gray Birch, *Historical Charters*, p. 4. It is important to remember that much local government was probably also conducted through the wards, parishes and sokes, which also provided a focus for community. For an excellent introduction to the administration of justice in the city, see A. H. Thomas's introduction to the *Calendar of Early Mayor's Court Rolls, 1298-1307*, (Cambridge, 1924).
- 7 The first document describing the folkmoot's role in the government of the city is found in BL, Add. Ms. 14252, folio 100b, in M. Bateson, 'A London Municipal Collection of the Reign of John,' *English Historical Review*, 17 (1902) p. 502, M. Weinbaum, *London Unter Eduard I und II*, 2 vols., (Stuttgart, 1933), vol. 2., pp. 38-39. The Londoners were summoned to the folkmoot by the ringing of a bell, and folkmoots were held at least three times each year, to organize the shrievality, the watch, and fire prevention.
- 8 Throughout the twelfth century, the husting served as a forum for the public announcement of property transactions. An early example, dated 1113-1131, describes the husting as being held 'in the house of Alfwin fitz Leofstan,' with prominent individuals and officials, including a sheriff and an

undersheriff, in attendance, W. D. Macray, (ed.), *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis* (Rolls Series, 1886) pp. 248-9, R. C. van Caenegam, ed., *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, 2 vols. (Selden Society, 1990-1) vol.1, pp. 228-9. For other examples see, van Caenegam, *Lawsuits*, vol.2, pp. 584-5 and 601-2, Stuart A. Moore, (ed.), *Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Johannis Baptiste de Colecestria*, 2 vols., (London, 1897), vol. 2, p. 295. The husting had a wider role, however, as a forum for settling disputes, particularly over land; van Caenegam, *Lawsuits*, vol. 1, p. 293, vol. 2, p. 482. With the creation of the mayor, the importance of the husting increased and a document dated 1193-94 describes it as the court of the mayor and sheriffs; Stuart, *Cartularium ... Colecestria*, pp.297-298. Charters and writs preserve a record of the routine role of the husting, but chroniclers also described the Guildhall and the husting as fora for raucous public debates. In 1191 Londoners assembled to discuss their dispute with the abbot of St. Edmunds, and in a separate incident, to consider taking sides in the conflict between Longchamp and John, H. E. Butler, (ed. and tr.), *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, (London, 1949), pp. 75-77, and J. S. Brewer, (ed.), *Giraldus Cambrensis: Opera* 7 vols., (Rolls Series, 1861-77), vol. 4, pp. 404-5.

- 9 For some discussion of the thirteenth-century evidence for public meeting, see D. Keene, 'London from the Post-Roman Period,' pp. 204-205.
- 10 The ordinances of Feb. 1188 specified that a contribution of a tenth of rents and movables was expected. The 1193 aid for the ransom of the king involved at least two separate tallages at high rates, and the tax imposed in April 1194 was at a rate of 2s on a unit of wealth called the carucate. For details see M. Jurkowski, C. L. Smith, D. Crook, *Lay Taxes in England and Wales 1188-1688* (London, 1998), pp. 1-4.
- 11 The assessment of an aid for the marriage of the king's daughter, first mentioned in the Pipe Roll of 14 Henry II, was, according to a later entry, made '*per wardas civitatis*', Pipe Roll, 33 Henry II, p. 41. By the late twelfth century, it was not unusual for the involvement of the wards in taxation to be noted. In the Pipe Roll of 1183-4, the '*cives Londonienses*' owed £19 13s 4d for an assize that '*fuit per wardas civitatis et postea concessum per justicias*', Pipe Roll, 30 Henry II, p.139. For another example see Pipe Roll, 34 Henry II, p. 20.

- 12 The potential of BL, Add. Ms. 14252 has not been fully realized by historians of London. Bateson's transcription is not complete and has some eccentric features, see 'A London Municipal Collection,' pp. 480-511 and 707-730. Weinbaum's transcription is superior, but is intended for a German-speaking audience, *London Unter Eduard I und II*, vol. 2, pp. 5-91. The three passages of BL, Add. Ms 14252 directly relevant to taxation and wardmoots are on folios 110r-111r, 112r-112v, 124r-125r.
- 13 The connections between the terms under which property was held and the rate of taxation are made especially clear in the passage BL, Add. Ms. 14252, folio 112r-112v, which records a '*sacramentum ciste*' (the oath of the chest). It asserts that taxes on property were paid at different rates depending on whether the owner held the land in '*feudo*' and had a stone house, or whether they only held '*non securo et non in feudo*'. For comments on stone as a prestigious building material in London, see Keene, 'London from the Post-Roman Period,' p. 194, and J. Schofield, *The Building of London from the Conquest to the Great Fire*, (London, 1984), pp. 54-56.
- 14 Throughout this paper, unless otherwise stated, reference to these texts is drawn from R. C. van Caenegam, (ed.), *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, 2 vols., (Selden Society, 1990-1), which conveniently assembles the principal accounts, drawn from the Rolls Series editions, and presents them with a parallel English translation. The only important omission from van Caenegam's text is Newburgh's titles and chapter divisions, which organized his account into two sections, entitled '*De conjuratione Lundoniis facta per quendam Guillelmum, et quomodo idem poenas audaciae luit*' and '*Quomodo vulgus voluerit hominem illum tanquam martyrem honorare, et quomodo error iste exstinctus sit*,' R. Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, 4 vols. (Rolls Series, 1884-1889) vol. 2, pp.466 and 471. Another intriguing account of the incident, which describes the trial and execution, is preserved in BL, Ms. Cotton Vespasian. C. XIV, folio 156r but its provenance is uncertain.
- 15 For comments on William of Newburgh's formation, context, and writings, see N. F. Partner, *Serious Entertainment: the Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England*, (Chicago,1977), esp. chapters 2-5.

- 16 Howlett suggested that Newburgh began writing in 1196, and died in 1198; see his preface to *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, vol.1, pp. xxiii-xxiv. His views, however, were revised by Kate Norgate, who argued that it was more likely that Newburgh wrote at the very end of the century, 'The Date of Composition of William of Newburgh's History,' *English Historical Review*, 19 (1904), pp. 288-297. See also Partner, *Serious Entertainment*, p.60.
- 17 Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, vol. 2, p. 469, Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 689.
- 18 Stubbs argues that he was born circa 1141; see his preface to *Gervasii Cantuariensis: Opera Historica*, 2 vols., (Rolls Series, 1879-80) vol.1, p. xii. For comments on Gervase of Canterbury as a writer, see A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c.550-1307* (London, 1996), pp.253-260.
- 19 Two candidates have been suggested; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, pp. 226-228.
- 20 W. Stubbs, preface to *Chronica: Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, 4 vols., (Rolls Series, 1868-1871), vol.1, p. xxxvi.
- 21 J. Gillingham, 'The Travels of Roger of Howden and his Views of the Irish, Scots and Welsh,' *Anglo-Norman Studies* 20 (1997), p. 167 and J. Gillingham, 'Historians Without Hindsight: Coggeshall, Diceto and Howden on the Early Years of John's Reign,' S. D. Church, (ed.,) *King John: New Interpretations*, (Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 9-10. Gillingham's comments on Diceto, in the latter article, are also useful, pp. 8-9.
- 22 LeNeve, John, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300*, vol. I: *St. Paul's, London*, compiled by Diana E. Greenway (London, 1968), pp. 5-6.
- 23 Gransden describes him as a friend of Hubert Walter (who was serving as Justiciar of England during the crisis), William Longchamp and Walter of Coustances, *Historical Writing*, p. 231.
- 24 Diceto, in *English Lawsuits*, pp. 692-3. W. Stubbs, (ed.), *The Historical Works of Ralph Diceto*, 2 vols., (Rolls Series, 1876), vol. 2, p. 143.

- 25 Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, pp. 693-694, passage quoted below, p. 11 n.35. Stubbs notes that Howden was careful to state that the frequency of taxes, followed by an unpopular distribution of the burden, led to the incident. Interestingly, Stubbs also observes that the language Howden uses to express this point is very similar to Newburgh's; see Stubbs, *Chronica: Houedene*, vol.4, p. lxxxix.
- 26 Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, pp. 691-692. He argues that FitzOsbert, because of his 'eloquen[ce]' managed to mislead the Londoners and caused 'the unexperienced mob' to resist the authorities.
- 27 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, pp.687-691, Diceto, in *English Lawsuits*, pp. 692-693. Stubbs finds Diceto's response to the event surprisingly subdued, commenting that Diceto balances a belief in the legitimacy of the popular grievances with a conviction that FitzOsbert was a dangerous demagogue requiring a severe response; see preface to *The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto*, vol 1., pp. lxxv-lxxvi. For comments on William of Newburgh's attitude towards towns, urban violence, and William FitzOsbert in particular; see Partner, *Serious Entertainment*, pp. 110-113. She describes Newburgh's attitude towards cities as characterized by nervousness, and argues that in his writing 'towns figure as centres of a new kind of unpredictable and erratic violence—different . . . in quality if not intensity from the violence of the countryside,' p.111.
- 28 H. M. Chew and M. Weinbaum (edd.), *The London Eyre of 1244*, London Record Society vol. 6 (1970), nos. 216, 295, 310. Another fleeting glimpse of William FitzOsbert is provided by an entry in the 1189 Pipe Roll, which notes 'Willelmus f. Osberti' owed 40s for a writ against 'Adam de Suwerch', Pipe Roll, 1 Richard 1, p229. The entry continues to appear in subsequent Pipe Rolls, indicating that the Exchequer continued to try to collect the debt until John came to the throne.
- 29 W. Stubbs, (ed.), *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi (Benedict of Peterborough)*, 2 vols., (Rolls Series, 1867) vol. 2, pp. 116-117, and Stubbs, *Chronica: Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, vol.3, pp. 42-43.
- 30 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 687.

- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 687. Newburgh assumes that FitzOsbert was present at these types of events. Keene intriguingly observes that beards were popularly associated with learning, pilgrims and resistance to authority, 'William FitzOsbert', *New DNB* (forthcoming).
- 32 Howden, *English Lawsuits*, p. 693. On the literacy of London merchants, see M.T.Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London, 1979), p. 88.
- 33 Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 691.
- 34 The Latin reads: '*hic nimirum, favore quorundam nactus in urbe locum aliquem inter magistratus,*' Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 688.
- 35 FitzThedmar, in his entry for the year 1248, provides the first reference to an aldermanic election when he remarks that Alexander le Ferrun was chosen by '*homines illius wardē*' and then admitted to the office of alderman in the husting, T. Stapleton (ed.), *De Antiquis Legibus Liber*, Camden Society, (London, 1846), p. 15. How the aldermen came to hold their positions prior to this date is unknown. Reynolds comments that 'there is no evidence of actual inheritance' of aldermanic office during the twelfth century, 'Rulers of London,' p.345. But nor is there evidence of popular election, and there are so many cases of related men holding office that family connections were clearly an important factor which helped a man secure office. Davis has identified two cases where the office of alderman was passed from father to son in the early twelfth century, and the dominance of aldermanic office by particular families continued into the thirteenth; H. W. C. Davis, 'London Lands and Liberties of St Paul's 1066-1135,' A.G. Little and F.M. Powicke, (edd.), *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, (Manchester, 1925), p. 48, Williams, *Medieval London*, pp. 32-33. The notion of proprietary jurisdiction was fundamental to civic government in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and there is strong evidence that aldermanic office was considered a form of property. Until the late thirteenth century, Caroline Barron observes, the wards were almost always known by the personal names of their aldermen, suggesting that they were considered a possession of their aldermen; 'Lay Solidarities: the Wards of Medieval

London,' in P. Stafford, J. L. Nelson, J. Martindale, (edd.), *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds* (Manchester, 2001), p.219. Farringdon (Ludgate-Newgate) ward for several decades subsequent to 1265 was bought, sold, leased and inherited; Williams, *Medieval London*, p. 32, W. Page, *London: Its Origin and Early Development*, (London, 1923) pp. 181-183, A. B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, 2 vols., (London, 1908-13), vol. 2, xvi-xvii. Portsoken ward was another notable exception, and from c.1125 until the reign of Henry VIII, its alderman was the prior of Holy Trinity Aldgate; G. A. J. Hodgett, (ed.) *The Cartulary of Holy Trinity Aldgate*, London Record Society, vol. 7 (1971), p. xiii. The establishment of the commune was probably the important turning point, but in 1191 the aldermen were not deposed *en masse*. The practice of selecting aldermen through election, rather than through a combination of purchase, inheritance and cooption, was probably only gradually introduced in the early thirteenth century, as the existing office holders passed away and the commune became established. It should also be remembered that election might only be a partially elective process. At the end of the thirteenth century, an aldermanic election involved the wardmoots advancing two candidates, from whom the serving aldermen then chose their new colleague, Williams, *Medieval London*, pp. 34-35.

36 Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693.

37 Diceto, in *English Lawsuits*, pp. 692.

38 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 687

39 The terminology used by the chroniclers to describe the dissenting Londoners varies. Newburgh uses the term '*plebes*' and '*pauperes*,' *English Lawsuits*, p. 688, Gervase of Canterbury '*vulgus inperitum*,' *Ibid.*, p. 691, Howden '*pauperes*' and '*cives Landoniarum*,' *Ibid.*, pp. 693-4, and Diceto '*pauperes*,' *Ibid.*, p. 692.

40 Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693.

41 *Pipe Roll Society*, Chancellor's Roll, 8 Richard I, p. 296. In place of the Pipe Roll of 1196 historians consult the Chancellor's roll of 1196, because the

Pipe Roll of that year has not survived. During the eyre of 1244 the royal justices considered the value of William FitzOsbert's holdings in the city, which had been forfeited to the crown, and found them worth 20s a year, Chew and Weinbaum, *The London Eyre of 1244*, nos. 216, 295, 310.

- 42 Diceto, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693.
- 43 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 687.
- 44 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 688.
- 45 The damaged document was transcribed by F. Palgrave, (ed.), *Rotuli Curiae Regis*, pp. 69-70. Robert Brand and Jordan Tanner are mentioned in other documents of the period, and can be found acting as witnesses to land transfers by prominent men, such as mayor Henry FitzAlwin, Stuart, *Cartularium . . . Colecestria*, p. 295, Palgrave, *Rotuli Curiae Regis*, appendix, pp. cv-cvii.
- 46 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 688; Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 692; Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693; Diceto, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693.
- 47 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 688
- 48 Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693.
- 49 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 689.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 689 and Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 692.
- 51 Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 693.
- 52 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 689, Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, pp. 693-4, states that the citizen who was killed was named 'Geoffrey.'
- 53 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p.689.
- 54 Diceto, in *English Lawsuits*, p.693
- 55 Howden, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 694.
- 56 Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 692.

- 57 Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 692.
- 58 Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 692.
- 59 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 690.
- 60 *Ibid.*, pp. 690-1.
- 61 Gervase of Canterbury, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 692.
- 62 Newburgh, in *English Lawsuits*, p. 691.
- 63 Excellent lists of the mayors and sheriffs of this period have been compiled, but the lists of aldermen are not complete, Reynolds, 'Rulers of London,' p. 345 and tables 1 and 2, Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, vol 1., pp. 362-365. While there were men without conspicuous wealth in public service, as well as affluent men who were not interested in public office, many of the prominent figures can be shown to have had large holdings of property; Brooke and Keir, *London 800-1216*, pp. 218-222, Williams, *Medieval London*, p.53. There is no evidence that wealth was a prerequisite for office, but in the case of the shrievalty at least, the possession of substantial private funds was an advantage, for the sheriffs had substantial financial obligations, and they might have to wait for reimbursement.
- 64 Reynolds, 'The Rulers of London,' p. 350.
- 65 H. R. Luard, (ed.), *Matthaei Parisiensis, Chronica Majora*, Rolls Series, 7 vols., (1872-1883), vol. 2, pp. 418-419.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p.419. His account of FitzOsbert's actions and the events of 1196 is consonant with his more general suspicion of centralized authority in church and state, developed, in the words of Gransden, 'under the provocation of contemporary politics'; *Historical Writing in England*, p.367. Elsewhere in his writings Paris fiercely denounces abuses of power, particularly those perpetrated by papal agents and tax collectors. See, for example, his comments on the events of the year 1247 and in particular, on the two Franciscans who were given a commission by the pope to raise funds in England, *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 599-600, R. Vaughan, (ed. and tr.), *Chronicles of Matthew Paris* (Gloucester, 1984), pp.88-89.

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