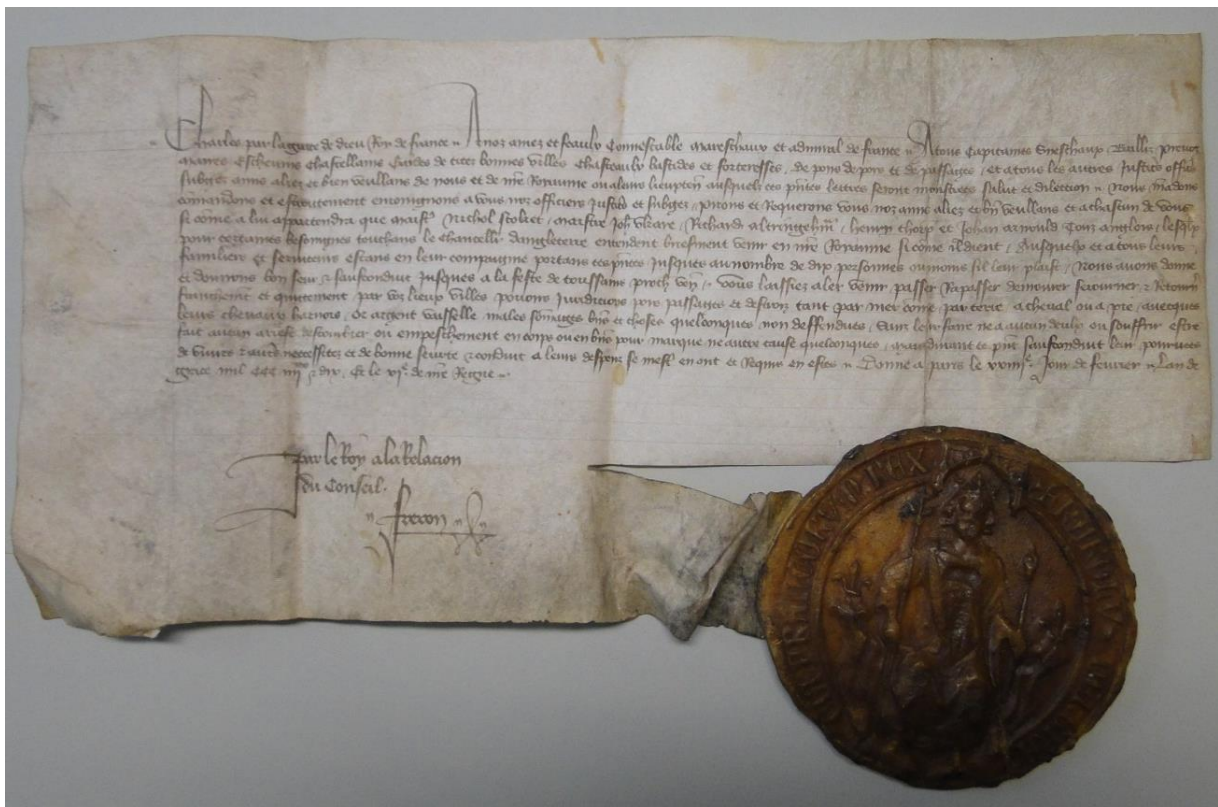


**A Medieval Travel Warrant:
NCA 9716**

By 1391 the Hundred Years War was already sixty years old, and one of several short truces was in place between England and France. William of Wykeham, as Lord Chancellor, administrative reformer and general fixer for King Richard II and his Council, had long found himself shoring up the wayward management style of Richard II towards his kingdom. As Chancellor, Wykeham had made influential speeches to Parliament in January and November 1390, declaring the King's wish to rule his subjects with equity and justice, and announcing plans to send a peace embassy to France after Candlemas (2 February 1391), to seek an end to the war. The travel warrant issued from Paris by Charles VI of France three weeks later might seem therefore to be evidence that the initiative brokered by Chancellor Wykeham was progressing, although it does not explain why it should have ended up in New College's archives instead of in those of the Lord Chancellor's Department in central government. Indeed, on closer examination it seems that this travel warrant had little to do with Wykeham's royal chancellorship, or with the English peace embassy to France (which did not receive its final instructions until the end of April 1391).



NCA 9716
New College Archives, Oxford

New College Archive 9716, dated 24 February 1390/1, written in French and bearing a magnificent example of the royal seal of Charles VI of France, ordered his military, naval, judicial and local government officials, his keepers of towns, castles, bridges, ports and highways, and all his loyal subjects to ensure the safe passage within the kingdom of France of five named agents of Wykeham. They were described as ‘maistre Nichol stoket, maistre Johan Ware, Richard altringeham, henry thorp, et Johan arnould, Touz anglois, lesqueulx pour certaines besoingnes touchans le Chancelleri dangleterre entendent briefment venir en nostre Royaume’ (all Englishmen who intend to come briefly into our realm on certain matters touching the Chancery

of England). So long as they arrived bearing copies of this warrant, they and their ten servants, horses, gold and silver, armour and other goods were to be guaranteed safe conduct and protection against arrest, taxation, challenge or hindrance, within the realm of France until the feast of All Saints (1 November) next. In 1974, our college archivist was clearly baffled by the document, assigning it to that part of his catalogue headed 'Unclassified Documents' [a polite archival term for 'Miscellaneous or Unfathomable'], misread Ware's surname in it, and simply noted that it had a 'fine seal'.¹ The present study, which would repay further development, owes much to the generosity of Dr Brian Collins in sharing his careful research into the archives of Winchester College, and to the present archivist of New College's growing obsession with our medieval and early-modern notaries public.

All five men named in the French travel warrant worked for Wykeham as bishop of Winchester, and (whether Charles VI was aware of it or not) it would be more accurate to infer 'bishop's chancery' rather than 'royal chancery' in the wording, although master Nicholas Stoket was by that time also a legal specialist respected in the royal chancery.² But so far as the affairs of Winchester and New College were concerned, he and his four colleagues were among the clerks, notaries, and proctors who represented the temporal interests of the bishop of Winchester in London and Rome, drew up the formal documents necessary to gain papal permission to proceed, and undertook direct negotiations with those religious houses willing, in the face of the alternative (sequestration by the English crown), to sell their English estates to a respected prelate for subsequent endowment upon his colleges in Oxford and Winchester. The archives of both Winchester College and New College confirm that 1391 was the year in which serious negotiations, often noting the names of two or three of the five agents as negotiators, or witnessed by one of them in the capacity of notary, were put in hand with the Benedictine abbeys of Mont St Catherine in Rouen, and Trion in Eure-et-Loir, mainly to the benefit of Winchester College,³ but also bringing the Buckinghamshire estate of Tingewick and the advowson of Saham Toney in Norfolk to New College. Richard Altrincham acted as the bishop's proctor in these transactions, sometimes jointly with Nicholas Stoket. Both Winchester and New College would also benefit that same year from negotiations with the abbey of St Valéry in Picardy, resulting for New College in the acquisition of several estates in Essex (Takeley, Lindsell, Widdington, Birchanger and East Hall in Bradwell-on-Sea).

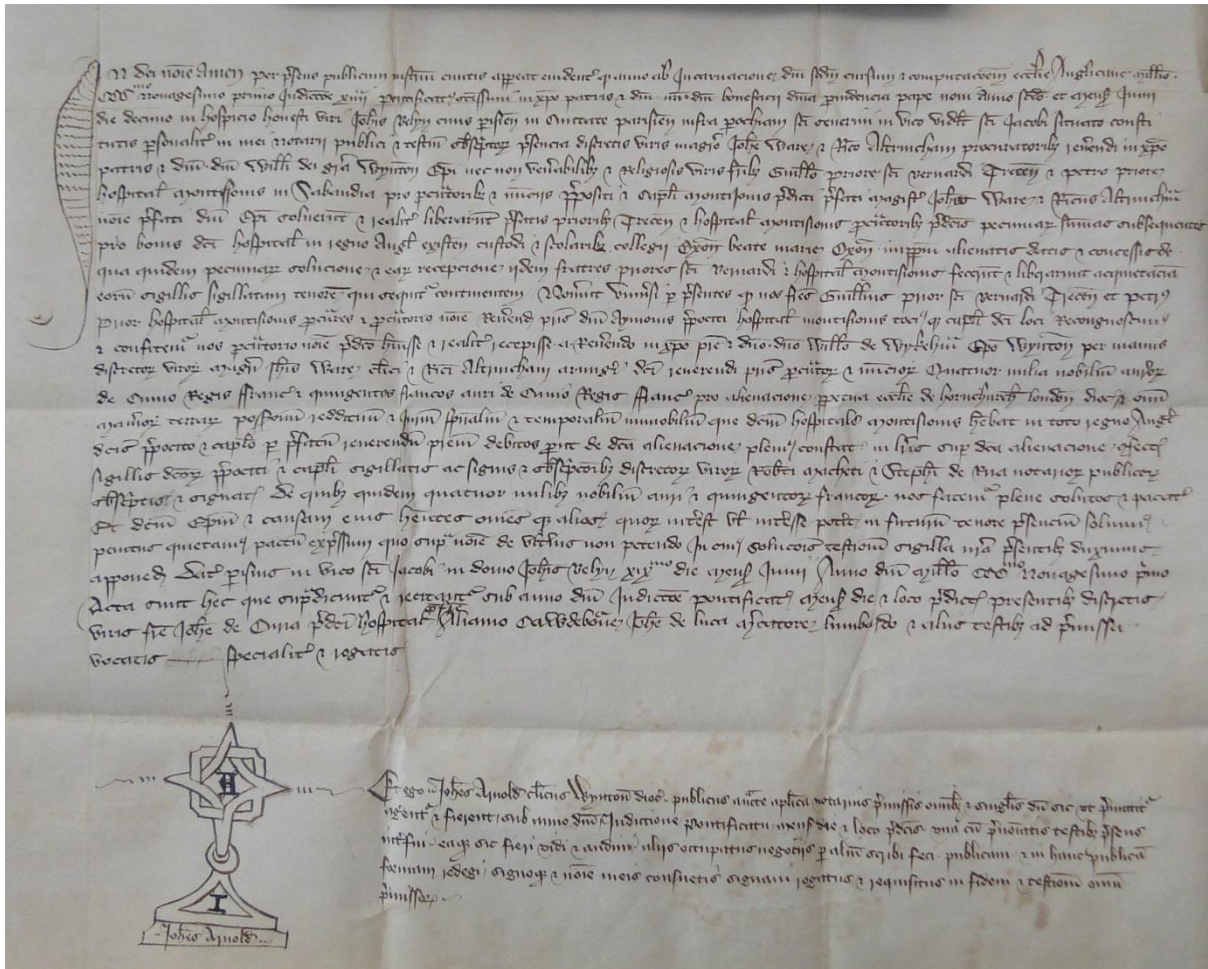
At the same time, April to September 1391, negotiations were well in hand with the canons of the hospital of St Nicholas & St Bernard at Montjoux in French Savoy. When back in Paris, John Arnold would witness as notary, in the presence of the proctors for the canons of Montjoux and for bishop William of Wykeham (John Ware and Richard Altrincham), an important deed selling the estates of Hornchurch priory – that is, three manors in Havering, the advowson of Hornchurch itself, the manor of Kemnal in Chiselhurst, and Mountjoys Inn in the City of London – to William of Wykeham for New College, and the Harmondsworth estate in Middlesex for Winchester College.⁴

¹ Francis Steer, *The Archives of New College Oxford: A Catalogue* (London, 1974), p. 509.

² See The National Archives C115/A, Treatises, for his writings on canon law.

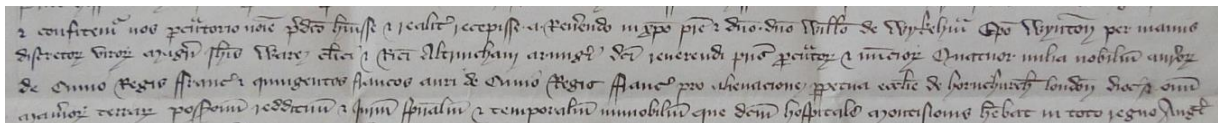
³ See Sheila Himsworth, *Winchester College Muniments II & III: Estates* (Chichester, 1984), pp. 458-63, 955-56.

⁴ NCA 10797, and see also the group of Winchester College documents outlining Wykeham's *modus operandi*: Himsworth, *Muniments*, vol. 2, pp. 458-60.



NCA 10797

The importance of the French King's travel warrant becomes starkly clear when one considers the amounts of money involved in purchasing these estates: 4000 gold nobles and 500 gold francs were paid to the Montjoux agents in Paris on 10 June 1391. (The equivalent today would be over half a million £s.)



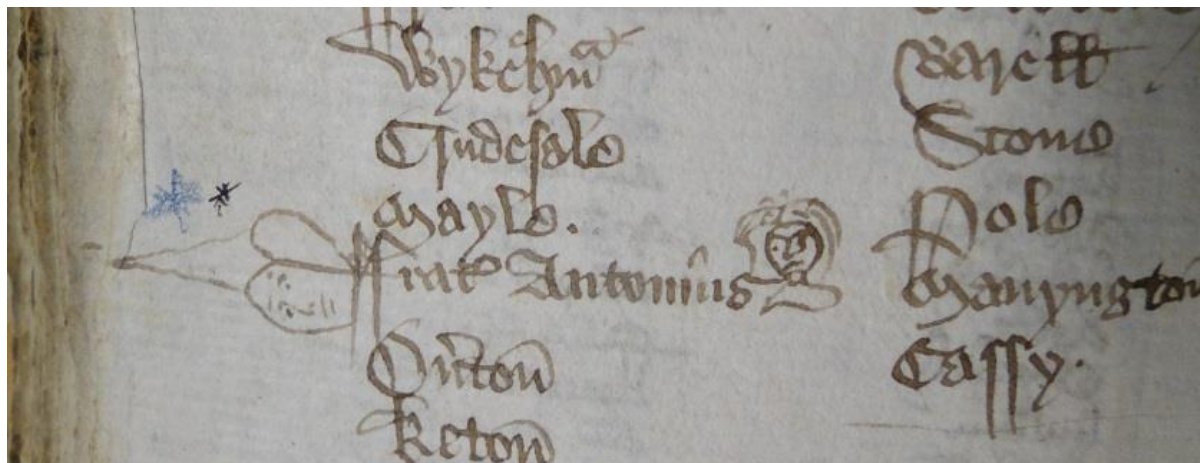
NCA 10797 [detail]

It must have been a hectic few months, and events certainly moved fast; for example, our college accounts together with Winchester documents noting the presence at Boulogne of Stoket, Ware and Altrincham in connection with the St Valéry negotiations, confirm that the acquisition of the St Valéry and Montjoux estates was completed by mid-June 1391.⁵ Within a month the warden of New College, having already attended upon William of Wykeham at London, Farnham, and Esher on several occasions, no doubt to receive instructions, took a round trip from Oxford to London to Hornchurch and Takeley (with full pomp – eight horses

⁵ NCA 7336 and Himsworth, *Muniments*, vol. 2, p. 463.

were authorised) for two weeks to take formal possession of the Essex manors and hold manorial courts there.

Nor did the acquisition of lands of alien priories end when the French travel warrant expired, for the following April (1392) Wykeham's agents went to Rome to finalise ongoing negotiations for the acquisition, for Wykeham and New College, of the estates of Writtle priory in Essex formerly owned by the Hospital of the Holy Ghost in St Mary Saxia, Rome; and throughout 1392 brother Antonius, 'the late Master of Writtle priory' would be seen dining in Hall at New College for some nine or ten weeks.⁶



NCA 9303: 1392, week 12

He clearly made quite an impact, for the Hall Steward at one point inserted a thumbnail sketch of him next to his name in the seating list, another hand has added a second sketch in the margin, and our Victorian annotator of the college's records, Warden Sewell, later marked them with crayon and ink asterisks.

Back in Italy Nicholas Stoket continued to look after the interests of New College and its Founder, becoming closely involved in the negotiations to purchase the English possessions (in Chesterton, Cambridgeshire) of the abbey of St Andrew of Vercelli, Lombardy, 'the abbot to procure the Pope's authority to sell, and the Warden and Scholars to buy... as soon as possible'.⁷ One can only marvel at the skill with which our Founder, who rarely acted directly but preferred to use trusted agents, brought all this to fruition.

Little is known of Henry Thorp, but he seems to have been retained by William of Wykeham since at least 1373 when he had been appointed as the bishop's Apparitor-General and over the next two decades negotiated, or notarially attested, the acquisition of several estates for Winchester College.⁸ Even less is known about Richard Altrincham, beyond his involvement in the transactions of 1391-2 to acquire estates for Winchester College and New College,⁹ but he is sometimes given the status of 'esquire' in the documents, and twice joined master Nicholas Stoket in May 1393 to dine with William of Wykeham.¹⁰

John Arnold continued to work for William of Wykeham and his successor as bishop, and was still active in 1410 as a notary at Winchester College, bailiff of the liberty and soke of

⁶ Hall Steward's Book, NCA 9303.

⁷ Himsworth, *Muniments*, vol. 2, p.460, filling a gap in New College's archives which are silent on the date of this endowment, so perhaps it was never completed.

⁸ T.F. Kirby (ed.), *Wykeham's Register*, 2 vols. (London & Winchester, 1899), pp. 41-43, 138-140, 187, 195-196, 294; and Himsworth, *Muniments*, vol. 2, p. 414.

⁹ Himsworth, *Muniments*, vol. 2, pp. 431-32, 460-463, 467.

¹⁰ Wykeham's household account, information courtesy of Dr Brian Collins.

Winchester and Wolvesey Palace's receiver of rents from St Giles's Fair.¹¹ He was clearly held in high esteem, being present at Wykeham's private chapel at Highclere in February 1398 when the pallium was conferred by Wykeham upon Archbishop Roger Walden, by authority from Rome; in January 1401/2 at Bishop's Waltham palace he was appointed Wykeham's Apparitor-General in recognition of his 'good service hitherto and in the future';¹² and in 1404 he was assigned a bequest of 100 shillings under the terms of Wykeham's will. The John Arnold of Winchester who attended Winchester College and subsequently became a fellow of New College in 1451 may have been a descendant.

Two of Wykeham's agents were exceptionally able and influential men. Master Nicholas Stoket, trained in law, first comes to notice in his capacity as the bishop's negotiator in 1382 when he was dispatched to Rome to represent Wykeham at his triennial visit to the papal curia. Six years later he served as an envoy to Prussia, and between 1389 and 1394 was an occasional commissioner in appeals from the Court of Chivalry and Court of Admiralty. But he also seems to have worked tirelessly as the bishop of Winchester's clerk, and not least in 1393, the only year for which Wykeham's household accounts survive. They indicate that Stoket was a frequent guest in Wykeham's household that May, June and August, and particularly on 21 and 22 August when he dined with William of Wykeham, William Wynford, Hugh Herland, the Prior of St Swithun's, treasurer Ketene of Wolvesey, and Simon Membury the clerk of works, to discuss the remodelling of Winchester Cathedral.¹³ In that same year Stoket also represented Wykeham at the St Paul's Cathedral convocation in his capacity as rector of St Magnus in the City of London. Alfred Emden outlines Stoket's impressive career in the *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500*,¹⁴ even though any formal relationship with the university, other than the indirect link with New College, is not known.

Master John Ware comes across as a similarly significant figure.¹⁵ Despite finding time to write a commentary on Decretals 3,¹⁶ and onerous commitments in London by 1390 as the bailiff of the liberty of Westminster Abbey while already holding the rectory of Elyngdon in Wiltshire, he remained an effective servant of William of Wykeham. A year or so after his travels in France he undertook a joint visitation (with former warden Nicholas de Wykeham) of New College on the Founder's behalf, arriving in January 1393 with ten horses and servants to stay in the Lodgings for seven nights, at the end of which the college found itself with a bill for £3 6s 8d for food and stabling.¹⁷ Given the timing, it seems likely that much of the discussion that week, at least by master Ware, may have dwelt on the college's new acquisitions of alien abbey estates. Six years later Ware returned twice more to New College, dining in Hall at the high table with warden Malford in May and September 1399;¹⁸ the reason is unknown but one wonders whether they discussed Ware's bequest to the college of law books promised since March 1391. If so, it came to nothing, for he changed his will after Wykeham's death and his own appointment to the royal chapel of St Stephen's Westminster, and bequeathed his books elsewhere (compare his two wills of 8 March 1391 and 20 September 1409, finally proved in October 1410).¹⁹ The will of 1391, presumably drawn up while in France, hints at a sense of comradeship with his travelling colleagues and with Wykeham's circle generally: Ware bequeaths his canon and civil law books (for which he had paid upwards of 40 marks) to Wykeham himself, for the use of New College,

¹¹ Mark Page (ed.), *The Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester 1409-10* (Winchester: Hampshire Record Series XVI, 1999), p. 412.

¹² Kirby, *Register*, p. 534.

¹³ Wykeham's household account 1393, information courtesy of Dr Brian Collins.

¹⁴ A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1957-1959), vol. 3, p. 1786.

¹⁵ Ware's career is also outlined in *ibid.*, pp. 1985-86.

¹⁶ 'On the Life and Honesty of the Clergy': see TNA C115/86.

¹⁷ College accounts, NCA 7340, also NCA 1077.

¹⁸ College accounts, NCA 7348, 34th and 50th weeks.

¹⁹ TNA PROB 11/2A/329 and PROB 11/2A/348.

and releases Wykeham from four years' worth of fees owing to him, amounting to 20 marks; to John Arnold, clerk, he bequeaths 40 shillings from the chest in his chamber at Esher (another of Wykeham's episcopal palaces) and one of his horses, with a saddle and a cloak; to master John de Campeden he bequeaths his small bible and book of the Legatine Constitutions of Otto (1237) and Ottobono (1268), both key works of reference on canon law. John de Swaffham (the notary who had witnessed Wykeham's foundation charter of New College in 1379, and along with John Arnold was named as an executor of Ware's 1391 will) was promised Ware's copy of 'small decretals'. Family and friends were to receive other goods and real estate. The replacement will of 1409 however reveals a quite different outlook: by now Wykeham was dead, the travels in France were long over, all Ware's links with New College had disappeared, and he was only weeks away from his own death. By now he was a canon of the royal chapel of St Stephen's in the palace of Westminster – where he hoped his body would lie in state, beside an image of the crucifixion, before burial. All his bequests now turn to caring for his relatives and servants, making numerous charitable gifts to the poor and to the inmates of London's prisons for the good of his soul, and gifts to the chapel of St Stephen. 100 shillings was to go to his church at Hendon to pay for a window at the east end of the chancel. There is no longer any reference to New College, and Ware's books are promised now to the royal chapel (his best Decretals), the vicar of Boxley (his shabby (*debiliora*) Decretals and John Andreas's Gloss on Decretals 6), and his new executor Henry Merston, canon of St Stephen's chapel (his bible and possibly the rest of his library). Time had moved on ...

Jennifer Thorp
Archivist