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Sir John Cheke, Chamberlain of the Exchequer, 1552-53

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The most obscure aspect of Sir John Cheke's public career is his tenure as a Chamberlain of the English Exchequer. This study confirms that Cheke's chamberlainship was a sinecure, albeit one of prestige and profit. Attention is also paid to the three rising gentlemen who held office under Cheke: Robert Creswell, Roger Higham, and William Hunwyke.

The standard accounts of John Cheke's career provide scant information on his Exchequer chamberlainship,¹ even though this was the most lucrative and prestigious office acquired prior to the final, chaotic, weeks of the Edwardian regime. This research note, based upon a thorough study of all existing institutional records, provides a corrective. It rounds out our knowledge of Cheke's officeholding and removes some errors in previous scholarship.

Sir John Cheke, royal tutor and gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Edward VI, took the oath as one of the two Chamberlains of the Exchequer before William Paulet, Marquess of Winchester, Lord Treasurer of England, on 18 October 1552.² His fellow Chamberlain was Francis Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. Cheke's immediate predecessors were Sir Anthony Wingfield (1550-52) and before him Thomas Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (1543-50). This was distinguished company for the first Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge. Normally (as in the cases of Talbot, Wingfield, and Wriothesley), the post was an honor reserved for a privy counselor. Indeed, Wriothesley served as a Secretary of State for three years before a Chamberlain's place became available to him; Cheke was inserted into the Privy Council as an unprecedented third Secretary only on 2 June 1553. Wingfield was a cousin of the late Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk; his wife Elizabeth was a daughter and

1 Needham, "Cheke at Cambridge and Court," Johnson, "Cheke," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, I, 626 – 30; Bryson, "Cheke," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, art. 5211.

2 Exchequer, King's Remembrancer Roll: The National Archives [hereafter TNA], E 159/331.

co-heir of the Earl of Oxford. Cheke's wife, Mary neé Hill, was a daughter of a serjeant of the royal household. While holding a chamberlainship, Wingfield was Comptroller of the Household, Talbot was President of the Council in the North, and Wriothesley was Lord Chancellor (1544-47).³ Cheke was above his 'station'. No wonder that Cheke, albeit high in the King's favor in the summer of 1552,⁴ had to fight off an immediate, and unprecedented, attempt to share the chamberlainship. Wingfield died on 15 August 1552.⁵ Cheke was informally awarded the position at the Council meeting of 25 August.⁶ Nonetheless, on the next day John Godsolve, clerk of the Signet, wrote to William Cecil, a Secretary of State and Cheke's brother-in-law and ally, asserting that there existed a prior understanding whereby he and Cheke would share the office.⁷ Godsolve would be disappointed. Cheke was appointed for life by letters patent, alone, on 12 September 1552.⁸

The office of Chamberlain was a distinguished sinecure. In precedence, the two incumbents ranked immediately below the Lord Treasurer, and above the Undertreasurer of England, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the four barons. Cheke's annual salary was £52.3s.4d., plus a livery allowance each year of £13.6s.8d. out of the Great Wardrobe.⁹ All three of the Exchequer clerkships which lay in Cheke's gift to bestow were entitled to collect fees from the public. However, there exists no record of the private arrangements (if any) which Cheke may have made to share in these fees. Cheke was allowed his salary from the day of Wingfield's death.¹⁰ There

3 Alsop, "Exchequer," 325-6, 349-50, 353-5.

4 Johnson, "Cheke", I, 628.

5 Swales, "Wingfield," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, III, 639.

6 Register of Privy Council actions: British Library [hereafter B.L.], Royal Ms. 18. C. XXIV.

7 *State Papers Domestic, Edward VI*: TNA, SP 10/14, fol. 149.

8 *Patent Rolls, Edward VI*, IV, 404.

9 Alsop, "Exchequer," 14, 35, 62-3, 359-60.

10 *Patent Rolls, Edward VI*, IV, 404.

is no evidence within the records of the Exchequer between August 1552 and July 1553 that Cheke engaged in the institutional work or actions beyond the ceremonial level. He benefited from the status of the position, the salary, and the patronage. However, his only known fiscal task was as an external Exchequer accountant: Cheke was on the commission to collect the third payment of the Relief, a parliamentary tax, in the city and county of Cambridge.¹¹ Unlike many Exchequer officeholders, Cheke did not even avail himself of the right to sue, or be sued, in private legal disputes in the Court of the Exchequer – a valuable perquisite of office.¹² Prior to his appointment, Cheke, who was rapidly acquiring a landed estate centered in East Anglia, had numerous dealings with the Court of Augmentations, but few, if any, with the Exchequer.¹³ He did possess friendships among well-placed members of the institution. Sir Thomas Chaloner was a Teller, 1550-52, albeit an absentee one who relied upon a deputy, his brother-in-law and successor Thomas Farnham.¹⁴ An even closer long-time friend and supporter, Peter Osborne, became Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer on 26 August 1552.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Exchequer in the late Edwardian years was largely dominated by religious conservatives, led by Lord Treasurer Winchester, Undertreasurer and Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir John Baker, several of the barons, and the Teller (and antiquary) Nicholas Brigham, later a personal treasurer to Queen Mary.¹⁶

11 *Patent Rolls, Edward VI*, V, 351, 362. The third payment was due in Easter term 1551, but receipts arrived at the Exchequer every term until Michaelmas 1554. Cheke was one of 46 individuals on the commissions, drawn from the elite of the city and county.

12 Alsop, "Exchequer," 47-8.

13 For examples, see Court of Augmentations records: TNA, E 315/218, fol. 37 (20 May 1547), E 101/163/3, fol. 8 (14 June 1547), E 315/219, fol. 135 (20 August 1548), E 315/225, fol. 14 (8 May 1551), and fol. 198 (8 June 1553). Also relevant is the record book of the Royal Commission on Debts, 1552: TNA, E 163/12/14, fol. 27v (19 January 1552).

14 Alsop, "Exchequer," 322-5, 331-4.

15 Cheke to Osborne, 30 May 1549: B.L., Lansdowne Ms. 2, fol.74. J.G. Elzinga, "Osborne," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, art. 20880; Fuidge, "Osborne," in *Commons, 1558-1603*, III, 158; Corcos, "Smith," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, III, 331.

16 Alsop, "Brigham," 49-67.

In the mid-Tudor period, some Chamberlains used their Exchequer patronage to place their own servants or family members in the institution, others chose to utilize existing personnel. Cheke followed the latter course. As Writer of the Controlment Roll, Cheke removed Wingfield's appointee, and personal servant, John Crickote or Crickcoste.¹⁷ In his place, Cheke employed Crickote's deputy, William Hunwyke, gentleman of Halstead, Essex.¹⁸ Hunwyke had earlier been clerk to John Raymond, Wriothesley's appointee in this position.¹⁹ No firm evidence has been uncovered that Cheke and Hunwyke possessed a personal tie. However, it is surely suggestive that after his appointment Hunwyke, whose normal residence was at Halstead,²⁰ also acquired a residence at Stoke-by-Clare, Essex, across the Stour River from Cheke's residence and estates in Stoke-by-Clare, Suffolk.²¹

The individual selected by Cheke to serve as Deputy Chamberlain to strike the Tallies was also a career Exchequer clerk and a rising gentleman. Roger Higham, or Heigham, had served a decade as Deputy Chamberlain in the Exchequer of Audit to three successive Chamberlains, Robert Radcliff, Earl of Sussex, Wriothesley, and Wingfield.²² On 7 November Cheke moved him to the Exchequer of Receipt, at twice his previous salary.²³ He was a younger son of Robert Higham of Werneth, Cheshire, and he established a gentry family at

17 Wingfield, "Last Will and Testament:" TNA, Prob 11/36, fol. 57-7v.

18 Alsop, "Exchequer," 28, 340-1.

19 Alsop, "Exchequer," 28, 340-1.

20 Hunwyke, "Last Will and Testament, 1569," TNA, Prob 11/51, fol. 181; *Patent Rolls, 1547-53*, V, 260; *Patent Rolls, Elizabeth I*, I, 157.

21 *Patent Rolls, Philip and Mary*, I, 362.

22 Exchequer, Tellers' Rolls, expenditure (salaries): TNA, E 405/207-497.

23 Exchequer, *The Black Book of the Receipt*: TNA, E 36/266, fol. 74. The Deputy Chamberlain (Audit) and the Writer of the Controlment Roll (Receipt) each had a long-established annual salary of £5 a year, and the Deputy Chamberlain to Strike the Tallies had £10. Fees were more lucrative, but would have been shared with their private clerks and, possibly, the Chamberlain. For example, in, or shortly after, the reign of Edward VI, the clerk to the Writer of the Tallies and the Deputy Chamberlain to Strike the Tallies shared a fee of either 12 pence or 18 pence for every tally created: B.L. Lansdowne Ms. 171, fol. 289-9v. On average during the reign, 844 tallies were struck each year: calculated from the Receipt Rolls, TNA, E 401/1176-1202.

Maldon, Essex, centered upon the manor of Jenkin Maldon.²⁴ The earliest known notices of Higham in the historical record date from 1536-7, when he acquired several leases and estate offices from the Franciscan Abbey of the Minoreesses of St. Clare without Aldgate (the Minorities).²⁵ Following the dissolution in 1538, he remained receiver of the same lands in the first Court of Augmentations; Higham subsequently surrendered this office for an annual life pension of £12.6s.8d.²⁶ His elder brother, John Higham, was receiver for the lands of Waltham Abbey in the Court of Augmentations.²⁷ Higham was M.P. For Gatton, Surrey, in the Parliament of 1545. The History of Parliament Trust biography of Higham attributed his return to the patronage of Sir Roger Copley, but there exists no known documentary evidence and the author of that biography was not aware of Higham's patronage tie to Wriothesley in 1545.²⁸

For Cheke's final appointment, his Deputy Chamberlain in the Exchequer of Audit (the Upper Exchequer), he selected an individual with both a long history in that department and established ties to Cheke, or to Cheke's circle. Robert Creswell had served in the Exchequer of Audit from at least 1532 as an assistant to (Sir) Christopher More when the latter was secondary to the Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer and then King's Remembrancer, 1542-49.²⁹ Creswell developed an extensive private practice as an attorney for Exchequer accountants.³⁰ In 1545 Creswell purchased for his

²⁴ *Visitations of Essex*, 62; B.L., Additional Charter 5982. Higham's property holdings in 1557 are specified in his will and in the Inquisition Post Mortem: P.C.C., TNA, Prob 11/41, fols. 74-5v; TNA, C 142/116/73.

²⁵ Johnson, "Heigham," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, II, 331.

²⁶ B.L. Lansdowne Ms. 662, fol. 32v.

²⁷ B.L. Lansdowne Ms. 662, fol. 19v.

²⁸ Johnson, "Heigham", 331-2.

²⁹ Tellers' Books and the Declarations of the State of the Treasury: TNA, E 405/201-6, 489, 498 (expenditure, salaries). For Christopher More, of Loseley, Surrey, see: Johnson, "More," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, II, 616-7.

³⁰ In 1548, for example, he served as attorney for at least thirty-two accountants: Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, Memoranda Roll, TNA, E 368/324.

residence the manor of Polling, Hampshire.³¹ He was closely tied to Sir John Mason, for whose last will and testament Creswell was later an overseer.³² Mason and Cheke were friends of long standing, and members of the same family circle. By his marriage to Mary Hill in 1547, Cheke became Sir John Mason's son-in-law (Mason married Mary's widowed mother, 1541).³³ In Cheke's last will and testament, written on the day of his death, 13 September 1557, he appointed Mason as overseer.³⁴ Creswell was linked to Mason as early as 1543 when he collected the salary due to the latter as clerk of the Privy Council.³⁵ Later, the two men received bequests from John Warner, Dr. of Physic, of All Souls, Oxford – another associate of the same circle.³⁶ Other evidence from 1552 linked Creswell to Peter Osborne and his family.³⁷ After Cheke was appointed to the Exchequer, it was Creswell who served as his agent to collect the salary payments due to Cheke as Chamberlain.³⁸

The precise date of Cheke's removal from office remains uncertain. However, it is not true that he held the chamberlainship until 2 November 1553.³⁹ This was the date of the formal appointment of Richard Strelley as his successor, who was retroactively entitled to the salary from 8 September.⁴⁰ However, Cheke was not paid up to 7 September. He had been placed under house arrest, and

31 *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, XX. ii. 266 (33). Creswell later resided at Odiham and was a justice of the peace for Hampshire, 1554-59: Fritze, "Faith and Faction," 375.

32 Mason, "Last Will and Testament, 1566," TNA, Prob 11/49, fol. 10.

33 Johnson, "Cheke", I, 627; Baker, "Mason," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, II, 582, 584; Carter, "Mason," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, art. 18278.

34 TNA, Prob 11/40, fol. 12.

35 Tellers' Roll: TNA, E 405/113 (expenditure, salaries). See also the three wage and annuity payments to Mason in Michaelmas term 1560: TNA, E 405/126, mem. 11.

36 Warner, "Last Will and Testament, 1564," TNA, Prob 11/48, fols. 75-6.

37 Lane, "Last Will and Testament, 1552," TNA, Prob 11/35, fols. 254v-6.

38 Declaration of the State of the Treasury: TNA, E 405/496 (expenditure, salaries).

39 This is the date given in: Johnson, "Cheke", I, 626.

40 *Patent Rolls, Philip and Mary*, I, 4, 193.

his possessions inventoried, on 26 July 1553. On the next day he was imprisoned in the Tower; on 12 August he was found guilty of treason.⁴¹ That verdict possibly voided the life grant of his chamberlainship. Cheke was not paid any of the half-year salary due on 29 September. On this date William Hunwyke received his own final salary payment.⁴² Higham was paid up to Easter 1554. Thereafter, Henry, Lord Stafford's appointees received the salaries formerly held by Hunwyke and Higham.⁴³ Creswell remained in office under Strelley, and then Stafford.⁴⁴ Strelley was seriously ill by the date of his appointment, and died on 23 January 1554. Stafford received the vacant office on the following 23 February.⁴⁵ Neither the appointment, nor the payment, records of the Exchequer reveal actions by Strelley in respect to the three establishment positions in his gift. It appears that Cheke's three appointees continued in office (two after 29 September) without formal re-appointment. However, there exists no reason to believe that Cheke retained the chamberlainship much after Mary's accession. Whether he surrendered it prior to his conviction for treason, or was deprived, is at present unknown. In July 1553, Cheke held three positions at Court. His place as a gentleman of the Privy Chamber apparently terminated on 6 July, the date of King Edward's death. The office of a Secretary of State ended on 19 July, when Queen Jane's regime fell.⁴⁶ However, the chamberlainship was held under a life grant. A good deal remains uncertain about Cheke prior to his release from confinement and the issue of a general pardon on 28 April 1554,

41 *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, IV, 420; Bryson, "Cheke".

42 TNA, E 405/499 (expenditure, salaries).

43 TNA, E 405/499 (expenditure, salaries).

44 TNA, E 405/499, 507, and 510 (expenditure, salaries).

45 Thorpe, "Strelley," in *Commons, 1509-1558*, III, 398; *Patent Rolls, Philip and Mary*, I, 193.

46 Johnson, "Cheke", 626.

for all offenses prior to 1 October 1553.⁴⁷ Precisely how and when he ceased to be a Chamberlain of the Exchequer cannot now be determined.

In conclusion, as Chamberlain, Sir John Cheke advanced three long-serving Exchequer clerks, assisting each in their successful efforts to establish themselves amongst the gentry. One, Creswell, was linked to Cheke's own circle; another, Crickote, may have developed some ties. Cheke apparently valued the office for its prestige and salary, and perhaps as a stepping stone into the Privy Council and beyond. Few mid-Tudor Chamberlains made much of this post,⁴⁸ and then only when other opportunities were not readily available. Cheke possessed a strong power base in the Privy Chamber centered upon the young King. The grant of a Chamberlain's office in August 1552 was a suitable reward and a recognition of royal and regime favor: it afforded prestige, salary, patronage and no duties. The Exchequer has never been assigned a large role in Cheke's career, but its records are complex and successive biographers may be forgiven for leaving the topic obscure. What can be discovered is now on the historical record.

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47 Johnson, "Cheke", 626; Bryson, Cheke."

48 Anderson, "Henry, Lord Stafford," 225-42.

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