

THE
HOUSEHOLD KNIGHTS
OF KING JOHN

S. D. CHURCH



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INTRODUCTION

In 1901, J. E. Morris first drew attention to the importance of the royal military household in the armies of Edward I. In his work on Edward's campaigns in Wales, Morris described the king's military household as 'a small standing army' which 'must have been invaluable as a nucleus of resistance against the Welsh while others were being raised'.¹ The knights of Edward's *familia* were singled out for particular attention by Morris. They performed the functions of a 'headquarters staff' and were given all manner of other duties. They garrisoned the king's castles and governed those parts of Wales which Edward had conquered. During times of war, Morris argued, King Edward's household knights were in charge of recruitment, transport, and escort duty in addition to their martial function as the nucleus of the king's army. While Morris did not extend his discussion to the problem of the functions of household knights in peacetime, he did describe the importance of the military household in times of crisis. In 1920, T. F. Tout brought out the second volume of his *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England* in which he built upon the conclusions arrived at by Morris. He suggested that Edward's army 'was essentially the household in arms'.² In effect he was saying that the king's military household was not just the nucleus of the army, but actually was the army. The king's household consisted of a small number of mounted warriors, he argued, made up of bannerets, knights, squires, and sergeants-at-arms. According to Tout, this core could be expanded rapidly at very short notice when circumstances required.³

If the military household was the royal army, then it followed that it was the household itself which made the preparations for, and organised the conduct of, the campaign. It was the king's stewards and the king's

¹ J. E. Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford, 1901), p. 84.

² Tout, *Chapters*, ii, p. 133.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 138; M. C. Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance under Edward I* (London, 1972), ch. 2.

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marshals who were responsible for the administration and discipline of the army, and the clerks of the wardrobe who were responsible for meeting the cost of its supplies and wages.⁴ The successful completion of the king's campaign, therefore, depended almost entirely on the efficiency of the whole household during times of conflict. The extent to which the king's military household formed the very foundation of the army's cavalry force was graphically illustrated by N. B. Lewis in 1948. Lewis examined the wardrobe accounts between August and November 1297 for the campaign in Flanders and discovered that the household element in the cavalry force amounted to some 550 'troopers' at its peak, and that this number represented about two-thirds of the mounted contingent on that campaign.⁵ By this time, then, it was abundantly clear that the military household of Edward I was, to all intents and purposes, the royal army, and that the household as a whole played the central role in the conduct of Edward's campaigns.

Since the 1960s, historians have moved the origins of the royal military household back in time. In 1963, J. O. Prestwich suggested that the Anglo-Norman kings used the military element in their households in much the same way as did the Edwardian kings. He further posited that this continuity in the household could be pushed back at least to the Anglo-Saxon period, if not even further to the *comitatus* described by Tacitus in his *Germania*.⁶ Where Prestwich led, others followed, and in 1977 Marjorie Chibnall pointed to the significance of Henry I's military household to the maintenance of his control over Normandy.⁷ In 1981, Prestwich again joined the debate, stressing the importance of the military household in both the martial and non-martial spheres.⁸ He suggested that there was enough evidence to show that the household was vitally important to the 'political, administrative and military history of the Norman reigns'.⁹ Through their attention to the military household, historians have increasingly come to appreciate that the royal household knights played a dominant role in this organisation. C. L. Kingsford's fascinating biography of Otho de Grandison, published in

⁴ Tout, *Chapters*, ii, pp. 137, 139–40.

⁵ N. B. Lewis, 'The English forces in Flanders, August–November 1297', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to F. M. Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin, and R. W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), p. 314.

⁶ J. O. Prestwich, 'Anglo-Norman feudalism and the problem of continuity', *Past and Present*, 26 (1963), pp. 50–2.

⁷ M. Chibnall, 'Mercenaries and the *familia regis* under Henry I', *History*, 62 (1977), pp. 15–32. See also R. Allen Brown, 'The status of the Norman knight', in his *Castles, Conquest and Charters: Collected Papers* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 290–304; and his *The Normans and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 2nd edn, 1985), pp. 198–200.

⁸ J. O. Prestwich, 'The military household of the Norman kings', *EHR*, 96 (1981), pp. 1–35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–6.

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1909, clearly illustrated that at least one of Edward I's household knights was one of the king's most trusted counsellors.¹⁰ Although he chose not to explore in detail the non-martial functions of the household knights, Tout also recognised that Edward's household knights performed a central role in the maintenance of the king's rule. 'The knightly element in the king's household', he said, 'was not there to fight, but to administer, though being knights by habit and training and in this case also by profession, it could always use swords if the need arose.'¹¹

The importance of the household knight in the administration of Edward's regnum was further illustrated by J. G. Edwards in 1948. The treason of Thomas Turberville in 1295 was a *cause célèbre* which attracted the attentions of most commentators of its day.¹² What drew their interest was not that Turberville had committed treason, but that he was 'miles de familia regis and domesticus et praecipue domini regis Angliae familiaris'.¹³ Because he was a man who had been privy to the king's innermost thoughts, his act of treason was unforgivable. In the minds of contemporaries Turberville's position as *miles de familia regis* clearly suggested that he had detailed knowledge of the king's activities. It was his position as a household knight which allowed him into the king's confidence. And, because he was in the king's confidence, Turberville was entrusted with numerous important missions by Edward I. Turberville was obviously no brainless hired thug whose sole function was to bash heads for the king.

This distinctive position which the household knights of Edward I enjoyed can also be perceived in the reign of King John. In 1955, J. E. A. Jolliffe revealed that the Angevin kings relied extensively on their household for the governance of the realm. In this work, however, Jolliffe despaired of identifying any more than a handful of the household knights, even for the period of John's reign when the documentary evidence becomes so much more abundant.¹⁴ Jolliffe argued, moreover, that of those knights who could be identified, there was no real reason to believe that they had a tangible position and that they possessed no formal 'badge proclaiming [their] status'.¹⁵ But Jolliffe was mistaken to be so pessimistic about identifying John's household knights.

There is little doubt that the king's knights do in John's reign appear

¹⁰ C. L. Kingsford, 'Sir Otho de Grandison (1238?-1328)', *TRHS*, 3rd series, 3 (1909), pp. 125-95.

¹¹ Tout, *Chapters*, ii, p. 135.

¹² J. G. Edwards, 'The treason of Thomas Turberville, 1295', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to F. M. Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin, and R. W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), p. 296.

¹³ J. O. Prestwich, 'Military household', p. 4.

¹⁴ Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, pp. 218-19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

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as a cohesive and identifiable body in some of the contemporary documentation. The majority of the knights who form the core of this study have been identified from three surviving lists of John's household knights. The first list dates from the campaign in Scotland in the summer of 1209. The surviving mise roll for this campaign lists some thirty-six knights of the king's household who received *dona* on 1, 3, and 12 August. In the manuscript all these men were highlighted for special attention by the scribe, and headed by the rubric 'donum factum militibus de familia Regis in exercitu Scochia'.¹⁶ The second list dates from the following year and the campaign waged in Ireland by John. The *prestita* roll for this campaign mentions sixteen household knights who received *prests* on 11 August. All these men received their *imprests* under the heading 'prestitum factum familie domini Regis'.¹⁷ The final list of household knights which survives from John's reign occurs in a muster roll for late 1215 and relates to John's northern campaign against the rebels. In this roll the forty-seven household knights who accompanied the king were separated from the other knights under the heading 'nomina militum qui sunt de hospitio Domini Regis'.¹⁸ These three lists all appear within larger documents and the royal knights are quite clearly distinguished from the rest by the scribes. They therefore go a long way to illustrate that the scribes who drew them up were well aware that the *milites de familia regis* were indeed a discrete group worthy of separate mention in the documentation.

Similar evidence from the early years of the reign of Henry III confirms the impression that royal household knights were seen by contemporaries as a group worthy of special distinction. Dating from between 1225 and 1229, there are three lists of household knights who were summoned by Henry III for three separate campaigns.¹⁹ In 1225–6, 123 men were listed as 'milites summoniti de familia domini Regis'.²⁰ In 1228, 70 men were listed as 'milites de familia Regis vocati per breve'.²¹ And in 1229, 67 men were listed as 'isti milites sunt summonendi de familia Regis'.²² The household knights received separate summonses from the ordinary tenants-in-chief and it is clear that the separate summons was in part due to a specific obligation that they owed to the king.²³

¹⁶ PRO, E101/349/1B m. 2.

¹⁷ *Rot. Lib. Joh.*, p. 212.

¹⁸ S. D. Church, 'The earliest English muster roll, 18/19 December 1215', *Historical Research*, 67 (1994), pp. 1–17.

¹⁹ For the dating of these lists see J. S. Critchley, 'Summonses to military service early in the reign of Henry III', *EHR*, 85 (1971), p. 86.

²⁰ PRO, C72/2 m. 20.

²¹ PRO, C72/2 m. 15 d.

²² PRO, C72/2 m. 13.

²³ Critchley, 'Summonses', pp. 79–95.

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The special position which household knights held within the household is seen in other records of the period. In 1205, for example, when the army was gathered on the south coast awaiting the order to embark for Poitou, John's barons refused to pass judgement on William Marshal after the Marshal had revealed the extent of his oath to Philip Augustus. John, in frustration, turned to his bachelors in the hope that they would return the desired verdict against the Marshal.²⁴ This incident once more demonstrates that the household knights were looked upon as a distinctive group, separate from the others in the royal household.²⁵ There are further examples of the importance which contemporaries attached to the position of royal household knight. In 1210, John attempted to justify his actions towards William de Breosa. The king expressly stated that the role of one of his household knights, Robert of Burgate, was important in the affair. Robert was 'unum militem de domo nostra', and had been used by the king to oversee the attempts of William, earl of Derby, to reconcile John to William de Breosa.²⁶ In 1215, when John wished to impress upon the Pope that his intention to pay Richard's widow, Berengaria, her dower was sincere, he stated that 'fecimus juarare in animam Gaufridum Luterell militem nostrum'.²⁷ Again in 1220 an envoy to the papal curia was identified by the clerks of Henry III for their king as 'militem nobis familiarem'.²⁸

This general recognition of the household knights as a separate and important group can also be illustrated in the local county environment. In an incident where two of John's household knights were in danger of losing a court case against a certain Baldwin Tyrell whom they had accused of spreading rumours that the king had been killed in North Wales, they proclaimed that 'illi fuerunt de privata familia domini regis, jurati quod, si illi aliquid audirent quod fuisset contra dominum regem, domino regi illud intimarent'.²⁹ Jolliffe thought that this was something like 'a counsellor's oath . . . for the members of the Household',³⁰ presumably looking forward to the counsellors' oath of the fourteenth century.³¹ Although the oath to which this case refers seems to have

²⁴ *Maréchal*, lines 13, 188–90.

²⁵ J. M. W. Bean, '“Bachelor” and retainer', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 3 (1972), pp. 117–32, has shown how, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, the term bachelor had come to mean a household retainer.

²⁶ *Foedera*, i, 1, p. 107.

²⁷ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 181 b, 182 (2); *Rot. Chart.*, p. 219 b; *Foedera*, i, 1, p. 137.

²⁸ *Patent Rolls 1216–25*, pp. 257, 268 (2).

²⁹ *Curia Regis Rolls*, vii, p. 170.

³⁰ Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, p. 176 and no. 2.

³¹ *Reports from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Public Records of the Kingdom* (London, 1800), pp. 235–6.

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been particular, reflecting the circumstances of the reign at this time, it seems highly likely that it indicates that John's household knights were accustomed to take oaths to the king, making them a distinctive body with a special relationship to their lord. The similarities between the relationship that these men and their lord shared with the *comitatus* of Tacitus' *Germania* is striking.

As Tout pointed out, the king's knights were warriors by 'habit and training',³² although many of them were used as administrators, they had all started life as fighting men. In the middle ages fighting was a team game and each household made a natural team; the royal household was no exception. The charge in close formation and the feigned flight required both precision and a great deal of training, and that training had to take place within each group of knights. Marjorie Chibnall has shown just how effective the king's *milites de familia* were when operating as a coherent group in the defence of Henry I's Norman lands.³³ The early career of William Marshal gives us a vivid picture of the life of a household knight: engaging in an endless round of tournaments in which the most successful knights were those who worked in cooperation with their fellow knights. These contests usually involved two or more teams who fought each other in imitation of battlefield conditions scarcely less dangerous than the real thing.³⁴ The tournament was the ideal training ground for warfare and men like William de Tancarville, the Marshal's first lord, were keen that the knights of their households gained the experience on offer at these meetings. David Crouch has commented upon the role of William Marshal himself as 'player manager' of the young king's knightly household.³⁵ Undoubtedly this constant round of fighting together produced a camaraderie which strengthened feelings of mutual trust and support. This feeling amongst fighting men is common to all ages and the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries were no different. Crouch has described how the Marshal's knights 'gave him much of his political weight in society, and their attendance at his side gave him dignity'.³⁶ This was certainly how the household knights perceived themselves; they were separate from the rest of the household in a way that only

³² Tout, *Chapters*, ii, p. 135.

³³ Chibnall, 'Mercenaries and the *familia regis* under Henry I', pp. 16, 19.

³⁴ D. Crouch, *William Marshal: Court, Career and Chivalry in the Angevin Empire, 1147-1219* (London, 1990), pp. 37-52, 174-8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176; G. Duby, *William Marshal: the Flower of Chivalry*, trans. R. Howard (London, 1986), p. 84.

³⁶ Crouch, *William Marshal*, p. 136.

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fighting men can be, and they thought little of the household clerks, seeing them as worthy only of ridicule.³⁷

Despite the general appreciation of the importance of royal household knights, there is as yet no full-length study of these men; as a result, important questions remain unanswered. For example, little is known about how these men were recruited, how they were rewarded for their services, and how they were used by the king. As regards to their functions, many historians have been far too quick to assume that royal household knights did little other than tasks related to fighting. As recently as 1987, for example, Chris Given-Wilson stated that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries 'the overriding duty [of the household knights] to the king was military'.³⁸ The temptation to overstate the martial function of the household knight is understandable. As Allen Brown has pointed out, 'the role of the king as war leader . . . before and after the feudal period as well as during it, is a fundamental in history'.³⁹ Medieval kings regularly engaged in warfare; as a result, the historian is able to perceive the household knight at war more easily than at any other time. There are other reasons, too, why so much emphasis has been placed on the military activities of the knights of the king's household. In times of war it is more easy to witness the household knights acting as a coherent group. Warfare is exciting and therefore captures the attentions of the chroniclers and, as a result, the attentions of modern historians as well. But, I shall argue, it is possible to obtain a valid picture of the everyday functions of the king's household knights only by concentrating on the material produced by government in the course of its everyday activities. The military functions of the household knights were just one aspect of their lives, and it is important to see the martial role of the king's knights in the context of their general role as members of the king's *familia*, a word that implies a closeness which is lost in our modern translation of the word as household.

The reign of King John provides the historian with the earliest opportunity to see the royal household knights in detail. During John's rule, for the first time, the public authorities took great care to record the minutiae of governmental administration. Under the auspices of Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury, the chancery began to record the various letters sent by the king to his officials in the realm.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 135.

³⁸ C. Given-Wilson, 'The king and the gentry in fourteenth-century England', *TRHS*, 5th series, 57 (1987), p. 88.

³⁹ R. Allen Brown, 'Status of the Norman knight', p. 297.

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The king's household also began to record its expenditure on items such as payments to the king's household knights. Unfortunately, these household accounts and chancery rolls do not survive in continuous sequence, but enough have remained intact to constitute a significant source. This increasing detail of governmental records lifts the household knights from their previous position of relative obscurity to a point where their status and importance may be perceived by the historian. This work, however, sits very much at a transitional point in the quantity and quality of the evidence. Whilst it is possible to perceive the household knights in some detail, it is not until later in the thirteenth century that the rest of the military household can be seen with any clarity. The squires, sergeants-at-arms, crossbowmen, and run-of-the-mill infantry remain obscured in John's reign; it is only occasionally that we can glimpse the totality of the royal military household. Nevertheless, it has been possible to obtain a remarkable amount of material on the activities of the household knights themselves, and, as a result, perceive something of the importance of the royal household to the control of John's realm.

The structure of the military household during the reign of Edward I has already received considerable attention from a number of scholars. Edward's military household was simple in its make-up. The steward was the head of the whole household and was responsible for administering justice to clerks and laymen alike; as an integral part of his duties, the steward had the responsibility of administering the 'household army'. Below the steward came the marshal, who kept the muster rolls and who was responsible for the discipline of the military household. There were usually two stewards and two marshals at a time, a system which allowed at least one responsible officer to be *in situ* at all times.⁴⁰ Both the stewards and the marshals were always knights or bannerets, and, as such, had usually been promoted to their positions from the ranks of the household knights.⁴¹ Below the stewards and marshals were the royal household knights, and below the knights came the squires, mounted sergeants, crossbowmen, and foot soldiers.

The role of the Angevin steward has been discussed in detail by Jolliffe.⁴² He maintained that by the time of John's reign the steward had taken most of the functions of the household under his control,

⁴⁰ Tout, *Chapters*, ii, pp. 28, 33.

⁴¹ T. F. Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward I in English History*, revised by H. Johnstone (Manchester, 2nd edn, 1936), pp. 244–81.

⁴² Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, pp. 210–25.

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both domestic and military;⁴³ as early as 1163 the steward had taken the leadership of the household knights from the constable.⁴⁴ But Jolliffe was forced to conclude that there was little to connect the steward to the leadership of the king's household forces in times of war.⁴⁵ But they did have an important part to play in campaigning activity, as we shall see shortly. As in the reign of Edward I,⁴⁶ there were always at least two, and sometimes as many as four, stewards holding office concurrently in the Angevin royal household.⁴⁷ There are no lists which describe who the stewards were but we do know the identities of the men who held this office during John's reign. Tout identified Robert of Thornham (1199–1201), Peter of Stokes (1201–5), William de Cantilupe (1199–1216),⁴⁸ Brian de Lisle (1213–16), and Falkes de Bréauté (1215–16).⁴⁹ To this list we must append the name of William of Harcourt, who became a household steward in or before 1210 and remained in office until the end of the reign.⁵⁰

The men who became stewards of the royal household undoubtedly had extensive military expertise. Falkes de Bréauté, for example, was very obviously a man of considerable martial abilities, and it can be no accident that he was appointed as a household steward early in 1215 when John had need of such qualities in the men he employed. But by and large, the stewards of John's household concentrated their efforts on the logistics on the king's campaigning activities. The actual leadership of the household forces in war they left to other men. Brian de Lisle, for example, had served John as a household knight from at least 1204, and had proved to be an extremely useful servant.⁵¹ In 1205, he became one of the custodians of William de Stuteville's lands; when these were redeemed, Brian retained control of the vital northern strongholds of

⁴³ Ibid., p. 225.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 211, 212. ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁶ Tout, *Chapters*, ii, pp. 28, 158.

⁴⁷ Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, pp. 216–17.

⁴⁸ William was referred to as a household steward as early as 10 October 1200 (*Rot. Lib. John*, p. 1) and he was described as a steward of John's when John was count of Mortain in a charter to Robert de Berners given at L'Isle d'Andely on 12 July 1198 (*Ancient Deeds*, iv, A. 6686). It seems likely, therefore, that he was steward to John from the beginning of his reign and was one of those whom John took with him from his household as count to that as king.

⁴⁹ Tout, *Chapters*, vi, p. 38.

⁵⁰ *Rot. Lib. John*, pp. 207, 212; *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 28. There have been a number of other men suggested as stewards of John's household, none of which, alas, I have been able to verify. Jolliffe, in his *Angevin Kingship*, p. 220, suggested that Geoffrey de Neville, although mostly employed by John as a chamberlain in the household, was a steward for a short time between 1207 and 1208. R. C. Stacey, in his *Politics, Policy and Finance under Henry III, 1216–1245* (Oxford, 1987), p. 102, no. 50, suggested that Osbert Giffard was also a royal steward under John. N. R. Holt, in his edition of *The Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1210–1211* (Manchester, 1964), pp. 65, 68 (2), 155, indexed John fitz Hugh as 'senescallus Regis'.

⁵¹ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, pp. 13 b, 17 b.

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Knaresborough and Boroughbridge.⁵² He was chief forester under Hugh de Neville in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire from 1207;⁵³ from 1208 he was castellan of Bolsover as well as enjoying a variety of custodies for the king.⁵⁴ Brian's appointment to the royal stewardship coincided with the preparations the king was making for his invasion of the continent, and it was Brian's administrative qualities that King John was after.⁵⁵ In November 1213, Brian, along with Falkes de Bréauté, took 3,000 marks across the channel 'for the defence of Flanders'.⁵⁶ Brian was back in England by Christmas, when he was to be found involved in the transportation of money to the king.⁵⁷ Brian was also involved as a paymaster to the victorious men who had destroyed the French fleet at Damme, and even seems to have had his own galley, perhaps captured booty from Flanders.⁵⁸ In April 1214, Brian sent 30,000 quarrels to Portsmouth for transportation to the continent for the campaign which was already in progress.⁵⁹ Brian was the only one of the three royal stewards to accompany John to Poitou in 1214 (he was with the king at Niort by 6 May 1214);⁶⁰ although the details of the campaign are obscure, the witness lists of the charter rolls suggest that he had an important role to play as one of John's advisers.⁶¹

In extraordinary circumstances, the royal stewards could act as field commanders for the king; the situation at the end of John's reign provided just those circumstances. As the king's steward, Falkes de Bréauté was responsible for making preparations for the impending civil war when he was placed in charge of the payment and distribution of the stipendiaries whom John had brought back from Poitou.⁶² Falkes was one of the men who were left in the south of England in early 1216 to keep the rebel barons cooped up in London while John took his forces northwards.⁶³ It is clear that Falkes played a major part in leading the king's stipendiary forces throughout the civil war.⁶⁴ During the

⁵² *Pipe Roll 7 John*, pp. 38–40; *Rot. Fin.*, p. 309; *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, pp. 43, 42 b, 57 b, 65 b (2), 66, 66 b, 83 b, 90, 105 b, 144; *Pipe Rolls 8 John*, pp. 217–20; *9 John*, pp. 125–7; *10 John*, pp. 50–1; *12 John*, p. 135.

⁵³ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 72 b, 73.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80 b.

⁵⁵ The first time that Brian was described as a royal steward was as a witness to a letter close dating to 3 October 1213 authorising the acquisition of victuals for the king's table (*Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 154).

⁵⁶ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 139 b (4).

⁵⁷ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 107; *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 158 b.

⁵⁸ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, pp. 148, 156 b. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶⁰ *Rot. Chart.*, p. 197.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197, 197 b, 198 b, 199 b (4), 200 (3), 200 b (4), 201 (2), 201 b (2).

⁶² *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, pp. 176, 178 b; *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 126 b, 127.

⁶³ *Chron. Maj.*, ii, p. 635; *Coggeshall*, p. 177.

⁶⁴ Holt, *Northerners*, p. 129; Painter, *King John*, pp. 336, 364.

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battle of Lincoln in 1217, Falkes was in charge of his own contingent of troops.⁶⁵ William of Harcourt also played an active part in military affairs, especially during the civil war. In April 1215, he moved to Nottingham at the head of a group of soldiers to meet the king. William had returned to Corfe by August, and later the same month he was made sheriff of Yorkshire and was based at Scarborough. The castle was an isolated outpost and William's scope for action was severely limited. By March 1216, William was in the castle of Framlingham.⁶⁶ Clearly, then, the stewards of John's household had an important role to play in the military affairs of the king and, occasionally, were even sometimes to be found leading the king's field forces.

But the royal stewards had other important military duties to perform. The military role of the Angevin stewards which received the most attention from Jolliffe was that of paymaster to the king's army.⁶⁷ When Geoffrey Luttrell was told to take his 'liberaciones . . . sicut alii milites de familia nostra recipiunt', the order was attested by Peter of Stokes, King John's seneschal.⁶⁸ The imprests paid to the household knights on the Irish campaign in 1210 were given by the view of William of Harcourt.⁶⁹ When on one occasion a household knight was not present to receive his imprest, the amount was given over to the king's steward.⁷⁰ The *dona* given to the household knights in the Scottish campaign in 1209 were also paid by William de Cantilupe, who was assisted by John fitz Hugh.⁷¹ The likelihood is, therefore, that the royal stewards had some responsibility for dispensing campaign funds to the royal household knights.

Jolliffe wondered if the household knights were subject to the discipline of a single leader in the form of the steward.⁷² In Edward I's reign the steward was assisted in this task by the marshal, who also kept a record of their numbers.⁷³ The *Constitutio Domus Regis* of the mid-1130s also suggests that the marshal had a role to play in household discipline.⁷⁴ This function of the marshal as disciplinarian of the king's army may also be seen in the reign of King John. There survives on the dorse of the close rolls a text which goes by the name of the

⁶⁵ *Maréchal*, lines 16,535–40. It is likely that Falkes was still a steward of the household at this stage in his career (*Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, pp. 350, 350 b).

⁶⁶ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 152, 154, 165, 169; *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 23; Painter, *King John*, p. 355; *List of Sheriffs*, p. 161.

⁶⁷ Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, pp. 218–19.

⁶⁸ *Rot. Norm.*, p. 54. ⁶⁹ *Rot. Lib. John*, p. 212.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 225 (Robert of Ropsley). ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125–6.

⁷² Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, p. 218.

⁷³ Tout, *Charters*, ii, pp. 137, 146. ⁷⁴ *Dialogus de Scaccario*, p. 134.

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'Constitutions of the King's Army'.⁷⁵ This document describes in some detail how the royal army was to be organised. The entry appears on the dorse of membrane eight, which dates it to some time between 23 July and 16 August 1213 at the point when John was determined to chance his luck in France again after the victory at Damme. That the barons thwarted this attempt is well known, but this document is likely to have been placed on the close rolls for this expected campaign. Because of the appearance of two marshals for Normandy, however, it is possible that this document also reflects an earlier tradition when Normandy was in the hands of the Angevin kings.⁷⁶ We may, therefore, speculate that something like this document existed well before 1213.

There is no mention of the king's stewards in this document. Clearly they had no part to play in the discipline of the army as a whole, despite being the superior officer within the household. Like Edward I's marshals, John's marshals were the officers with responsibility for the discipline of the army, and no doubt also kept a list of those men present.⁷⁷ John's marshals swore to uphold the constitutions of the army;⁷⁸ it was they who put right any problems or punished any malefactors.⁷⁹ The image that this document gives of the duties of John's marshals can be appreciated only if we conclude that the structure of John's military household was little different from that of Edward I's time. The steward was indeed the head of the military household, just as he was the head of the whole household; but he was assisted in the task of controlling the military household by the marshals. These were the men who had the day-to-day contact with the household troops during periods in which they were on campaign; this impression is confirmed by the comments of Roger of Wendover when he was describing the army John sent to Flanders in 1214. The earl of Salisbury, Roger says, was made marshal of the royal army in Flanders, and we know from Roger that the earl did indeed play a major role in leading the king's troops at Bouvines.⁸⁰

There are no lists of the king's marshals and so we are largely left to speculate about their identities. The four named marshals in this

⁷⁵ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 164.

⁷⁶ 'Dominus Rex habeat de qualibet terra sua duos Marescallos scilicet de Anglia Radulfum de Bray et Radulfum de Normanvill'. De Normannia Philippum de Albiniaco et Engugerum de Boun; de aliis terris illos dominus Rex eliget.'

⁷⁷ Tout, *Chapters*, ii, p. 137.

⁷⁸ 'Isti [the Marshals] jurabunt quod bene et fideliter pacem ecclesie observari facient.'

⁷⁹ 'Hoc idem quilibet Baro et quilibet miles et quilibet capitalis serviens familie sue se firmiter observaturum jurabit ita quod si aliquis transgressor huius institutionis inventus fuerit Marescallis tradatur ad faciendum inde quod justitia fuerit.'

⁸⁰ *Chron. Maj.*, ii, pp. 578–80.

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document give a starting point. They were Ralph of Bray and Ralph de Normanville for England and Philip d'Albini and Engelram de Boun for Normandy. In addition, there are two other names that may be added to the list. On 28 April 1214, the household knight, Godfrey of Crowcombe, was given custody of the castle of La Rochelle by the king. In the letter declaring that the castle was to be handed over to Godfrey, he was described by John as 'marescallo nostro'.⁸¹ If we are to read literally the constitutions of the army drawn up in 1213, then presumably Godfrey was one of the marshals whom the king could 'eliget' for his other lands. Another man to appear as a household marshal was Ralph Gernun, the king's nephew, in February 1207.⁸²

Within the overarching structure of the royal military household, then, the bulk of the household knights were placed somewhere between the stewards and marshals at the top and the squires and sergeants at the bottom. It is with this group of men that this book is concerned. But within this category of household knight, individuals might vary considerably in standing. As we shall see, this distinction in standing can best be perceived in the functions which the household knights performed. There were those who seem to have been little more than fighting knights, and appear in the records mainly in relation to campaigns. And there were those household knights who were amongst the closest of John's counsellors, and appear in the records performing a multitude of tasks for the king. The same core of individuals were used as sheriffs, castellans, diplomats, and custodians of escheated lands by King John. These men were the senior members of the household, not necessarily in terms of age, but in terms of the amount of trust that the king placed in them. Examples include men such as Brian de Lisle, Falkes de Bréauté, and John Russell, all of whom eventually became stewards of the household either late in John's reign or early in the reign of Henry III;⁸³ also Robert of Ropsley, John of Bassingbourne, and Robert Peverel who, despite enjoying high favour with the king, deserted John during the civil war. Some, like Godfrey of Crowcombe and Geoffrey Luttrell, became specialists in particular fields such as diplomacy. Luttrell's services were also valued within the household itself when he was not involved in tasks *extra curiam*. Most of the knights who will be described in this book, like John of Bassingbourne, were men of considerable standing in the royal household and they were a vital arm of John's royal administration. But it is important to note that a good proportion of John's household knights did not fall

⁸¹ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 114.

⁸² *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 77 b.

⁸³ PRO, SC1/62/4.

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into this category. Of the knights who form the basis of this study, about half appeared only in the context of John's campaigning activities. This should serve to remind us that the first role of the knight in John's household was to be a warrior. Only when a man had proved himself in this field was he employed in the many tasks of Angevin royal administration.

One question remains to be addressed before we move on to the main body of the discussion: how many knights are we talking about when we refer to the body of *milites de familia regis*? The evidence strongly suggests that we are talking of a figure approaching 100 men who at any one time could be described as being knights of the royal household.⁸⁴ In the early years of the reign of Henry III, for example, the king called on the services of some 123 knights of the royal household.⁸⁵ In addition to these 123 household knights, the list also includes a further 88 knights who were brought by the household knights as their own retainers. Obviously these men should not be considered as household knights for the purposes of this study, but their presence in the household army would be extremely important. In the case of this particular campaign, the household element became a staggering 211 knights. When one considers that on the Irish campaign which John waged in 1210 there were only 800 or so named knights,⁸⁶ that the royalist forces at Stamford in 1218 and those mustered at Portsmouth in 1229 were around 500 or 600 knights,⁸⁷ then one can see just how significant a force 200-odd household troops and their retainers could be. Of course, these figures do not include the mounted sergeants who must have accompanied at least some of the household knights. In April 1216, for example, the royal household marshal Ralph Gernun entered into an agreement (an indenture even?) with the king that he would serve John with three knights and five well-armed sergeants 'for as long as the war lasts between the king and his barons'.⁸⁸ In any event, from within the

⁸⁴ For a full discussion of the evidence concerning numbers of household knights in the early thirteenth century, see S. D. Church, 'The knights of the household of King John: a question of numbers', in *Thirteenth-Century England IV: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1991*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 151-65.

⁸⁵ PRO, C72/2, m. 20.

⁸⁶ S. D. Church, 'The 1210 campaign in Ireland: evidence for a military revolution?', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 20 (1998), pp. 45-57.

⁸⁷ I. J. Sanders, *Feudal Military Service in England: a Study of the Constitutional and Military Powers of the 'Barones' in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 108-9, 121.

⁸⁸ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, p. 265 b; N. B. Lewis, 'An early indenture of military service, 27 July 1287', *BIHR*, 13 (1935-6), pp. 85-9; S. D. Lloyd, 'The Lord Edward's crusade, 1270-2: its setting and significance', in *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, ed. J. Gillingham and J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 120-33.

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ranks of his own household, Henry III could easily muster about one-third of the knights on any major campaign.

John, too, seems to have been able to muster a force of household knights that was every bit as formidable in its size as the one available to Henry III in the mid-1220s. Although the evidence is by no means as obvious as that for Henry III's reign, there is material to show that the numbers retained in the household on a long-term basis amounted to almost 100 knights.⁸⁹ The most significant gathering of household knights under King John seems to have been at St Albans on 18/19 December 1215, just before John was to make a devastating attack on the rebels' strongholds in the north.⁹⁰ In the document that records the names of those whom John took northwards, there were 47 men named as knights 'de hospicio domini regis'. But this was only half the army, for the other half remained in the south with the earl of Salisbury. More importantly, there were at least 50 household knights still in royal service in 1215 who did not join this particular army.⁹¹ So had all been mustered together, then the total of household knights would have approached 100. This looks like a military household every bit as significant as the one enjoyed by Henry III shortly after he entered into his majority.

If the medieval king was the helmsman of the ship of state, the royal household was the ship's engine. It comprised men from most ranks of society, from the great magnates of the realm to simple servants who looked after the day-to-day needs of the king and his court. English government, whether in peacetime or wartime, was conducted through the royal household; and amongst the most important men in the household were the knights: socially élite, militarily preeminent, and indispensable for the workings of English medieval government. It is with these men that this work is concerned.

⁸⁹ Church, 'A question of numbers', pp. 151–65.

⁹⁰ Church, 'The earliest English muster roll', pp. 1–17.

⁹¹ Church, 'A question of numbers', pp. 162–5.