



*The Household Knights of Edward III:
Warfare, Politics and Kingship in
Fourteenth-Century England*

By Matthew Hefferan

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Over the course of Edward III's reign, which lasted from 1327 to 1377, at least 284 men served him as household knights. These men, who were customarily given robes and fees by the king, were principally drawn from the ranks of the "upper gentry" and were differentiated into two groups: the simple household knights and the household bannerets, the latter of which held a superior social and military status. Together, as Hefferan shows, they "occupied an important place in English warfare, politics and government in the fourteenth century" (258).

Perhaps their most important duties were military. Between 1327 and 1360, on any given campaign, Edward was accompanied by roughly 95% of his household knights. During expeditions, simple household knights served in the king's own retinue, probably leading modest contingents of household esquires and archers, while household bannerets could lead their own retinues into battle, and took charge of smaller ventures, such as sacking towns and crossing rivers. Aside from fighting on campaigns, household knights served in a variety of other martial capacities, for instance as keepers of royal castles, admirals, and commissioners of array. Yet these men were also entrusted with further responsibilities. For instance, they made loans to the crown; acted as royal diplomats; served as captains of Calais and justiciars of Ireland; and sat on judicial commissions, with a household knight heading over half of the commissions tasked with investigating smuggling between 1340 and 1353. For these endeavours, and others, they were rewarded with a considerable volume of patronage, which included grants of lands, wardships, and annuities.

Matthew Hefferan's valuable monograph investigates all these topics, and many more besides. It is split into four parts, framed by an introduction and conclusion. The first part explores the knightly household in Edward's reign, considering such issues as how knights were retained, who they were, and for how long they were retained. The second part considers the military activities of the household knights, not only examining their roles on campaign, but also their contributions to royal diplomacy, to defending England, and to raising money and amassing supplies for expeditions. The third part assesses the political role of the household knights, both nationally and in the localities, and discusses their witnessing of charters, their attendance at parliament, and their positions as keepers of royal forests. The final part evaluates the patronage they received for serving the king, charting the variety of grants and informal benefits which were given to household knights. It concludes, provocatively in the light of work by some "new constitutional" historians, that "a powerful, symbiotic bond existed between service and reward," and that "royal patronage played a vital role in maintaining and encouraging such loyalty to the king" (257). In covering all these matters, Hefferan adds much to our understanding of the household knight in later medieval England, in what is the first full-length study of the knightly household in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Not only does Hefferan's book fill a significant historiographical lacuna, but it also does so in a praiseworthy fashion. Most importantly, Hefferan has researched his subject painstakingly, and consulted a wide array of printed and manuscript sources. This places his

whole account on solid foundations, but the depth of his research is perhaps most evident in the helpful series of figures, graphs, tables, and appendices which accompany his text. These provide useful information about how long men spent in the knightly household, which knights were summoned to parliaments and great councils, the retinues raised by knights for various campaigns, and so on. Hefferan has also mastered the broader secondary literature concerning household knights, such as Simon Church's research on John's reign, Michael Prestwich's on Edward I's reign, and Chris Given-Wilson's on Richard II's reign, as well as much work on noble retinues. This enables him to set Edward's own knightly household in its proper context and to make a number of fruitful comparisons. More generally, the book is attractively-produced and well-referenced, with rich footnotes and a twenty-six-page bibliography.

However, Hefferan's book displays several shortcomings. Firstly, there are a handful of small errors of fact; for instance, Hefferan states that Edward III denied Archbishop Stratford admittance into parliament in "the winter of 1340-1341," whereas this actually happened in April of the latter year (54). Secondly, while Hefferan's grasp of the secondary literature is customarily impressive, there are several lapses; he describes George Cuttino and Pierre Chaplais as the only scholars "to consider medieval diplomacy in any depth in the twentieth century" (146). Yet this overlooks the work of historians such as Mary Blust, Donald Queller, and John Ferguson (although he does cite Queller's and Ferguson's work elsewhere). Finally, some of his arguments are not fully convincing. For example, Hefferan posits that "it is reasonable to argue that because... they [the household knights] represented a reasonably cohesive group, they too enjoyed an additional degree of efficiency and camaraderie as a military unit," and that "this would have had a positive impact on the outcomes of Edward's military ventures" (119). All this is entirely plausible, but it would have been more persuasive for Hefferan to substantiate his conclusion more thoroughly, beyond a reference to Richard Barber's claims regarding the knights of the Order of the Garter and their contribution to the English victory at the Battle of Poitiers.

Nevertheless, these are relatively minor concerns considering the scope of what Hefferan has achieved. This is an erudite, detailed, and impressive first monograph, which will be of interest to both political and military historians of later medieval England.

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