

The King's Chamber

Both Henry VII and Henry VIII had many palaces, castles and manor houses. They regularly moved between these places so that they could be cleaned and so that they could visit different places in the country to see people, see to business in other locations, or engage in their favourite activity – hunting.

The Palace of Westminster

This was where the bureaucratic, meaning the official administration, offices of government stayed. The King's legal courts, and financial offices were here. The main financial office was known as the Exchequer, but by the time Henry VII came to the throne, it was inefficient and slow. Previous kings had got around this by keeping money in their Chamber, and Henry decided to develop this into a more efficient means of managing money.



What was the Chamber?



The Chamber was the king's own apartments within his palaces. Historians think that it was early in Henry VII's reign that the Chamber grew from being two rooms – the first where the king would receive visitors and eat and the second was where he slept – into three rooms. The third room he added was a 'privy' or 'secret' chamber, where only the king and especially selected servants were allowed.

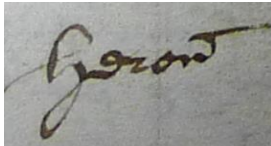
The Chamber Books

Rather than use the Exchequer, the large, slow and cumbersome medieval government financial system, the king had money paid direct to him in his chamber, and made payments from it to. It was a bit like a very large money box – so large that books had to be kept to keep track of all payments in and out, and staff employed to keep track of all the money. These books tell us lots about what the king spent his money on, what presents he gave, who was at his court, what he spent his time doing and who owed him money.

Meet the Chamber Staff



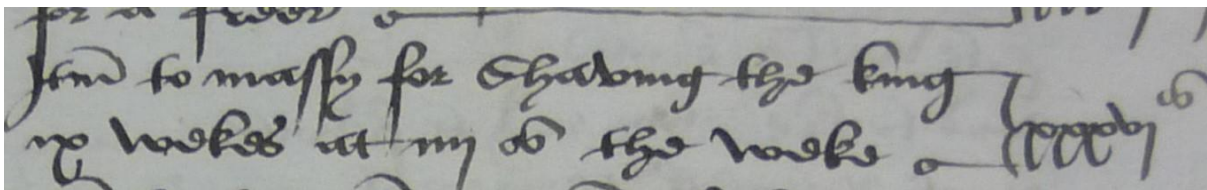
John Heron – started as a clerk in the Chamber, and became its treasurer early in Henry VII's reign, and continued as treasurer until 1521, the year before he died. The early books are mostly in his handwriting. When he started in the role, he earned £3 6s 8d per quarter. By the end of the reign his salary was £25 per year, plus various high-paying offices and rewards, including a knighthood!



By 1499, the chamber was so busy that John was given some help. John Trees came to work with him first, then John Porth in 1503. Near the end of the reign, in December 1508, Richard Lee became a chamber clerk, proving you didn't have to be called John to handle the king's money!

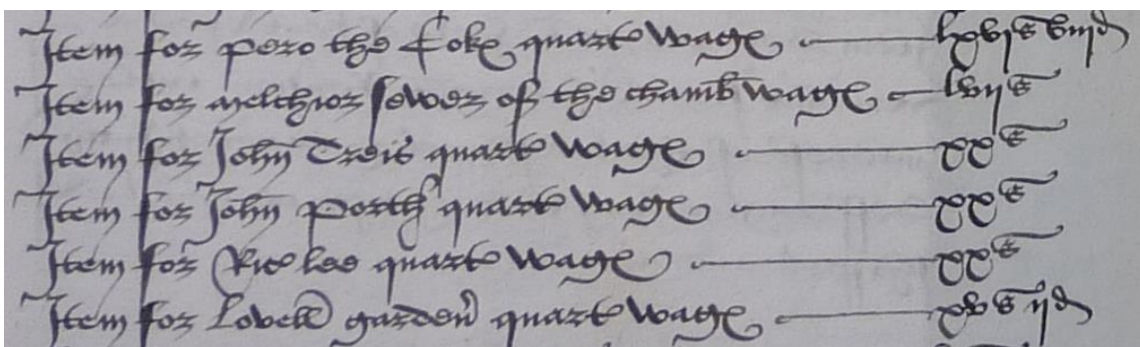
Also employed in the Chamber were servants to look after the king's every need:

Massy Viliyard, who possibly came from Brittany and met Henry when he was in exile there, was the king's barber for all of Henry VII's reign and the beginning years of Henry VIII's.



TNA, E101/415/3, f.46r

Note – all payments start with the word 'Item' - the line over the 'm' shows that the 'e' is missing. Here he received 36 shillings for 9 weeks – can you transcribe this and see how much he got per week?



TNA, E36/214, f.155v

Pero, the French cook, and **Melchior** the sewer (served food and organised guests) served Henry VII towards the end of his life. **Lovell** the gardener served Henry for most of his reign – Henry was very fond of his gardens and Lovell oversaw gardens at Windsor, Woking and Richmond. Who else is being paid in the extract above?