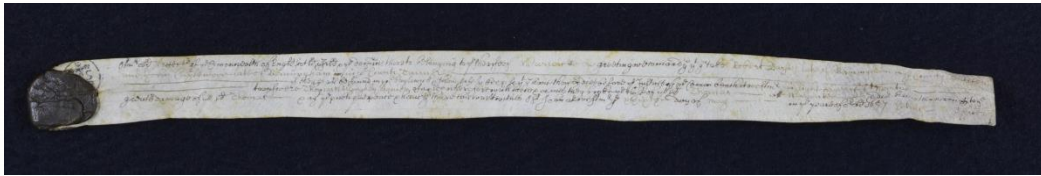


A Mysterious Writ to the Sheriff of Warwickshire (CR173/7)

Not much is known for certain about this intriguing little document. It sits in a collection of political and administrative papers belonging to the Loveday Family of Arlescote and is simply described in our catalogue as '*A Writ to the Sheriff of Warwickshire*'. But why is it so small? What purpose did it serve in this truncated form?



The document is less than 25cm long and 2cm wide, yet would have serious consequences for the men to be detained. Warwickshire County Record Office CR173/7

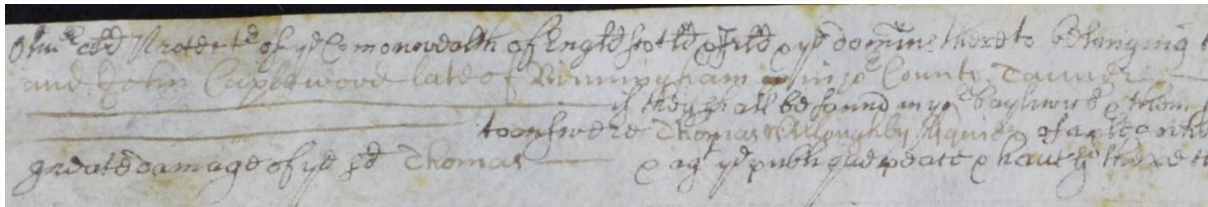
The slip of paper is appended with a seal (presumably to endorse its authority) and is written in the name of Oliver Cromwell in 1657, towards the end of the Interregnum. It commands the Sheriff of Warwick (who is not named but was George Pudsey, esquire) to seek out and detain Robert Baylies, a butcher, and John Caplewood, a tanner, both from Birmingham.



The seal may have some detailing on it, including a cross, but it is very difficult to see. Warwickshire County Record Office CR173/7

If found, they are to appear at the Court of Common Bench at Westminster for their crimes against Thomas Willoughby, esquire. These crimes are not detailed in the short document, but they are

alleged to have 'broken the close'¹ of Thomas Willoughby 'with force and arms', as well as doing him 'other wrongs' and causing 'great damage' to both Willoughby and the 'publique peace'.



The writing is late secretary hand, with the characteristic 'backward' e, sloping d and the y^e abbreviation for 'the'. Warwickshire County Record Office CR173/7

Whatever they did must have been serious as the Court of Common Bench (more commonly known as the Court of Common Pleas) was one of the highest courts in the land, convened to hear pleas, or cases, brought by one individual against another. Lesser crimes would have been heard by local Quarter Sessions courts.

In this case Thomas Willoughby may have been the Thomas Willoughby described as 'a minor gentleman from Sutton Coldfield'.² This particular Willoughby had been an active fundraiser for the Civil War effort in Warwickshire, helping to find volunteers in the county and train them as Parliamentary troops.

Perhaps his attackers had a Royalist cause and Willoughby therefore had every hope of a successful outcome in a Cromwellian justice system!

¹ This could mean a parcel of land, which was often described as a close.

² A. Hughes, 'Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660', Cambridge, 1987, p.150, available in the Warwickshire County Record Office library.