Few runs of household accounts of late medieval clergy – bishops, let alone clerics further down the ecclesiastical hierarchy – survive to this day. The publication of the receivers’ accounts for the estates and household of William Worsley are therefore particularly welcome. They are able to show the pressures under which such clerics operated, pressures which were often more worldly than spiritual. The difficulties of managing income from farming demesne land and from fixed rents in the late fifteenth century are amply displayed; so are the expenses resulting from the requirements of hospitality and other secular obligations. Although tentative estimate would put Worsley’s income at around £300 per annum – making his household among the wealthiest in England – the strain of receiving important visitors and of attending the king on campaign (Edward IV’s attempted expedition to Scotland in 1480) made itself felt on the dean’s finances. His household might have received criticism later from the reform-minded (and indeed, the provision of luxury items such as Rhenish wine, perhaps lends weight to an image of clerical opulence), but lavish expense seems to have been socially required rather than indulgently courted.

Worsley’s own actions did little to help his finances: his involvement in the Perkin Warbeck conspiracy resulted in an expensive pardon, as well as a brief spell in the Tower of London (made comfortable perhaps by the provision of beef, mutton, fish and sweetmeats provided out of the income from his own estates). Worsley’s involvement in the Warbeck conspiracy may also reveal further aspects about the plot: the editors are able to show, through careful documenting of Worsley’s connections, a wider network of priests, aristocrats and Londoners who might have been involved in the plot. In fact the introduction and biographical notes make this a more valuable book: full documentation is given for Worsley’s life and career, as well as a context for the accounts his household generated.

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