

that Willoughby, 'now being here in London' be compelled to show what proofs he had. Finally they signed off, praying to God for the King's prosperous estate, and for the Earl's 'good lordship' to endure. Unfortunately Cromwell fell from grace immediately afterwards, which may have resulted in the petition being 'lost' and no action taken to stop Willoughby continuing to ride roughshod over the townsfolk.⁶

In 1791 John Randall from Orford copied a document 'found among the records in Star Chamber' which was the bill filed by Willoughby against the Burgesses of Orford in 1541. Willoughby claimed that he had inherited from his forebears the castle and 'village' of Orford and 250 acres of land, pasture and marsh, paying to the King £20 pa. They had been in his family for 200 years. He then accused Robert Pawling, John Maryet, John Pie, Robert Partriche and Matthew Farrer with assembling on 6th October 1541 in riotous manner with bows, staves, swords and bucklers (small shields) to expel Willoughby and his officers.⁷

The draft of the burgesses' reply survives and refers to charters granted by kings right back to Henry III (reigned 1216 to 1272). The present king, Henry VIII, had granted patents in the second year of his reign, and owned the castle, town mill and marsh for which the burgesses paid £30 a year to the Exchequer for the use thereof.⁸

Charges against Spicer

The next set of charges was levelled against Spicer alone and, if they were true, reveal the bailiff to be a thoroughly wicked man. The main accusations were that he had mown the Common, and declared in church before all the parish that if any man placed cattle on the Common he would kill the animals. He had undermined the castle and locked the gate so that access to the beacon to light it was denied. He hired two men, Knappett and Grene, to remove the King's timber from Sudbourne for his own use. A further 40 feet of royal timber was taken and they also took a barrel of pitch belonging to a Lowestoft man for Spicer.⁹

A confrontation between Spicer and the constable was related in yet another document listing complaints against the former made by the seven burgesses. In August, probably 1541, Spicer had entered the field where the inhabitants had their cattle and drove some of them to the pound, which

was within the castle walls, and locked the gate. John Utting, his deputy, was to fine the owners a penny for each animal that had been detained. Thus Robert Pawling, for example, was charged five pence. The following day Spicer had removed more animals, which the deponents said were permitted to be where they were it being after harvest and during shack time.

At some stage in all this furore the constable, Matthew Farrer, had threatened to place Spicer in the stocks. According to Farrer, Spicer came to his door and verbally assaulted him, saying he had come to see whether Farrer would place him in the stocks now. He had put more cattle in the pound and wondered which of 'the proudest knaves' would fetch them out.

Farrer then, in the King's name, charged Spicer to keep the King's peace, adding he 'did not well' to put cattle in the pound at shack time, which was of old custom. Thereupon Spicer took his sword and buckler and said, 'If thou hast a weapon I would displease thee'. He then returned them to his saddlebow, took off his jacket and untied his points (laces holding clothing together) and would have struck Farrer had he not retreated into his house. Spicer then left saying he was doing his master's will.¹⁰

The complainants then referred to the decay of the castle, adding that it stood a mile from the sea and '20 score tayllers yards' from the Haven. Every grant and charter reserved the castle to the King's use and exempted it from the fee farm. Thus Willoughby had no jurisdiction over it.

Other charges related to Spicer's treatment of women and the poor generally. He had conveyed away William Boote's wife, who was not seen again. Robert Cage's wife had likewise been allured, enticed and conveyed away, taking with her some of her husband's goods which, it was alleged, were later found in Spicer's stable. He drove Katheryn Wiseman's cattle and horses out of her grounds to the pound and would not allow her to feed them. As a result three beasts, a colt and a horse died. He took away a bay trotting gelding and a young mare, the latter being looked after by Thomas Manning for a Letheringham man, and sold the mare. Two of Robert Pawling's horses were taken off the Common to a desolate place where they died.