

# **Section One:**

## **The 1390s and Earlier**

### **Going Back to Go Forward**



## Introducing Section One

*Although I'm keen to start exploring the dramatic events surrounding the deposition of Richard II in 1399, I need to restrain my curiosity for a little longer. In 1399 Richard Redmayn and William Gascoigne were in their forties, Elizabeth Aldburgh in her mid-thirties – all three of them had already lived full lives so it would be unhelpful to pick up their stories abruptly in 1399, ignoring everything that had happened to them and their families beforehand. We'd be left wondering how their earlier experiences had shaped their aims and ambitions and the subsequent choices they made. Therefore the three chapters in this Section travel back to explore different facets of the development of the Aldburgh, Redmayn and Gascoigne families.*

*This introduction is also the best place to say a little about the highest-ranking layers of society, the groups we call the nobility and gentry – otherwise I'll have to shoe-horn this explanation into a later place where it doesn't fit and disrupts whatever flow I've built up!*

*The Aldburghs belonged to the nobility (or peerage), the small group of between 50 and 70 families (the numbers fluctuated across the period) at the very top of the social tree. What divided the nobility from the gentry was both wealth and, more specifically, that the heads of noble families were summoned individually by name to attend meetings of the House of Lords at Parliaments. However even this small group of families had differences in status, wealth and power. At the very top were the dozen or so dukes and earls, often closely related to the king, with an income of between £3000 and £5000 a year. In contrast, the lower-ranking lords (also known as barons), men such as William Aldburgh, had incomes from upwards of around £500 a year.*

*The Redmayns and Gascoignes belonged the gentry, the middling landowners whose public service was essential to effective government. The gentry consisted of at least 4000 families nationally, ranging from the elite of each county with incomes of between £400 and £100 a year from ten or more manors to lesser gentry with incomes of between £10 and £20 from one or two manors. The elite gentry played the most important roles in local government, as Sheriff, Justices of the Peace and being elected as their county's representatives to the House of Commons. The lower gentry filled less exalted but still practically important posts such as coroners and tax collectors.*

*Both nobles and gentry were therefore wide-ranging in wealth and influence and there was more social mobility as families rose or declined than many were comfortable with. However that's enough by way of definition for now! It's time to get to know these families a little better and where better to begin that with a marriage, the marriage of Elizabeth Aldburgh and Sir Richard Redmayn, sometime around 1396.*

*Note: A list of books, articles and other material consulted for this section can be found at the end of Chapter 1.3*

## Chapter 1.1 Marriage: Elizabeth Aldburgh and Richard Redmayn c.1396

*I'd rather live in his world than live without him in mine.*

*From 'Midnight Train to Georgia' by Gladys Knight and the Pips*

For a week or more, in or around 1396, all roads around Wharfedale in Yorkshire seemed to lead to Harewood Castle. Elizabeth Aldburgh, one of the sisters who'd inherited the Harewood estates, was about to be married. The castle must have been en fete, everything and everybody cleaned and polished, members of the household clothed in new livery, the best of food and drink ready for the guests. Many of the friends and relatives gathering for the celebrations would have been local families such as the Gascoignes from nearby Gawthorpe Hall, the Vavasours of Hazlewood Castle and members of the Roos family from Ingmanthorpe near Wetherby. They were familiar with Harewood and its surroundings but looking around more curiously, perhaps impressed by the domestic comfort of the castle built only thirty years earlier, were those connected with Sir Richard Redmayn, Elizabeth's husband-to-be, whose home was at distant Levens Hall in Westmorland.



*The effigies of Elizabeth Aldburgh and Sir Richard Redmayn,  
in Harewood Church, Leeds*

Elizabeth and Richard's marriage was to last twenty years and they'll play a major part in the next few chapters so their wedding provides an excellent opportunity to introduce them. Not that this will be easy. No letters or other evidence written by Elizabeth or Richard survive to tell us about their relationship or influence upon one another but there is enough information to outline their stories up until their marriage and to suggest the kinds of issues that may have figured in their thoughts and conversations as they looked ahead to life together. That information also creates the opportunity to speculate on whether they chose to marry because, to paraphrase Gladys Knight, they'd rather share their worlds than live apart.

What do we know about Elizabeth and Richard in the years before their marriage? Elizabeth, born in 1364, was in her early thirties, widowed by the death of her first husband, Sir Brian Stapleton, and mother of at least one son. We know little else

about her (as is the case even for many of the wealthiest women in this period) but there is enough information for Professor Carole Rawcliffe to describe Elizabeth as seemingly 'intelligent and interesting'. Later in life, Elizabeth was left a copy of the *Legenda Sanctorum*, a popular collection of saints' lives, by Sir Thomas Roos and Sir Henry Vavasour left her a gold ring. More tantalisingly, Elizabeth's father-in-law left her ornaments and medals dedicated to the cult of the Virgin on condition that she behaved well after his death in 1394. What could he have been expecting? Taken together, these bequests suggest that Elizabeth was a woman who inspired affection amongst her friends.

Elizabeth was also well-used to responsibility, having inherited her half-share of the Aldburgh estates (along with her sister Sybil) from her brother in 1391, the same year that her husband, Sir Brian Stapleton, died. One immediate task she may well have had was to act as her husband's executor, as other women of her status did. This included resolving her financial settlement as widow, supervising the arrangements for the anniversaries marking Sir Brian's death (his 'month's mind' and 'year's mind') and perhaps commissioning a monument at his place of burial in the Dominican Friary in York, the Blackfriars. Elizabeth would then as a *femme sole* (a woman with the right to own property, make contracts in her own name and plead in the courts) have got on with the business of running her Aldburgh estates as well as of her jointure, the share of the Stapleton lands that had been left to her for her lifetime by her husband.

We have more evidence about Richard who was born in the early 1350s and so was in his early 40s when he married Elizabeth. He too had been married before and had at least one son though the patchiness of the evidence means that we don't know even the name of his first wife. His successful military and administrative career can be reconstructed, however, largely from government records. Knighted by 1376, he took part in military expeditions to France and Scotland and may have fought against the Scots in 1388 at the battle of Otterburn where his father was one of the English commanders. Richard was also an enthusiastic participant in jousts, arranging a joust of war (when lances were sharp rather than blunt as in a joust of peace) at Carlisle in 1391 between 4 English knights, including himself, and 4 Scottish knights. Sadly the result doesn't seem to have survived.

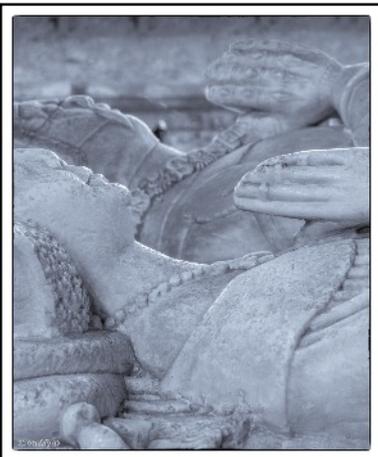
Richard's first experiences of government were in his home territory, the north-west, being appointed to responsibilities such as overseeing repairs to Carlisle Castle, a role which helped build his links with Henry Percy ('Hotspur') the eldest son of the powerful earl of Northumberland. Richard was also connected with the most powerful nobleman in the country, the King's uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster who paid Richard an annual fee for his advice or services although we don't know when this was.

Even more promisingly, Richard became a member of King Richard II's household by 1388 and was retained for life in the significant role of king's knight in 1390, receiving an annuity and probably new robes each Christmas when he attended court. The King's trust led to Richard's appointment to the annual post of Sheriff of Cumberland on three occasions by 1397. He also took part in the King's military expedition to Ireland in 1394-95 and received a series of other annual fees and grants from the King. Richard Redmayn was clearly a man on the rise.

There are therefore good reasons to see Elizabeth and Richard as capable, intelligent and well-respected individuals. In addition, Richard must have been fit and strong from his military career, his jousting and the numerous lengthy journeys he made on horseback but there is much else that we don't know about them – how tall they were, blonde or dark, slim or plump, short-tempered or patient, cheerful or gloomy, supportive or critical?

And what did they look like? We can't expect their effigies to help us as they, along with the effigies of Sybil Aldburgh and her husband, share common features with another pair of effigies in Yorkshire and thus may be simply the standard output of an alabaster workshop, probably in York. Elizabeth's effigy, for example, has a placid, even bland, face which may approximate her appearance or may tell us more about the sculptor's limitations. Unfortunately, we can't compare Elizabeth's face with her sister's as poor Sybil is too damaged by time and erosion. That said, the effigies do tell us about how Elizabeth and Richard wished to be remembered and about the clothing that reflects their status.

Richard wears the armour of a knight of the early fifteenth century and he has a rather jaunty, pointed moustache, a striking piece of male fashion bravado of the time that he may well have been proud of.



Elizabeth is equally stylish, wearing the long flowing dress called a houppelande (though no glimmerings of the once-bright colouring of her clothes has survived), a wide head-dress profusely decorated with five-petalled flowers, a necklace with a heart-shaped pendant and several rings.

*Elizabeth's effigy,  
with necklace and rings*



*Richard's effigy,  
with jaunty moustache*

Another thing we can't know is how Elizabeth and Richard met but there are several possibilities which may have overlapped. The Redmayns, Aldburghs and Stapletons knew each other through military service against the Scots and Richard Redmayn shared his enthusiasm for jousting with Elizabeth's father-in-law, the eminent soldier, Sir Brian Stapleton. The Stapletons, although their main estates were in Yorkshire, also held lands in Cumberland and Westmorland which could have brought them into contact with the Redmayns. More immediately, family and friends may have been on the look-out for suitable partners for Elizabeth and Richard. It was common for intermediaries to suggest possible husbands or wives, host dinners where they could get to know one another, share thoughts on the suitability of a prospective spouse (did sister Sybil give Elizabeth her thoughts while walking in the garden at Harewood?), and advise on and help negotiate the financial settlement, thus tactfully distancing the couple from financial discussions. Even politics may have played a part. King Richard may have favoured the Redmayn-Aldburgh marriage because he wanted to strengthen his following in Yorkshire. The King's natural support was in the south (with the exception of Cheshire) and the arrival of Richard Redmayn, one of the king's knights, in Yorkshire would boost the crown's influence in and knowledge of the county.

All this was practical rather than simply cold-blooded. There's a danger, looking back, of stigmatising medieval marriages as deeply mercenary arrangements designed solely to further the status and wealth of the families involved. However those who may have brought Elizabeth and Richard together would have been puzzled by this distinction. They believed that personal compatibility and attraction were the best underpinning for marriage as they could well develop into love but why shouldn't marriages combine love and advancement? If Richard's eyes gleamed at the prospect of Elizabeth's estates (more valuable than his own) they may also have gleamed at the thought of taking Elizabeth as his wife.

Are there hints to suggest that attraction or affection had developed between Elizabeth and Richard? The most obvious is that Elizabeth, as a widow, had the right to choose her new husband or remain unmarried. Many wealthy women in Elizabeth's situation revelled in this ability to choose (even if it was still wise to take note of family reactions) so, if Elizabeth decided to marry, it seems logical that attraction or affection played a part in her choice of Richard as her husband.

The second hint lies in the likely date of their wedding, a full five or six years after Elizabeth was widowed. The reason that 1396 or early 1397 is the likeliest date is because the earliest reference to Richard's presence in Yorkshire is from September 1397 when he was enmeshed in a dispute over land near Wetherby. This was followed thick and fast by official appointments in Yorkshire, starting with membership of a commission into law-breaking and the several further royal appointments in 1398. Until 1397 there is no evidence of Richard having a role in Yorkshire so these appointments are almost certainly the consequence of his recent marriage to Elizabeth. If the marriage had been earlier, he would likely have received appointments in Yorkshire sooner than 1397.

What has the date to do with affection? To tease this out we can use research by Professor Joel T Rosenthal who found that most widows who remained unmarried for five years remained widows for life. By 1396 Elizabeth had indeed remained a widow for five or six years even though, as a wealthy woman she must have had many suitors, all of whom she'd rejected. This suggests that she had confidence in her ability to lead a satisfying single life and so her decision to marry may indicate affection for Richard. Perhaps, after all, echoing Gladys Knight she'd rather live in his world, than live without him in hers.

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At some point before their wedding day, Elizabeth and Richard would have made formal vows of consent to each other in front of witnesses, the most important step on the road to marriage. The closest parallel today is getting engaged but this taking of vows of consent was far more formal. Elizabeth and Richard stood together before their witnesses, perhaps in the hall at Harewood Castle, and took hold of each other's right hands. Then Richard said 'I Richard take you Elizabeth to be my wedded wife' to which Elizabeth replied 'I Elizabeth take you Richard to be my wedded husband'. These words created a binding pact, the verbal equivalent of signing a contract of marriage. Then came the reading of banns in church on three occasions and, in the run up to the wedding, exchanges of gifts, which may have included jewellery, rings, fine clothing, furs and lace, hawks or horses, wines and delicacies such as raisins, figs and dates.

This period before the solemnization of the marriage in church must have created time for thinking ahead and perhaps for Elizabeth and Richard to talk about the future. Like most of us on the verge of marriage, they must have felt they were taking a huge step in their lives. Richard's developing career in royal service was a cause for optimism. This was a good time to be a trusted supporter of King Richard as the political future seemed more stable than at any point in the twenty years since he'd become king. The King's disputes with members of his nobility seemed over, leaving him in complete control of his kingdom. Everyone at the wedding must have anticipated more royal favours for the newly-married Redmayns.

But alongside these reasons for optimism, there were perhaps other emotions and thoughts as they neared their wedding - anticipation, uncertainty, memories of their previous weddings and spouses, maybe a touch of self-doubt about their appearance, their attractiveness, living up to each other's expectations, all thoughts that the about-to-be-married have had in common across the ages.

Elizabeth and Richard would also have been thinking about issues particular to them. Until now, Elizabeth had lived in Yorkshire and Richard in Cumbria but in future Richard and perhaps Elizabeth would be spending time in a place and amongst people they didn't yet know, a potentially unsettling and difficult process, to begin with anyway. How quickly would they adapt and would they feel comfortable in each other's home? Most immediately, Richard and Elizabeth would be sharing Harewood Castle with Elizabeth's sister, Sybil, and Sybil's husband Sir William Ryther. How would this work and how would they all get on? Perhaps Elizabeth was hoping that Richard's presence as her husband would create a more comfortable balance within the household? Perhaps spending time at Richard's home at Levens might help the shared ownership of Harewood work?

Another issue involved their existing children and their inheritances. If Richard and Elizabeth were to have children would it be those children who inherited their lands and property and, if so, what would be left for the children of their first marriages? Perhaps that was discussed although, as a potentially thorny issue, it may have been left to one side, to be tackled later if necessary.

All of which brings us to the moment when Elizabeth and Richard stood together in church to take their wedding vows, probably relieved to have got to this moment and looking ahead to their celebrations. The fourteenth century looked to be ending well for the Redmayn and Aldburgh families, not least by increasing their mutual wealth and status. But how had they - and their near neighbours the Gascoignes - built up that wealth and status across the fourteenth century? What stories had passed down through their families which shaped their priorities and ambitions?

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*Cover Picture: Effigy of  
Sir Richard Redmayn, in Harewood Church, Leeds*