

Family Stories

The Redmayns, Aldburghs and Gascoignes in the 1300s

A story, if it is to grip the reader, should, I am aware, go always forward. It should march. It should leap from crag to crag like the chamois of the Alps. If there is one thing I hate, it is a novel which gets you interested in the hero in chapter one and then cuts back in chapter two to tell you all about his grandfather.

P.G Wodehouse, *The Girl on the Boat*, 1922

Wodehouse would hate this chapter. I'm not just going to tell you about one grandfather but about several plus a supporting cast of the mothers, fathers and even the occasional great-grandfather of the newly-wed Richard Redmayn and Elizabeth Aldburgh and of their neighbour William Gascoigne. We will shortly be leaping, chamois-like, from crag to crag forward into the fifteenth century but first I want to go back in time. I'd better begin by explaining why.

In the next section, Section 2, I want to explore the experiences and decisions of the Redmayns, Aldburghs and Gascoignes during and after the dramatic events of 1399 when Richard II was deposed. However, to understand those decisions I first need to discover what was important to these families, stories that each family likely passed down through the generations, setting examples for family members to follow. What successes were they proud of? Which family members did they honour? How had they built up their status and power? If the answers help us understand the choices they made, then telling you about all these grandfathers will have been worthwhile!

I'll begin back in the church at Harewood, standing next to Sir Richard Redmayn's effigy. If Sir Richard suddenly sat up to tell us his family's story, I think he'd point to his armour and weapons and explain that military service, fighting for the king, together with administrative posts in the north-west and on the border with Scotland, had established the family's high status and their 'good worship', the high regard in which they were held by the crown and by members of the gentry and nobility.

The Redmayns had been defending the north-west from Scottish invaders since the 12th century, based recently at Levens Hall, a grey, functional tower south of Lake Windermere. Sir Richard's great grandfather and grandfather had, from the late 1200s, played their part in enhancing the family's status, campaigning against the Scots and French, raising soldiers for royal armies and attending parliaments as knights of the shire. However, the commanding figure centre stage in Sir Richard's family story would have been his father, Sir Matthew Redmayn.

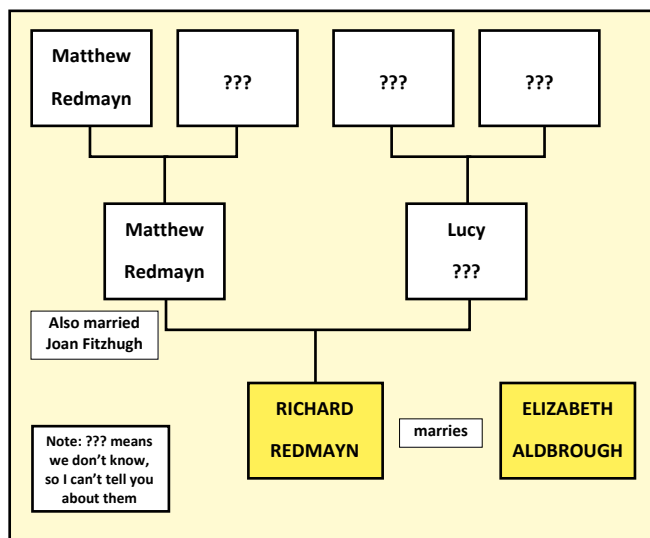
Born in the 1330s, Matthew was a renowned soldier. He too campaigned on the Scottish border and in France for Edward III, in 1370 for example, leading a contingent of 300 men-at-arms and archers, a significant contribution to the army of 4000 men which invaded Normandy. However, while his family must have known many stories of Matthew's prowess and fame, we have to rely on the Parliament Roll for the clearest evidence – which comes as a result of him being captured! Unable to afford the ransom being demanded, Matthew was

one of the soldiers whose plight led the Commons in the Parliament of 1376 to ask King Edward to help those:

‘who are renowned for the great services which they have performed and the risks which they have often undertaken to aggrieve the enemies of the king and the realm, and who are held by their enemies to be of such great estate surpassing their wealth that, when they are taken prisoner among them, they are put to such great and outrageous expenses that they cannot be delivered without the aid of our lord the king and the realm, such as Sir Matthew Gourney, Sir Matthew Redmayne, Sir Thomas Fogge ... and many other knights and squires.’

The Commons’ plea was successful. The Crown gave Sir Matthew £1000 towards his costs and freedom, a sum at least twice, maybe even four times the annual income of the Redmayns. It was an excellent investment. Matthew continued to serve the king as Warden of the Scottish March (a key role defending the border), Keeper of Roxburgh castle and as one of the English commanders against the Scots at the battle of Otterburn in 1388 when he was over 50 years old (though in telling this story, Sir Richard might pass over the fact that Otterburn was a Scottish victory).

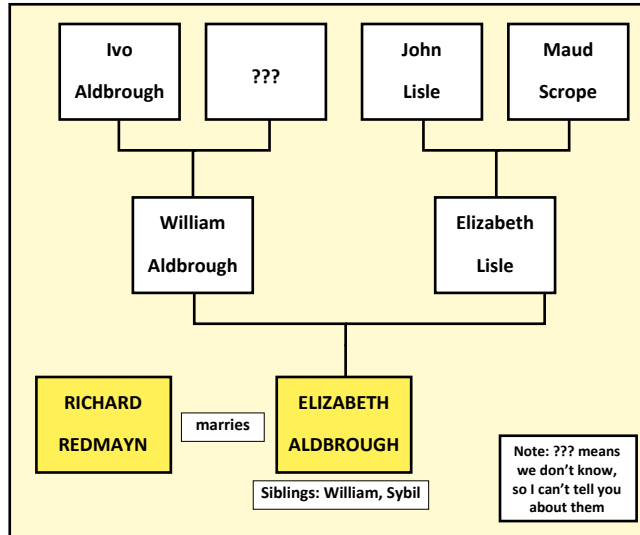
By the time he died (in 1391 or a little earlier) Sir Matthew and his ancestors had left a clear model – service to the crown – of how to build and maintain their status, power and good worship. Sir Richard followed their example. By the 1390s he’d campaigned with Richard II in Ireland as well as in Scotland and France, served as Sheriff of Cumberland and in other local offices and he’d become one of Richard II’s household knights. He’d also followed in his father’s footsteps with his second marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of William, Lord Aldburgh, creating a link to a noble family just as his father had done with his own second marriage, to Joan, daughter of Lord Fitzhugh.



Sir Richard Redmayn, his parents and grandparents

At this point, having identified the influences Richard Redmayn inherited from his father’s family I had hoped to tell you about his mother’s family. Sadly, however (as you can see in the family tree) we don’t even know his mother’s surname so whatever lustre her family

added to Sir Richard's story, whatever valuable connections they brought by marriage, are hidden from us. Therefore I'll turn to Elizabeth Aldburgh's family where we do know about both sides of her family and, happily, they're equally interesting and revealing! Elizabeth's story includes a surprising connection to a king who spent his retirement near Doncaster (not the likeliest playground for an exiled king) and a war hero whose exploits put Matthew Redmayn's record in the shade



Elizabeth Aldbrough, her parents and grandparents

Let's begin with the hero, John, Lord Lisle (Elizabeth's maternal grandfather) because he brought the family its greatest honour. John died before Elizabeth was born but she'd have heard his story many times, most famously his part in the battle of Crecy in August 1346. Nowadays Crecy is not so well remembered, overtaken in popular memory by the battle of Agincourt in 1415 (thanks to Shakespeare's *Henry V* and its modern film dramatisations) but at the time and for the next seventy years Crecy was renowned as the greatest ever English victory and Edward III, who led his men on the battlefield, as England's greatest king since King Arthur.

We can only guess what John told his wife Maud (daughter of Lord Grey of Wilton) and their children on his return. Could he – or they – make sense of the very individual, fragmentary battlefield images of people, sounds, feelings, smells, emotions that must have echoed round his mind? Safer, surer ground may well have lain in recounting how they'd triumphed over a much larger French army, how the King and his 16 year old son, Edward (the Black Prince), had inspired their men and how John's own retinue (a substantial band of 6 knights, 11 esquires and 23 archers) had contributed to a victory that resounded around Europe as well as throughout England.

John, like so many men of his class, was destined to be a soldier. His father, Robert, Lord Lisle (1288-1344), had fought in Scotland and, with around 90 manors in his possession, was well able to give 18-year-old John the manor of Harewood and other lands in 1336 so that he could begin his military career by leading 6 men-at-arms to join King Edward's army. John fought in Brittany and Gascony as well as on the campaign that led to Crecy and the capture of Calais. However the best gauge of John's status came in 1348 when he was

chosen by King Edward as a founder member of his new military order, the Order of the Garter. Those first Garter Knights, just twenty-six of them, were soldiers of the highest calibre, a close-knit, experienced group chosen, in the words of historian Richard Barber, as the ‘elite commanders of the future ... the men who were going to take forward King Edward’s plans for the conquest of France.’

John’s membership of the Order of the Garter must have had a significant impact on the Lises’ sense of their identity. He’d given them a special closeness to a famous moment of national heroism and to the greatest soldiers of the age, King Edward III and the Black Prince, a closeness which must have greatly enhanced the Lises’ sense of honour and status. Few families could match this. Even John’s death may have added to his family’s pride after he was killed, aged 37, by a crossbow bolt during the assault on the town of L’Estang in Gascony in 1355. Next day his commander, the Black Prince, ordered the army to spend the day in mourning John, Lord Lisle as a great soldier and companion,.

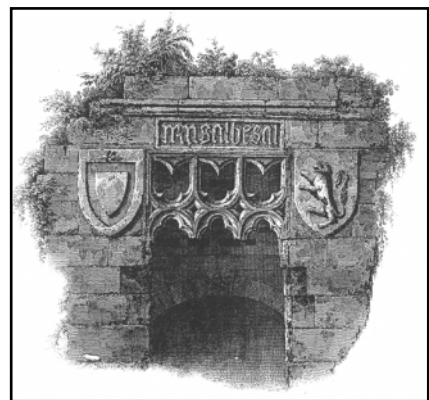
Other Lises, including John’s son Robert (1336-1399), continued to serve the king but John’s career must have been the heart of their story. Therefore it’s time to turn from the Lises, Elizabeth’s mother’s family to her father’s side, the Aldburghs, and explore the story of her father, William, Lord Aldburgh who made a lasting contribution by building the new Harewood Castle, helped in all likelihood by that surprising royal connection I mentioned above.

There are two strong clues to the depth of that connection. The first is still visible if you stand at the entrance tower of the castle. Look up and there, alongside each other, are the coats of arms of the Aldburgh family and of Edward Balliol, King of Scotland (though king only for brief intervals in the 1330s when Edward III’s army was available to support him on the throne).

The second clue is a payment made by William’s daughters, Elizabeth and Sybil, for daily masses to be said for the souls of their father, mother and brother and of Edward Balliol at Beauvale Priory. The payment, made thirty years after Edward’s

death, suggests that he was seen as almost one of Aldburgh family. A family will from 1391 also reveals that the Aldburghs kept mementos of Edward Balliol – tapestries and a book, decorated with the arms of both Balliol and Aldburgh, and his habergeon (part of his armour also called a mail-shirt).

Why were the Aldburghs and Edward Balliol so close? Although the relationship seems to have begun when Balliol gave lands in Galloway to William Aldburgh’s father, Ivo, William himself was the pivotal figure. William became one of Balliol’s household esquires, joined him on his campaigning forays into Scotland and, though thirty years younger than Balliol, was his trusted friend and adviser. So close was the link that, when Balliol gave William more land, he sought in return only an annual fee of ‘a rose in the season of roses, if asked for’. And after 1356, when Balliol (then in his 70s) resigned his rights to the Scottish crown to Edward III, William continued to visit the exiled king during his retirement near Doncaster.



The arms of Balliol (left) and Aldburgh (right) at Harewood Castle

From TD Whitaker, *Leodis and Elmete*, 1816

Is that relationship enough to explain the prominence of the Balliol coat of arms in the chapel at Harewood Castle as well as on the entrance tower? There may well be a stronger reason - that Balliol's wealth made a substantial contribution to the building of the castle. The chronology is suggestive. Balliol died (aged over 80) in 1364, the year that William Aldburgh and his wife Elizabeth Lisle paid £1000 to Elizabeth's brother, Robert, for the Harewood estate. Shortly afterwards, William began building the castle (I'll return to the castle in Section 2) but where did the money come from for this completely new castle? Balliol had no children so may well have left William a significant sum which either made a major contribution to building the castle or led to the original plans being upgraded. If so, the prominence of the Balliol coat of arms at the castle makes complete sense.

The new castle was a shining example of contemporary comfort, befitting the rising status of the Lisle and Aldburgh families, especially after William Aldburgh was summoned to attend Parliament in 1371 as Baron de Aldburgh. This rise to a place amongst the nobility was of great social importance and must reflect William's service to Edward III (for example as one of Edward III's ambassadors to the Pope in 1368) and the respect in which he was held by the King.

Royal service was therefore as central to the stories of the Aldburghs and the Lisles as it was to the Redmayns. All three families would have thought of these stories as contributing to their 'lineage', defined by Professor David Crouch as their 'image of themselves as on a track through time', this image creating their sense of identity, helping them see themselves as special and worthy of the deference of others. And at the core of their lineage was royal service, comprising substantial military experience and prowess, augmented by their work on local commissions, in other administrative posts and their attendance at parliaments, although the Lisles and, latterly, the Aldburghs attended the meetings of the Lords while the Redmayns were returned to the Commons as Knights of the Shire. All three families had therefore built their lineage (and as a result their 'good worship') in the most traditional ways.

In contrast, their neighbours, the Gascoignes, had a very different story to tell. There was no war hero, no campaigning against Scots or French, no close connection with a royal family for them to boast about. The early stages of the Gascoignes' route to gentry status involved commercial activities in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire though the details of that route are hazy. We can't, for example, trace the Gascoignes back before the early 14th century and there is no evidence of the specific trading activities through which the first recorded William Gascoigne (c1309-1378) made his money, beginning what Dr Chris Bovis has called the 'meteoric' rise of the Gascoignes.

Whatever William senior (so-called because the key Gascoignes were all, quite inconsiderately, called William) was doing, he made enough money by the 1350s to hold a variety of lands around Yorkshire with the manor at Gawthorpe as his main residence and by 1365 he'd been appointed to several royal commissions in West Yorkshire, the clearest evidence of the family's new gentry status. William's marriage illustrates another strand in his rise - his links with local gentry families. He married Agnes, daughter of the Frank family of Alwoodley (a couple of miles from Gawthorpe) and he had strong connections with the Vavasours of Hazlewood Castle.

However William senior set his sights higher still, aiming for his sons to achieve further social progress through their education. The eldest, John, had a career in the Church but it was the second son, William, who accelerated that meteoric rise through his immensely successful legal career. By the 1390s, when he was in his 40s, William was one of the leading lawyers in England, appointed as a Serjeant at Law (a senior counsel or barrister) in 1388 and, after an earlier temporary appointment, as a King's Serjeant in 1396, representing the King's interests in court. William also sat as a judge (also called a Justice) in the central law courts at Westminster and, in the intervals between the law terms at Westminster, as an assize judge in a regional group of counties.



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Ian and Helen with Justice William Gascoigne and his first wife, Elizabeth in Harewood Church, Leeds

All of which sounds very grand but what does it actually mean? The key point in terms of status is that there were only around eight Serjeants at Law at any one time and only a dozen Justices and so they were a very small group of elite lawyers, The Order of the Coif. Becoming Serjeants and members of this Order was a very costly business, the appointee paying for an elaborate and costly initiation ceremony (equivalent to of the ceremony of dubbing a knight) which included a lavish dinner. Any lawyer accepting this role therefore had to have built up a considerable private practice to afford the promotion. William's work included the provision of legal advice to religious institutions including York Minster and Selby Abbey and to members of the nobility and gentry, all of whom would have paid well for his services.

What made William such a success? The bedrock was an intensive education, including study at Cambridge University, followed by training at one of the Inns of Court for between six and eight years. He must have had a rare combination of qualities – a quick mind and eloquent tongue, mastery of the three languages needed by lawyers (Latin, Anglo-Norman French and English), a prodigious memory to recall cases and precedents, an immense capacity for hard work and the energy, stamina and resilience to cope with a vast mileage on horseback even in his early sixties.

The Gascoignes' continuing rise was not, however, purely the work of William. His two younger brothers, Richard and Nicholas, also worked as lawyers though they didn't complete the same formal training as William, apparently building their expertise through 'on the job' training. By the 1390s, the brothers were playing major roles in the administration of the West Riding of Yorkshire (where they carried the bulk of the judicial work carried out by the Commissions of the Peace) and for the Duchy of Lancaster where

they were ‘indispensable’, according to Dr Simon Walker. Their work for the Duchy brought them into contact with the Duke of Lancaster himself, John of Gaunt (Richard II’s uncle) and his son, Henry Bolingbroke, Earl of Derby and Hereford. All three brothers also worked for Thomas Holland, Duke of Surrey, one of Richard II’s closest advisers, with Nicholas holding the role of Steward of Surrey’s household.

The Gascoignes had come a long way very quickly by the 1390s and they must have been proud of their family’s rapid rise and their own individual successes, of their lands and their developing contacts with the very highest ranks in society. However this also makes me wonder how they felt about their place amongst the gentry. Did they feel inferior to the established gentry with their military records and their service to the crown? The Gascoignes had no John Lisle or Matthew Redmayn in their family history. Could they boast about their father’s success or would that simply underline their lack of an honourable, military inheritance? They must have been aware that in a famous legal case over who owned a particular coat of arms, one witness stated that Sir Richard Scrope could not be considered a gentleman because his father had been a lawyer!

Writing this chapter, I didn’t at first experience that ‘sitting on cats’ familiarity with past human behaviour. I don’t, after all, have any experience of royal service or military campaigns and I’m glad to say that I haven’t had my marriage carefully planned for me to enhance family status. After a little more thought, however, I do recognise how these families presented themselves to the world. We all put our best public face forward in the stories we tell about ourselves, selecting the incidents we include, the details we exaggerate, the photographs we put on display, even more so in the age of social media. Maybe our websites and Facebook pages are not so far-removed from the heraldry carved or painted onto walls, on shields, on tapestries, on tomb-chests and stained glass windows.

We can also recognise the likelihood that families quietly ‘forgot’ events that might damage their reputation. Did the Aldburghs ever tell how William was accused of inciting Edward Balliol’s servants to poach deer from Queen Philippa’s park in the 1360s – an incident recorded in the Patent Rolls but I imagine ignored by the family. Did John Lisle ever discuss with Maud, his wife, whether he really enjoyed spending so much time on campaign or whether, just occasionally, he wished he could spend more time looking out over Wharfedale surrounded by his family? Or did the training he’d received, the drive for honour and the demands of royal service prove so overwhelming that such personal preferences never entered his mind?

I said at the beginning of this chapter that I hoped that the stories I uncovered would help me understand the decisions taken by these families in 1399 and afterwards. So what have I found out to take forward? Clearly they’d want to defend and enhance their status and ‘good worship’ and they’d expect to do this through service to the crown – in military and administrative roles for Richard Redmayn, in judicial and administrative roles for William Gascoigne. They’d also want to retain the respect of their peers, for Redmayn the military community, for Gascoigne his legal colleagues. In addition, William Gascoigne would face a decision common to those who’d risen in status through commerce or the law – should his eldest son follow the self-same path to a legal career or take the route to knighthood and military honour in the expectation that this would enhance the family’s standing still further?

In this chapter I've omitted many details that would have built up the stories of these three families because they would, at the same time, have obscured the bigger picture of these stories. I hope the result is that it's clear why Richard Redmayn, Elizabeth Aldburgh and William Gascoigne were likely very confident of future success as they approached the fifteenth century – but few people, certainly not by middle age, are ever totally confident of future good fortune. Elizabeth would have been all too aware of how the deaths of her father and brother had suddenly ended the male line of the Aldburghs. And they all knew of the whims of Dame Fortune who might turn her wheel at any moment and send those basking in success tumbling down to disaster. However confident Richard, Elizabeth and William appeared in public, at the backs of their minds there must have been doubts, fears and uncertainties.



Detail of the Wheel of Fortune from John Lydgate's *Troy Book and Siege of Thebes*, © British Library

What those uneasy thoughts may have been I'll explore in the next chapter.

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