

16. One Fortnight in Summer: 26th July to 11th August 1415

How did the delay to Henry V's expedition affect the Redmayns?

The task of the historian is to decipher those voices [of the people of the past] and bring them back to life ... History is a form of ventriloquism: it is the skill of making them speak again ...

Professor Alexandra Walsham

I ended the last chapter wondering how long it would be before Elizabeth and Agnes heard news of the king's army and what that news would be. I suspect the answer came much sooner than they expected and left both women deeply shocked though not for the reason – death or injury to their loved ones – they feared. The news was that, just as the English fleet was about to sail from Southampton, a plot to depose Henry V had been uncovered. Instead of landing in France, Brian Stapleton (Agnes's husband and Elizabeth's son), the younger Redmayns and the rest of the royal army were still in England, delayed for who knew how long.

Elizabeth's and Agnes's minds must have been full of questions when they heard the news so it was probably helpful that they both had complex households to run, guests to attend to, servants to oversee, household accounts and the quality of the harvest to check on – though it can't have helped Elizabeth that she was also mourning the recent death of her friend Margaret Vavasour of Hazlewood castle. Richard Redmayn's arrival home, probably by late August, must have been a relief for both women as he had reliable information. He'd been in Southampton organising the mustering of the duke of Clarence's retinue (including Brian's men) and was still there or nearby when the plot (known to historians as The Southampton Plot) was revealed.

Richard was therefore able to tell Elizabeth and Agnes that the royal fleet had finally set sail on 11th August but may also have had answers to far more important family questions – how were Brian and the others coping with the two-week delay and had it caused Brian problems as the commander of forty increasingly impatient soldiers?

It's those questions, particularly about the lived experiences of Brian Stapleton during this two-week delay that I want to focus on in this chapter. A fortnight's delay doesn't sound lengthy, looking back across 600 years, but it must have seemed interminable to Brian – each day, each hour, each minute passing so slowly that the moment when they would set sail for France never seemed to be getting closer. That's why, to understand Brian's feelings better, I've found myself regressing to being a 4 year old at Christmas, thinking of 14 'sleeps', 14 awakenings and breaking of fasts, 14 dinners, 14 afternoons, 14 twilights during which Brian and his men had to fill time by talking, praying, checking their weapons again and again, exercising their horses and, above all, just waiting. What may have been in Brian's mind as he waited? Did he feel under extra pressure because the delay placed new demands upon him? Was he worried about how well he was dealing with these demands?

Suggesting answers to these questions feels intriguing, in keeping with my theme of exploring the lived experiences of the Redmayns. Books on this period focus on the details of the plot and in Henry V's reactions to it, not on the soldiers' experiences of the delay because we have no evidence about their feelings. However suggesting answers to the questions about Brian and the others is a challenge I want to take up, a challenge beautifully summed up by Alexandra Walsham's description of our role as historians as being ventriloquists, suggesting in this case what Brian and others might tell us if they could speak again. I'll have to use my informed imagination to '*decipher their voices*' but doing so, as ever, feels an adventure. I don't know what these chapters are like to read but they're still as exciting to write as when I began!

I'll begin by going back a couple of days before news of the plot broke. After the mustering was completed around 26th July, Brian Stapleton and his men received the order to board ship in Southampton on 1st August. From the moment he received that order, Brian's sense of anticipation and responsibility must have been increased even more in intensity. Within a week he and his men would be landing in France, ready to fight for King Henry – so what thoughts might have been in the minds of Brian and his soldiers as they readied themselves for the short ride to Southampton?

My suggestions – my first attempt at ventriloquism – are, of course, completely conjectural and individuals' thoughts varied, depending on personality, experience and whether they had families. There'd also have been a difference between what men said – their public faces – and their private thoughts but having a sense of the kinds of thoughts that were in soldiers' minds is an important part of understanding their experiences. Without these suggestions I'd simply be describing their locations (at the muster, in Southampton, on board ship etc), as if they were chess pieces being moved around without having any feelings or reactions of their own to the events they were part of.

I'll first suggest their most likely public thoughts, what they said in daylight, in company – and, to emphasise how conjectural this exercise in ventriloquism is, I'll use italics for these suggestions:

King Henry's a brave man, remember Shrewsbury when he led his men despite that arrow in his face – that last French embassy sought peace so they must fear us – we're lucky to have the duke of Clarence as leader of our retinue, he's experienced, a man to have confidence in – this is the largest English army anyone can remember, we're well-prepared, well-equipped, led by the King himself, supported by all his noblemen, nobody's shirking at home – the King's even using his jewels to pay for the expedition because his heart and soul is in this expedition and God is on our side – we can be confident in our success because our cause is just and God will help us fight with courage and honour – and there's wealth to be won when we capture French towns and homes and take prisoners. We'll return home rich men – and won't that impress our women-folk and the women we're yet to meet?

Now for their private thoughts and doubts, the ideas that maybe crept into their minds in the middle of the night and may have been very different:

The King has no recent experience of war – the French treated him with contempt with that ‘gift’ of soft pillows and tennis balls and their jibes that he isn’t the true king because his father stole the crown from Richard II – the French army will be very large and united – will I fight honourably, give my colleagues the support they need ... or will my courage fail? – what if I’m wounded, fall ill during a siege, die in battle? What will happen to my wife and children? Will I ever see them again?

And Brian Stapleton who was leading his retinue of forty men – as a commander, what was buzzing around his head? There’d have been personal thoughts, perhaps remembering words written to Agnes, his wife, in a letter Richard Redmayn would deliver to her when he returned home, but at the forefront of his mind he probably had a list of things to check before they headed for their ship:

A final check of everyone’s weapons and horses – ensure every man is wearing the Cross of St George and the Stapleton coat of arms – speak with my men-at-arms and senior archers to check that morale is high and they all understand the King’s ordinances for war – make certain they look disciplined, worthy of serving the duke of Clarence and King Henry – if I prove my leadership and prowess in this campaign, I’ll have the chance to rise in the duke’s and the king’s service – rewards like service in the royal household, administrative offices, grants of land and wealth, higher status marriages for my children, honour for myself and my family – and I’ll bring home treasures from French towns and the promise of ransom money from the rich prisoners I’ll take – there’s opportunity ahead and a great deal to be optimistic about.

The news of the plot broke on 31st July, the day before Brian and the rest of Clarence’s retinue were due to board ship. Quite possibly they were already en route from their muster point to the ships at Southampton, looking out for the sight and smells of the sea, when they heard of the likely delay. We don’t know what Brian and his men did next – did they return to their muster point? – but their sense of pent-up anticipation must have been shattered, replaced by a very different atmosphere – febrile, agitated, anxious – which only increased the pressures on Brian and other retinue commanders.

So why was the invasion of France delayed? I’m not going to discuss the Southampton Plot in detail – numerous books do that – but I do need a summary explaining why there was a delay, given that the plot did not come close to deposing Henry V. The chief plotter was 30-year-old Richard, earl of Cambridge, the king’s cousin and younger brother of the duke of York. His title suggests power but, while King Henry had given him the title of earl, he hadn’t given him the lands and wealth that enabled him to live up to that title. His ally and son-in-law was Sir Thomas Grey, a Northumberland knight also embittered by his lack of wealth and influence.

Happily for Henry V, what both men did have was a remarkable level of incompetence. They had no clear plan and no committed support, probably hoping to replace Henry with Edmund Mortimer, earl of March (whose family was said by some to have a stronger claim to the crown) but their suggestion so alarmed March that he told the king what Cambridge and Grey were discussing and thereby saved his own life. However, there was one alarming element to the plot and that was the involvement – if only on the fringes – of Henry, Lord Scrope. Scrope was a long-time supporter of the king and his father, royal treasurer and Knight of the Garter. If Scrope, regarded as the most loyal of Lancastrians, had discussed deposing Henry, could anyone's loyalty be relied on? As a result, the English army could not sail for France until the king was certain that every traitor had been identified.

Cambridge, Grey and Scrope were arrested on 31st July, when March revealed their names, and by 5th August had confessed, been put on trial for plotting to murder the king and his brothers, found guilty and executed though it's almost certain that Scrope was guilty only of listening to the deluded imaginings of Cambridge and Grey. Only once the executions had taken place could the king set sail.

That, in outline, was the plot but how did the resulting delay affect Brian Stapleton? By 31st July, Brian's soldiers had already been at their muster point for around ten days and now had to stay there while the plotters were identified, confessed, put on trial and executed. This prolonged delay, along with rumours about whether anyone else was involved in the plot, almost certainly meant that Brian's men became unsettled and were no longer just wondering 'When will we set sail?' but asking 'Will we ever set sail for France at all? Will the king abandon the invasion of France?'

Brian must therefore have been cursing the plotters for making his role, as commander of his retinue, far harder. Instead of standing on the deck of a ship, anticipating their landing in France, he had to keep his men disciplined and ready for embarkation without knowing when they'd be departing. So, reverting to my role as historical ventriloquist, what might have been in Brian's mind during this fraught period of further waiting? Here are some possibilities:

I need to keep morale and discipline high. Discussing this with other commanders will help, as well as getting definite information from the duke's advisers about when we'll sail.

With all the uncertainty, there's likely to be arguments with men in other retinues and within our own – we can't let the men's disappointment fester. We need to support each other now so we do so effectively when we fight in France.

We need to keep the men away from local taverns and women as much as possible. We don't need arguments with local people who don't like soldiers around their villages.

I need my men-at-arms and senior archers to set good examples to the younger men and let me know if any problems are developing.

We need activity, not just more weapon checking but closely supervised weapons practice and maybe archery competitions. I need to tell them when they're doing well – that's good for morale.

We need to keep the horses exercised and fit and we need to ensure our food supplies don't dwindle.

I hope the weather stays kind. We don't need summer storms to spread mud everywhere or hot weather to make everyone short-tempered and short of sleep.

I need to show the confidence and control they expect of their commander, keep the men optimistic, believing in our cause. It won't do any harm to remind them of the riches they could bring home.

I just hope I'm doing everything as well as I can.

Pray God we embark soon.

Those 'ventriloquised' thoughts are completely conjectural. There's no evidence of what Brian was thinking so I've used my 'informed imagination' to suggest possible thoughts along with ideas about leadership garnered from a book I've been reading while working on this chapter – the autobiography of the Australian cricket captain, Steve Waugh. This seems an unlikely parallel to draw on, hence my stressing the very conjectural nature of what I've written above, but Waugh faced, especially in his early days of captaincy, problems juggling his team's discipline and relaxation at times of stress and disappointment while playing against the dominant West Indies team. Maybe, if Steve Waugh knew about Brian Stapleton's situation in 1415, he'd experience one of those 'cat-sitting' moments when we recognise our common experiences with people in the past?

It must have been a huge relief to Brian when King Henry boarded his ship, the Trinity Royal, on 7th August and he and his men went aboard their own vessel. Even then, it was another four days until the fleet sailed, given the immense scale of the expedition. There were at least 1,000 ships, over 12,000 soldiers and perhaps 20,000 sailors along with the king's administrative clerks, chaplains, minstrels, grooms and other servants plus the smaller entourages of the nobles. And there were up to 20,000 horses (the duke of Norfolk alone had 24 horses and the knights in his retinue 6 horses each) and a host of military and other equipment – the King's pavilions, bed, jewellery (even on campaign he still had to display the splendour of his kingship) and the duke of Norfolk's bed, mattress and his personal iron-seated commode.

On 11th August, at least three weeks or more after Brian Stapleton and his men had arrived on the south coast, they finally set sail.

While Brian Stapleton had been waiting for his orders to embark, his step-father, Richard Redmayn, probably had a choice of what to do next. Having completed his role overseeing the muster of Clarence's retinue, he may have been tempted to stay on the south coast to watch the fleet's departure. Alternatively, he had responsibilities in the north so may have felt torn. Sadly, there's no evidence to tell us whether he chose to sit in the south or ride north do but again I'm intrigued by what may have been in his mind so I'll briefly try to decipher what those thoughts may have been.

One reason why he was probably tempted to stay in the south was that, while he did have responsibilities in the north, there was nothing needing his immediate attention. Back in May he'd been appointed to the Commission of Array in the West Riding to raise troops in case a Scottish army crossed the border but that work was complete or well in hand. Early in July he'd been restored to the West Riding Commission of the Peace (from which he'd been omitted in 1414 – see Chapter 14) but the King can't have needed Richard in Yorkshire or he wouldn't have appointed him to his role in the musters in July. Less routine was Richard's membership of a commission headed by the earl of Westmoreland to investigate the kidnapping near Leeds of a Scottish lord, Murdoch of Fife, a prisoner of Henry V who was being taken north. However Murdoch's abductors had been swiftly caught and he was back in royal hands so there can't have seemed any urgency on this issue either.

In contrast, there was a positive reason why Richard may have felt it was useful for him to stay in Southampton. Back in 1399 Richard II had led a royal army to Ireland and Richard Redmayn, as Master of the King's Horse, had supervised the shipping of the royal horses across the Irish Sea, an experience that few current royal administrators could match, given that there hadn't been many major military expeditions overseas under Henry IV. With around 15,000 horses plus their equipment, fodder and grooms to load onto the ships in Southampton, Richard's experience might well have been valuable. I wonder, therefore, if Richard approached John Waterton, the current Master of the Horse, to offer his help – it would be another opportunity for him to feel useful and less of an outsider because he wasn't going to France himself.

It's quite possible, therefore, that Richard was still in the south on 31st July when news the Southampton plot was uncovered, news which may have revived difficult memories for him. In 1399 Richard II's expedition to Ireland had led to the king's deposition and to Richard Redmayn's own imprisonment and possibly fears for his life, so I wonder if the parallels between 1399 and 1415 made Richard question, if he hadn't before, the wisdom of King Henry leaving the country for at least a year. Was Henry taking too big a risk? It had taken his father a decade to restore order after 1399 – could the invasion of France, if it wasn't a major success, lead once more to political turmoil?

There was also one aspect of the Southampton Plot that may have prompted Richard to head home with greater urgency than he'd anticipated – the kidnapping of Murdoch of Fife which was now being linked to the plotters' hopes of support in the north and from the Scots. As a result, Richard may have had that feeling, well-known to us all, that he wished he could be in two places at once – in the south to say farewell to the many people he knew amongst the royal army and in the north, confirming there was no threat to the king linked to the Southampton Plot. Whatever he felt, his prayers would have been with the King, his army and his own family members heading for France.

As I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, it's been a late addition to my writing plans. It would have been very easy to ignore this fortnight and speed onto the dramas of the siege of Harfleur and the battle of Agincourt. However I'm pleased that I have written this chapter because it's made me face up again to a central dilemma that's run through these chapters – when there's minimal or no evidence to answer my questions, do I simply ignore those question and move on or do I suggest

possible answers about the Redmayns' experience and thinking, using parallel examples from the period or my sense of continuities in human experiences and feelings across the centuries?

Although I'm constantly aware of the dangers of making those suggestions, I remain happy with choosing this option because it's allowed me to explore the lived experiences of Brian Stapleton during this frustrating period and of how Richard Redmayn maybe came to terms with not being a member of the royal army. Alexandra Walsham's idea of being their ventriloquist has pivotal in encouraging me to think in detail about their thoughts and, most importantly in my own mind, this ventriloquism has enabled me to live up to the quotation that for me is the most important why I study the past. It's the quotation I used in Chapter 1 above from Alan Plater's book *Oliver's Travels*:

'It's all about paying homage,' said Oliver. 'Hearing what the ghosts are saying.'

'What are they saying?' said Diane.

'They're saying ... please listen.'

How do I know?

Notes on my sources and reading for Chapter 16

Given the nature of this chapter, there is relatively little to list here but the following are worth mentioning:

The quotation at the start of this chapter from Alexandra Walsham is from *Historical Association News, Spring 2024*

The most detailed account of the plot against Henry V in 1415 is:

T B Pugh, *Henry V and The Southampton Plot*, 1988 – although every major book on Henry V covers the plot

I also used, surprising though it will probably seem:

Steve Waugh, *Out of My Comfort Zone: The Autobiography*, 2006 – probably the least likely book I've used while writing these chapters