

## 2. The Redmayns: A rough sketch and an ‘imaginative wind’

*‘I take life history to involve trying as hard as possible, even if that means sailing close to the imaginative wind, and certainly into the eye of the speculative storm, to make the acquaintance of my subject as a person, to guess plausibly, if no more, at what made him tick.’*

Janet L Nelson, ‘Did Charlemagne have a private life?’ in David Bates, Julia Crick, Sarah Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow*, 2006

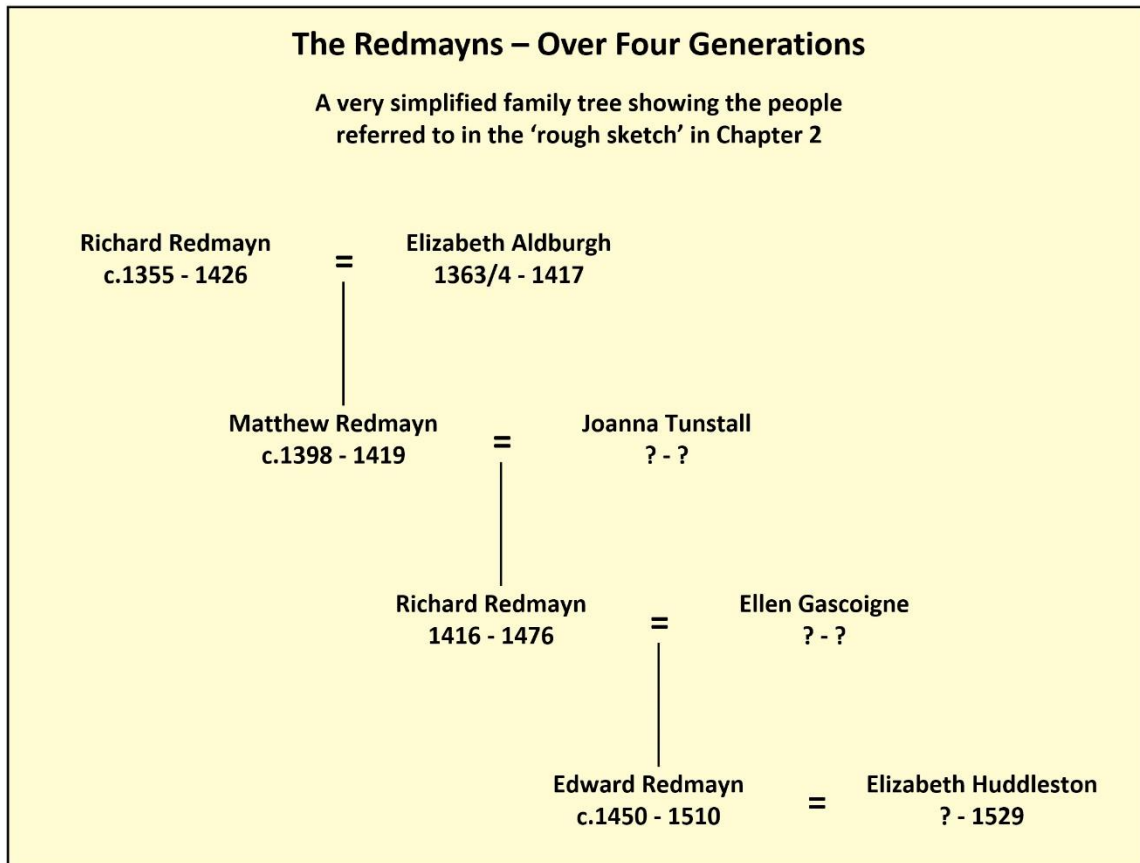
I hope the quotation above isn’t alarming. The references to *‘sailing close to the imaginative wind’* and *‘the eye of the speculative storm’* may suggest this is a novel rather than a history – but don’t worry, I haven’t been inventing implausible murders for Richard and Elizabeth Redmayn to solve at Harewood castle. That said, I wasn’t far into my research when I realised the value of Dame Janet Nelson’s words above – I really would need to use that ‘imaginative wind’ to make the acquaintance of the Redmayns as people and suggest what made them tick, to understand what shaped, motivated and mattered to them. However, before I explain how imagination has helped my search for those cat-sitting moments, I want to go back to the excitement of the first stage of my research and give you an outline, a rough sketch of the Redmayns’ story. I hope this will help you keep track of what, at first, are unfamiliar names, just as it did for me.

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Saying that I was excited at starting my research and writing isn’t an exaggeration. I felt like one of those fictional detectives setting out on an investigation, my mind full of questions, eager to find the answers. Not Sam Spade (though I fancy the fedora), not Peter Wimsey (I’d keep dropping the monocle), more like Trevor Chaplin and Jill Swinburne from Alan Plater’s *Beiderbecke* series – slightly bemused at how much I’d taken on but stubborn and persistent in the face of each and every challenge.

The first of those challenges was a basic one. I needed to create a rough sketch identifying the individual generations of the Redmayn family during the fifteenth century. This was important for giving me a framework to build on and would prevent me getting lost chronologically. I’d met the effigies of Sir Richard and Elizabeth from the early 1400s and of Edward and Elizabeth a century later but how many generations filled the decades between them and who were the missing members of the family? I’ll explain shortly how I put this outline together but, first, here’s the sketch itself and some of the questions it generated.

There were four generations of Redmayns across the century [you can see them in the outline family tree overleaf]. We begin with Sir Richard and Elizabeth, then their children and their grand-children and finally their great grand-children (the fourth generation) who include my old friend, Edward Redmayn. Edward died in 1510 early in Henry VIII’s reign. Now for some detail and the questions that initially wanted to ask about each of those generations.



The first generation revolved around Sir Richard Redmayn and his wife Elizabeth Aldburgh who were married around 1396. However, don't think of them as a teenage Romeo and Juliet. When they married, Richard was in his early 40s, Elizabeth in her mid-thirties. Both had been married before, had children and been widowed. This information immediately prompted questions about their fourteenth century back-stories. What could I find out about the families they came from and married into? What kind of career did Richard have and could I find out anything about Elizabeth's earlier life – a notoriously difficult task in relation to medieval women. And then there was the marriage itself. Was it a love-match or did Richard's eyes gleam at the prospect of Elizabeth's lands rather on seeing Elizabeth herself?

More broadly, Richard and Elizabeth's marriage appears to have been a turning point for the Redmayn family. Until then, the Redmayns had lived in Westmorland in the north-west of England but marriage to Elizabeth brought Richard to Harewood and Yorkshire. However I wondered how much of a turning point it really was. Did it end the Redmayns' connection with the north-west or did they retain strong links with their homeland, perhaps seeing involvement in Yorkshire as secondary to their north-western interests?

Finally for this generation, I wanted to know more about Sir Richard's later career. I knew he'd been Speaker of the House of Commons in 1415 (when he was about 60) which suggested he had a long and distinguished career but what exactly did this consist of – and why did he continue to play a part

in political events for so long? And again, could I find out anything to make Elizabeth more than just a name in the family tree?

In contrast to what I was learning about Richard and Elizabeth, it seems as if the story of the second generation, Matthew and Joanna, was a very short one. Matthew, the eldest son of Sir Richard and Elizabeth, died in early adulthood in 1419 (several years before his father), and so scarcely had time for a public career at all. He had however married Joanna Tunstall and their son, another Richard, born in 1416, was to head the third generation.

The story of the third generation is different again. Young Richard inherited his grandfather's estates when he was just ten so there was then a decade before he could take on the responsibilities of being head of the family. Minorities could be difficult and worrying times for families, so I needed to find out what arrangements were made for supervision of the family lands during his minority and then whether, as an adult, Richard consolidated or even increased the family's wealth and status. At first glance, however, the information I found felt minimal. Richard was elected as a Knight of the Shire for one parliament but there seems little other evidence of him having a public career though he lived to be sixty, dying in 1476. Did he prefer a quiet life, away from national events that included the Wars of the Roses, was he hindered by lack of ability or poor health or has the evidence simply not survived? In contrast Richard's cousin, another Richard Redmayn, had a much more public career as bishop of St Asaph, then of Exeter and finally Ely.

The fourth generation consisted of the children of Richard and his wife, Ellen Gascoigne (of the Gascoigne family of Gawthorpe Hall, near Harewood). They included Edward, the Redmayn I'd first encountered at university. Edward supported Richard III when he took the crown from his nephew, Edward V, and was well-rewarded with lands and offices in the south-west of England. Then in 1485 King Richard was killed at Bosworth by the army led by Henry, earl of Richmond, better known today as Henry Tudor or Henry VII.

The challenge here was to build on what I already knew. Could I find evidence about why Edward Redmayn supported Richard III, how his life was changed by doing so and then how he settled to life under Henry VII? Was he able to rebuild his life after Bosworth and shake off the stigma of being one of Richard III's supporters? And I needed to see what I could find out about Edward's wife Elizabeth. She came from the Huddleston family of Millom in Cumberland in the north-west. Was this telling me something about the Redmayns' continuing links with the north-west?

That completes my rough sketch of the Redmayns' story. It gave me the shape of the four distinct generations – the first long and apparently successful, the second all too brief, the third lengthy but uneventful, the fourth strikingly successful at first but then perhaps a struggle. Each generation must have experienced its 'if only' moments but none more so than the fourth generation – if only Richard III had won at Bosworth maybe the Redmayns would have scaled new heights of power and status?

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Now for how I put that sketch together – and why I realised that using my historical imagination needed to be an important part of this project.

As this was a first outline of the family's story, I didn't dig into contemporary sources at this stage, nor use academic monographs or articles or any of the many research theses available on-line. I could safely leave such detailed reading until later because the level of information I needed was available in four short biographies written by research historians – though three of the four are about the same man, Sir Richard Redmayn, the key figure in the first generation.

And these biographies are short! Sir Richard's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) consists of just a single page. More helpfully, Professor J S Roskell wrote a comparatively monumental article of 16 pages about Sir Richard and also led the team that produced the four volumes of *The House of Commons 1386-1421* (published in 1994) in which Sir Richard's biography runs to four tightly-packed, double-column pages. The fourth biography is of Sir Richard's grandson, Richard (died 1476), the head of the third generation, though he merits just two pages in *The House of Commons 1422-1461* volumes.

These biographies were incredibly helpful in providing much essential information. However they also left me asking a question that went to the heart of my only-just-begun project – is it really possible to get a sense of the Redmayns as real, breathing, living people or are they doomed to stay just 'names on a page'?

It was the nature of these four biographies that prompted this question and the accompanying heart-sinking doubt. Their strength lies in detailing the political careers of individuals – lists of offices, responsibilities and rewards in the form of detailed CVs, all based on the immensely detailed government records. There are inevitably gaps, periods when we don't know what Sir Richard Redmayn, for example, was doing but we do get a reasonable picture of his public career. However, what these biographies don't offer is discussion of the inner, private person – thoughts, emotions and reactions to events and people, the sense of a rounded human being.

The reasons for this absence of rounded biography are twofold. The first reason for the CV-like nature of these biographies is that they simply don't have the space to venture into discussion of possibilities, uncertainties or conjectural arguments about motives, attitudes and reactions. More importantly, however, is the nature of sources. No Redmayn family letters or other personal documents have survived, unlike the papers which reveal so much about individual members of the Paston, Plumpton and Stonor families. The only sources which offer even a peep into Sir Richard's thoughts are what's usually called his will (though I think it's a different kind of document altogether) and his effigy, thought that does tell us rather more than its inscrutable expression at first suggests.

So suddenly I had doubts. Did I have any real hope of experiencing more cat-sitting moments while researching and writing about the Redmayns? Happily, one reason for optimism was that, unlike the biographies, I have as much space as I want to explore the questions that may turn names into people. In fact, I've had to be selective about the questions I explore or I'd never have finished my story of the Redmayns, but I have had the freedom to focus on the human questions, such as

whether members of the Redmayn family had ideals, why Sir Richard and Elizabeth married, whether Sir Richard ever experienced fears and uncertainties. I can't expect to be certain about the answers but we can, I think, infer a good deal from their actions, and if I don't ask the questions, I don't give myself the chance to use my historical imagination to see the Redmayns as human beings.

Is such an imaginative approach to history legitimate? This is where I was really encouraged by the words of the medievalist Dame Janet Nelson, whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter but repeat here to save you having to turn back several pages:

*'I take life history to involve trying as hard as possible, even if that means sailing close to the imaginative wind, and certainly into the eye of the speculative storm, to make the acquaintance of my subject as a person, to guess plausibly, if no more, at what made him tick.'*

Clearly Dame Janet feels that judicious use of imagination and speculation is an important part of a historian's toolkit, not least when writing the history of a life. And she isn't the only eminent medievalist to hold this view. In the same collection of essays, Marjorie Chibnall wrote about the value of 'controlled speculation' and Pauline Stafford of 'informed speculation'. And as Professors Nelson, Chibnall and Stafford are to medieval history what Banks, Moore and Bobby Charlton were to England's World Cup win in 1966 it would be wise of me to follow in their imaginative footsteps.

So how have I used my controlled and informed imagination to understand the Redmayns as individual people? One important approach has been to think myself inside the situations that the Redmayns encountered – what I called when I was teaching 'thinking from the inside of history'. This has given me a better chance of identifying the decisions they faced, the options they had and why they may have made the choices they did. I've also used my informed imagination to explore the ways in which individuals may have reacted to the actions of others and to the unexpected. In doing this I've been trying to replicate the Redmayns' lived experience, writing as if I don't know what will happen next – just as, in life, the Redmayns never knew what the next day would bring. Professor Pauline Stafford explained this really well when she wrote:

*The task of the biographer, as of all historians, is to unthink teleology; it is his/her special task to reconstruct the range of what was possible, choosable and to grasp the ambiguities within which individuals make their choices and act.*

Another use of my imagination has been to ask questions that give me a wider range of insights into the lives of the Redmayns. I discovered early on that having the Redmayns in mind gives me a far greater sense of purpose when reading books and articles and this, in turn, stimulated new questions. To take one example, reading about medieval York, I found myself wondering what the skyline looked like when Sir Richard and Elizabeth rode into the city – did the Minster look like it does today or were parts still to be built? What did they see that we don't? What was new and exciting attention in the city? Using my imagination to ask intriguing questions is one of the most exciting parts of this project.

The enjoyment of using my informed imagination restored my confidence, as did the realisation that, for all the practical differences between the Redmayns' lives and ours, we do share a common humanity. Many aspects of their lives and thoughts, their emotions and feelings would be familiar to us. They created friendships, built marriages, bore children, mourned the deaths of family and friends, laughed at jokes and sang songs, felt hesitant, doubtful and lacking in confidence or were bumptious and overly pleased with themselves. Family relationships were just as complex – supportive, rewarding, hostile, unforgiving – then as now. As Professor Miri Rubin said in her book *The Middle Ages, A Very Short Introduction*:

*'It is often assumed that people of this period were vastly different from us. This is not a helpful assumption. Then, as now, individuals aimed to live the best lives possible while struggling to make ends meet, fulfilling the expectations of institutions, and trying to satisfy some of their desires .... Our sources – ranging from wills to poetry, from visual imagery to testimonies in courts of law – show individuals from across the social spectrum displaying emotions familiar to us: loyalty, jealousy, greed, hope, and passionate love.'*

One final source of early encouragement was another quotation, this time from Professor Frank Barlow, biographer of Edward the Confessor and Thomas Becket, who wrote *'It is fashionable nowadays to say that it is impossible to get much idea of the character of a medieval person. As we know from Obituaries it is not all that easy today. All the same I think it cowardly not to try.'*

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That was how I got my project on the Redmayns underway. Now it's time to move on from my rough sketch outline to a more detailed story, beginning with Sir Richard Redmayn and his wife Elizabeth Aldburgh, whose effigies have been lying in All Saints Church for six hundred years but were once as alive as we are today. As I'd discovered, Richard was in his forties when they married, Elizabeth in her early thirties and both had been married before. Therefore, to understand their marriage and their later lives, I need to start by exploring their earlier years – the values and ideals that shaped them, their activities and experiences and what we can deduce about their personalities and appearance, before moving on to investigate how their marriage may have come about.

I must confess I'm relieved to have reached this point. Until now, whenever I've walked into that airy, empty nave, I've had an eerie sense that their effigies are waiting for me, waiting to hear what progress I've made. For reasons I can't at all explain, I have a sense of responsibility to the Redmayns, a need to tell their stories, to keep their memories alive for other people to discover.

It's as if they share my belief in the central theme of 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 worthwhile reading for Chapters 1 and 2

*Note – the name Redmayn is spelled in a variety of ways (Redmayne, Redman, Redeman etc) in medieval documents and hence in modern writings. No one spelling can be considered correct.*

#### Chapter 1

The most detailed descriptions of the effigies in All Saints Church at Harewood are in Pauline Routh and Richard Knowles, *The Medieval Monuments of Harewood*, 1983.

While this is a short book (106pp) it also contains notes on the conservation of the tombs and transcripts of a handful of wills and other documents. The pictures of the tombs in black and white are not as sharp as we've grown used to in illustrated books but they're still useful.

#### Chapter 2

In creating my rough sketch in Chapter 2 the most useful of the biographies are those in The House of Commons volumes published for The History of Parliament Trust:

The entries for Sir Richard Redmayne (d.1426) and Sir Brian Stapleton (d.1417) which also provide information about Elizabeth Aldburgh are in *The House of Commons 1386-1421* ed. J S Roskell et al, 4 volumes, History of Parliament, 1992.

Happily these volumes are also online at <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>

The entry for Richard Redmayne (d.1476) is in *The House of Commons 1422-1461* ed. L Clark, 7 volumes, History of Parliament, 2020. These volumes will go online but haven't yet appeared in 2023.

A longer article that's also very useful though it predates the biography above:

J S Roskell, 'Two Medieval Westmorland Speakers Part II: Sir Richard Redmayne' in

*Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society* vol LXII, 1962

I also used several quotations in Chapter 2 about the role of imagination. These came from articles in David Bates, Julia Crick, Sarah Hamilton (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow*, 2006

For anyone writing a biography I can highly recommend these essays which discuss both biographies written during the Middle Ages and modern biographies about medieval people. The book isn't easy to get hold of at a reasonable price but, having been lucky enough to do so, I found most of the 16 articles contain both stimulating ideas and confidence-boosting arguments for writing biographies.

### **In addition**

There are several chapters on the fifteenth century Redmayns in W Greenwood, *The Redmans of Levens and Harewood*, 1905 (280pp). This family biography covers the 12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – a mixture of quotations from sources and occasionally romanticised family history. Greenwood, a lawyer, clearly burrowed deep into historical records that had not been published at the time, writing far more than he originally intended. As he said in his introduction ‘When I first began to study Redman history a few years ago my only thought was to prepare a few notes from which my little daughter, in years to come, might perhaps care to learn something of the doings of her ancestors in past centuries.’

If his daughter’s Latin was good she may have enjoyed the quotations from contemporary records but it’s more likely she enjoyed passages such as this about Sir Richard Redmayn:

‘... this Redman knight must have gone to woo the fair widow, fresh from his jousting at Carlisle. As a gallant cavalier of long lineage, the son of an old friend of her family, and with a reputation for skill in the arts of chivalry, he probably had no great difficulty in winning Elizabeth’s hand and heart ...’