

3. Horseman, Jouster, Soldier, Courtier What made Sir Richard tick? c.1355 to c.1395

'for he that muste be a good horseman hit muste com of usage and exercise. But whan he commyth to the strokis of his swerde he is than noble and mighty.'

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur (The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones)*

As I browsed the biographies of Sir Richard Redmayn, I was looking for something more than details of where he fought, the commissions he was appointed to or the lands he was granted. I did need that information but, to introduce Sir Richard effectively, I was looking for a moment or an event that gave me an insight into Richard's ideals, skills and character – and I found that moment in June 1393 in Carlisle.

For a week that midsummer, Carlisle resounded to the drumming of hooves and the thud and screech of lance and sword on shield. For once these weren't the sounds of a Scottish attack on the city. It was a tournament in full competitive flow. Four English and four Scottish knights were jousting for the honour of victory and for national prestige and the leader of the English knights was Richard Redmayn himself. Here was Richard in the kind of '*noble and mighty*' action that would have impressed even Thomas Malory and the knights he wrote about in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

England and Scotland had been at war for much of the fourteenth century but, even during periods of truce, knights took part in tournaments to hone and display their fighting skills. The joust at Carlisle was a prime example of the deadly seriousness of those tournaments. According to Richard's biography in the *House of Commons 1386-1421* volumes, this wasn't a 'joust of peace' where knights used lances with splayed points called coronels, designed so they were unlikely to pierce the eye-slit of an opponent's helm. This was a 'joust of war' where knights used sharply-pointed war lances well-capable of piercing eye-slits and killing their opponents. Violent death was a possibility every time Sir Richard mounted his horse and accelerated towards his opponent.

We know about this tournament thanks to a short entry in the Patent Rolls, the administrative record of royal appointments, grants and decisions of many kinds. The entry reveals the date and venue of the tournament, the numbers of knights involved and that it was Sir Richard who initiated the event by seeking King Richard II's permission to hold the tournament. It also tells us that the king appointed the most famous soldier in the north to preside over the tournament. This was 'Hotspur', Henry Percy, eldest son of the earl of Northumberland, who'd won his nickname because of the speed and aggression of his war-time tactics.

Sadly, we don't know the results – who won, who lost and maybe who was injured – but the tournament does reveal Richard's skills, ideals and values or, to put it less formally, what made him tick. And as Richard was nearly forty that summer in 1393, we're looking at a mature and experienced man whose ideals and principles must by then have been fully-formed, tested against the realities of adult life.

To begin with Richard's military skills, it's clear that he was a formidable horseman. It could take as little as five or six seconds from the moment he spurred his horse into action to his lance striking his opponent's shield or helm so Richard must have been able to control his mount and manoeuvre at high speed, the result of many years of experience, that *'usage and exercise'* identified by Malory as essential in the making of a high-class horseman. He must have been equally *'noble and myghty'* with the *'strokis of his swerde'*, highly skilled with his lance and, overall, extremely fit and physically very strong.

The tournament also reveals Sir Richard's links with the king and nobility. It was his closeness to Richard II as one of the king's household knights that enabled him to get approval to hold the tournament. Hotspur's presence suggests his connection with and perhaps even rapport with Sir Richard. The two men had campaigned and worked together before – when Richard was in charge of repairs to Carlisle Castle in 1390 it was Hotspur he reported to. If Hotspur respected Richard Redmayn, then Richard must have been a very capable knight indeed.

Even more valuable for understanding Richard are the inferences we can make about his ideals. Given his age, he wasn't likely to believe that death only happened to other people, so why did he initiate and take part in the tournament, risking his life with each joust? The answer is, I think, that Richard believed in embodying the chivalric virtues of courage, hardiness and military skills, the values that really mattered and were of paramount significance to him. In the words of Dr Tobias Capwell (an experienced modern jousting as well as the leading authority on late medieval armour), knights took part in jousts of war because they believed that *'the enhanced risk (of injury and death) made the exercise more meaningful as a display of skill and courage'*.

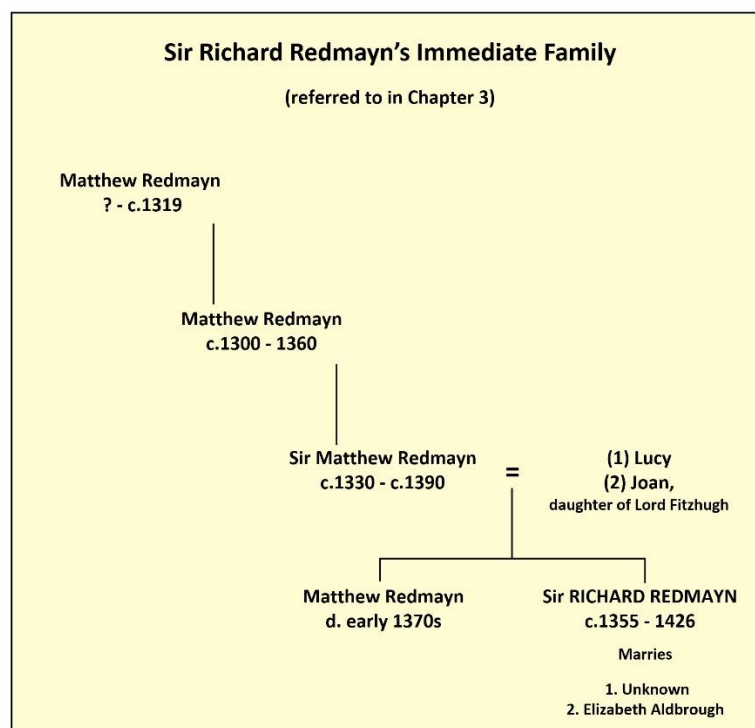
This tournament has provided a great start to my exploration of Sir Richard's skills and ideals, but have I experienced any 'sitting on the cat' moments during my visit back to Carlisle in 1393? It may seem unlikely – jousting is such an alien activity to me – but Richard did come to life for me when I thought of him mounting his horse to take part in a joust. I'd be terrified but, at that moment he must have felt entirely at home on the tournament ground and in the saddle, comfortable with his skills and abilities, confident that jousting was an activity he was really good at. He was, after all, the man who initiated the tournament and was leading the English knights. This sense of confidence is, I think, a feeling we can recognise and identify with, even if our versions involve very different activities. We all have moments when we're aware that we're doing something we've trained for, practiced, feel entirely at home with, are very good at – so when I think of Richard turning his horse to face his opponent, confident in his abilities, I do catch that sense of common humanity. I think I can see the real person inside the armour.

Armed with those initial conclusions about Sir Richard's skills and ideals, my next step was to explore the earlier generations of his family to see whether he inherited those qualities from them. Was he following in their footsteps or taking a different, more individual path?

It was no accident that the tournament in 1393 was held at Carlisle because the north-west had been home to the Redmayns since at least the twelfth century. They lived at Levens Hall, south of Lake Windermere, playing key roles in the administrative and military leadership of Westmorland and Cumberland. The next few paragraphs explain those roles – they aren't the most exciting paragraphs but, as Diana Rigg's character said in *The Great Muppet Caper*, 'It's plot exposition. It has to go somewhere'.

In terms of status, the Redmayns belonged to the gentry, the second rank of landowners – the first rank being the approximately sixty families who made up the nobility (the number of noble families fluctuated a little across the decades). The nobility were wealthier than the gentry but, in legal terms, the real distinction was that nobles were the individuals summoned by name to attend the House of Lords at parliaments. The Redmayns never achieved noble status but Richard's father, Sir Matthew, did marry into a noble family. His second wife was Joan, daughter of Lord Fitzhugh, suggesting that the Redmayns were one of the most powerful gentry families in the region – a suggestion supported by the fact that Joan's two previous husbands had both been noblemen.

Further evidence that the Redmayns were amongst the elite gentry in the north-west comes from the roles they fulfilled on behalf of the crown. One marker of elite status was the appointment of Richard's grandfather, Matthew Redmayn, as Sheriff of Cumberland. As Sheriff, he was the king's chief representative in the county, holding office for a year, responsible for ensuring the efficient running of county courts, collecting income from royal lands and holding elections to parliaments if required. A second indicator of the Redmayns' high status was the election of both Richard's grandfather and great-grandfather as Knights of the Shire (we'd call them MPs) for parliament for one or other of the north-western counties. Knights of the Shire were elected afresh each time the king summoned Parliament.



Richard's father, Sir Matthew, continued his family's record of administrative service, being appointed Sheriff of Cumberland and ticking a third marker of elite gentry status when he was appointed as a Commissioner of the Peace in both Cumberland and Northumberland and as a commissioner of array raising troops for defence. Commissioners (also known as Justices) of the Peace were chosen by the crown from amongst a county's nobles, leading gentry and lawyers with royal judges providing expert advice. They were responsible for keeping the peace in each county, meeting quarterly, hearing charges against those accused of major crimes and deciding if cases should be tried in the King's courts.

Richard's military inheritance can also be traced back across several generations. Both his great-grandfather and grandfather had joined royal armies against the Scots and the French, as did Richard's father, Sir Matthew (born c1330), who fought with distinction in Scotland, Ireland and France in the mid-1300s, the great years of English military success under Edward III. It's ironic, therefore, that the best evidence for Sir Matthew's prowess as a soldier is the result of him being captured and held to ransom – twice! In a request put to Edward III by the House of Commons in the Parliament of 1376, Sir Matthew was listed among a group of soldiers '*renowned for the great services which they have performed and the risks which they have often undertaken to aggrieve the enemies of the king*' but who couldn't afford to pay the ransoms demanded by their French captors. King Edward's response showed how much he valued Sir Matthew. He gave him £1000 towards his costs and freedom, a sum many times higher than the Redmayns' annual income from their lands.

It was an excellent investment. Sir Matthew took part in a diplomatic mission to Portugal, served the king as Warden of the Scottish March (a key role defending the border), commanded the garrisons of Carlisle, Roxburgh and Berwick castles and In 1388 was one of the English commanders at the battle of Otterburn against the Scots – though Otterburn may not have been mentioned too loudly in the Redmayns' hearing as the English were defeated.

It's likely that Sir Matthew died in 1390. In June that year he was listed among the Commissioners of the Peace for Northumberland but omitted when the commission was revised in December and there's no further references to him in government records. When family charters were next drawn up it was his son, Richard, who confirmed them. Intriguingly, in January 1391 Sir Richard took out a loan of £100 with an Italian banker which, Professor Carole Rawcliffe suggests in *The House of Commons 1386-1421* biography of Richard, may have covered the costs of a pilgrimage to Rome in the wake of his father's death. Speculating over-enthusiastically, perhaps Richard was honouring his promise to his father to make the pilgrimage and so speed his father's soul more quickly through Purgatory.

This summary suggests that Sir Richard's family had a lengthy record of royal service, both military and administrative, and that the military expertise and physical prowess he displayed in the tournament at Carlisle were imbued from childhood. With that background established, I can now concentrate on Sir Richard – what do we know about his youth and were there ways in which his career differed from those of his forefathers?

It probably won't be a surprise to discover that we know almost nothing about Richard's youth. We don't even know who his mother was. Her first name was Lucy but we don't know her surname so whatever valuable connections or family honour she brought to the Redmayns are hidden from us. All I can suggest is that she was very likely from the north-west as John Marsh's research in his thesis *Landed Society in the far North-West of England c1332-1461* suggests that 80% of gentry marriages in the region involved families who were from or had strong links with Cumbria. We do know that Lucy and Sir Matthew had at least three children – a daughter called Felicia and two boys, their eldest son, called Matthew in the family tradition for first-borns, and 'our' Richard. Matthew's early death made Richard, born by 1355, the family heir.

We're also ignorant of Richard's wider family – his aunts, uncles and cousins – and there may have been other brothers and sisters. Tantalisingly, other Redmayns do appear in the records. John, Reginald and James Redmayn appear in list of military retainers linked to Richard's father, Sir Matthew, but whether they were Richard's cousins, uncles, or younger brothers we don't know.

Nor do we have any details about Richard's upbringing though, like other young men of his status, he probably spent part of his youth in another household, perhaps that of Lord Greystoke, a relative by marriage. There he would have trained as a knight, developing military skills, horsemanship and learning the ideals of service to one's lord as well as other essential skills including manners, musicianship and dance.

Another complete blank is Richard's first marriage. We don't know his wife's name, the date of the marriage or how many children they had – in fact we know so little that it raises the question of whether he really did marry as a young man. However there are two reasons why I feel certain he did marry. The first is that he became his family's heir in the early 1370s (after his elder brother's death) and it's scarcely likely that he waited until the late 1390s and was in his 40s (when he married Elizabeth Aldburgh) to marry and father an heir to the Redmayn lands.

Secondly there is evidence that he had a son. In her thesis, *Richard II's Knightly Household*, Dr Shelagh Mitchell lists a Matthew Redmayn among the king's knights in 1393-4 and in 1394-5. In addition, a Sir Matthew Redmayn appears on several commissions, in Northumberland in 1392 and 1396 and in Yorkshire in 1398. These dates fit this Matthew Redmayn being Sir Richard's son. Sir Richard was born in the early 1350s so could have married and fathered a son in the early 1370s. That son, 21 by 1392 or 93, was old enough for knighthood. While not conclusive, this suggests that Sir Richard did marry and had at least one son. However, the identification of Matthew as Sir Richard's son only reveals another gap in our knowledge. If Matthew was in his twenties by the early 1390s then he too likely married but we have no evidence of who his bride was. Nor do we know when Matthew died, other than soon after 1398, his last appearance in the records.

I felt more confident of finding information as I turned from Richard's family to his early political and military career and I was right – to an extent! Government records tell us that Richard was knighted by 1376, took part in a naval expedition in 1377-8 whose target was probably a French fleet and that, by 1381, he was serving under his father in the garrison at Roxburgh on the Scottish border alongside two other Redmayns, Reginald and James. There the trail goes cold, however. There's no

evidence of what Richard was doing between 1381 (when he was in his mid-twenties) and his appearance as one of Richard II's household knights in 1388.

The likelihood is that Richard did have a military career. His father's record as a soldier, his own upbringing and the joust at Carlisle all point in a military direction. What might that career have looked like? Its focus may well have been on Scotland and defending the border alongside other members of the Redmayn family. Here are three possibilities:

1384 – did he join the invasion of Scotland led by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster? His father was one of the knights who joined Gaunt, leading a retinue that included James and John Redmayn. Was Richard with them or, as he wasn't listed in his father's retinue, did he serve under a different commander?

1385 – did he join King Richard's army, 14,000 strong and the largest of the period, which invaded Scotland? Sir Matthew was one of the sub-commanders, which suggests Sir Richard too may have taken part, but the names of his father's retinue haven't survived to confirm that. Another possibility is that Richard was defending Carlisle against a possible attack by the Scots – a Scottish attack did take place there when the English invasion ran out of steam.

1388 – Richard may have fought alongside his father, Sir Matthew, at the battle of Otterburn against the Scots.

All this is conjectural but whatever Richard was doing, he must have been winning respect because by 1388 he'd become a knight of the king's household and in 1389 was in charge of repairs to Carlisle castle and appointed Sheriff of Cumberland for the first time. It sounds as if he would have been proud of his achievements, but I also wonder whether Richard felt frustrated by the lack of opportunity for military glory in France. The great victories of the 1340s and 1350s, which he'd heard so much about growing up, had come to an end by the time he came of age in the mid-1370s. Edward III, the greatest king since Arthur in the eyes of contemporaries, was ageing and ill and, in Professor Mark Ormrod's words, 'the final phase of Edward III's reign was a sad postlude to an otherwise remarkable success story'.

Fate was then doubly unkind to Richard. He might well have expected military success under Edward III's heir, Edward the Black Prince. His heroic role at Crecy in 1346 had promised another glorious reign but, in 1370, the prince returned from campaigning in Spain seriously ill and was bed-ridden for long periods until his death in 1376, aged only 45. Edward III died the following year, leaving the ten years-old Richard II, son of the Black Prince, as king. Richard Redmayn had reached adulthood at very much the wrong time for an English knight seeking military success in France.

Even then, Sir Richard may have hoped that Richard II's nobility would unite and launch successful campaigns against the resurgent French armies. Instead, the young king's government was dominated by divisions, suspicion and accusations of corruption and treason while French forces ravaged the south coast. It's therefore possible that Sir Richard found these changed circumstances frustrating, his military opportunities restricted to the Scottish border rather than heroic

campaigning in France. Perhaps his developing career in the royal household was an alternative to the campaigning he'd hoped to build his career around?

How did that connection with the royal household begin? One possibility is that Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford, King Richard's favoured adviser in the mid-1380s, provided an introduction. The Redmayns held some of their Westmorland lands from the earl and Richard may have become known to the earl through this connection. Supporting evidence comes in a document in October 1386 naming Sir Richard as one of a group of men who took wages from the crown to the earl of Oxford so he could pay soldiers mobilised against a threatened French invasion. This connection through Oxford is however conjectural. If real, it was one that Richard would rapidly have downplayed when the deeply unpopular Oxford was forced from power by the king's political opponents and fled the country in 1387.

Whatever the initial link between Sir Richard and the royal court, by 1388 Sir Richard (then in his early to mid-thirties) had developed a closer relationship with the crown than his ancestors, having been appointed as one of King Richard II's household knights, a status that meant he was referred to in crown documents as the king's 'trustworthy and well-beloved knight'.

This was a significant advance in status, involving personal attendance on the king for part of the year and representing the king's interests in the north-west, hence his appointment as Sheriff of Cumberland in 1389 and again in 1393. In addition, each year Sir Richard received an annuity of 40 marks, a little over £13, from the crown. This wasn't a major payment in itself (though as much as many lower-ranking gentry received from their lands each year) but just one of a series of rewards from the crown in the 1390s. Another significant contact for Sir Richard was the King's uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who paid Sir Richard an annual fee of £20 for his advice or service. Back home there was a very visible sign of Sir Richard's proximity to the king for in 1393 he won the king's permission to create a new hunting park at Levens.

The park was huge – a full 3000 acres – best understood by imagining an area of five square miles around your own home. (My own local park at Roundhay in Leeds is one of the largest public parks in Europe but less than a quarter of the size of Sir Richard's hunting park.) What may have delighted Richard most was that his new park was by far the largest in the region – William Windsor's park, the next largest, was 2000 acres and most contained just a few hundred acres of land. What a place for Richard to enjoy his hunting, entertain other gentry and show off his closeness to the king.

Becoming a household knight may also have broadened Sir Richard's experiences and ideas. At court he saw the latest fashions in dress, jewellery and cuisine and listened to (and made acquaintance with?) the poets Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower. It's likely he took part in hunting and tournaments, perhaps even the visually sumptuous Smithfield tournament in 1390 which attracted the most experienced jousting knights from Europe as well as England. Richard also knew many fellow-knights at court who went on Crusades to the Baltic or Mediterranean – and joining a crusade may have been another alternative to lost hopes of campaigning in France.

Crusades are often thought of as ending with Richard the Lionheart's failure to capture Jerusalem in the 1190s but the crusading ideal continued to inspire knights for another several centuries. During

the 1300s several thousand English knights fought in what are known as the Baltic Crusades to Lithuania and Russia and, in Sir Richard's time, the royal court was a hotbed of crusading idealism. Many of the king's household knights joined expeditions to the Baltic led by Henry Bolingbroke, the eldest son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and cousin of the king. One of those Crusaders was Hotspur, Henry Percy, who Sir Richard knew from that tournament at Carlisle and responsibilities on the Scottish border. There's no evidence that Sir Richard joined a crusade but it wouldn't be surprising if he discussed the possibility with Hotspur and others, took the idea seriously and was disappointed if he did not take part.

One campaign Sir Richard did join was in October 1394 when the king led a military expedition to restore his authority in Ireland. Over the winter of 1394-95, King Richard forced the Irish leaders to submit and accept his overlordship. We don't know what role Richard Redmayn played, militarily or administratively, but he gained experience he likely drew on four years later when he again joined the king's army bound for Ireland – but that expedition in 1399 is a story for a later chapter.

Despite all the frustrating gaps in our knowledge of Sir Richard's youth and his public career, I think we have enough information to suggest answers to my question – 'what made Sir Richard tick?' He seems to have inherited a commitment to royal service from his father and other family members, leading to his military service, his administrative roles and a desire to enhance the family's 'good worship', the high regard in which the Redmayns were held by the crown and members of the gentry and nobility. What has also emerged is the closeness of Sir Richard's relationship with the king, closer than those his forefathers had enjoyed.

This suggests that Richard also had a degree of personal ambition, perhaps a wish to use his abilities to their fullest or even curiosity about life at court. Whether ambition was the main factor we can't know but I feel I've laid the groundwork for understanding what Sir Richard tick – a question I'll return to as we continue to follow his career.

At the same time, I've also realised that Richard wasn't in complete control of his life and choices. It would be easy to assume that he found it straightforward to achieve all his goals because of his status, lands and powerful connections. In reality, however, like everyone who's ever lived, Richard had frustrations and his life was heavily influenced by the actions and choices of other people and also by events outside his control. Youthful dreams of glory in France may have had to be replaced by other ambitions closer to home. He had to learn to adapt to unexpected and unwelcome situations as well as he could – a situation most of us recognise and have experienced.

That sense of Richard Redmayn as a human being – not just an effigy! – has, I feel, been visible in other ways. We can think of him making his way in a range of new environments as he matured – as a soldier, an administrator and a courtier – and experiencing some degree of uncertainty as he met new people whom he needed to impress with his abilities. There was also the inevitable human experience of mourning his family – his parents and elder brother, his first wife and possibly children, other relatives and friends. However the cat-sitting moment that stands out for me

remains the one that I described early in this chapter, when we can sense Richard's confidence in his abilities as he sat proudly in the saddle, ready to begin the joust at Carlisle.

All of which brings us to the mid-1390s. By then, Richard was forty or a little older, capable, energetic, a skilled soldier and horseman with extensive administrative experience, all of which had enhanced the Redmayn family's status, power and prestige. Richard was very much a man on the rise but would his future wife, Elizabeth Aldburgh, have respected and shared those ideals and qualities? Does her upbringing echo Richard's? Just how much can I find out about Elizabeth? That's what I'll explore next.

How do I know?

Notes on my sources and reading for Chapter 3

This material augments the biographies of Richard Redmayn listed in Chapter 2.

I used the volumes of the Calendars of Patent Rolls and Calendars of Close Rolls online.

The Calendars of Patent Rolls are available at

<http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/search.html>

The Calendars of Close Rolls are available for a subscription on British History Online

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue>

The following provided context for Richard Redmayn's career and thinking:

Nigel Saul, *Richard II*, 1997

Jackson W Armstrong, *England's Northern Frontier: Conflict and Local Society in the Fifteenth-Century Scottish Marches*, 2020

Chris Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England 1360-1413*, 1986.

Tobias Capwell, *Arms and Armour of the Medieval Joust*, 2018

Timothy Gard, *Chivalry, Kingship and Crusade: The English Experience in the Fourteenth Century*, 2013

Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, 1984

S A Miles, *Parks in Medieval England*, 2009

Adrian R Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, David Simpkin, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 2013

and the immensely valuable linked database *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*:

<https://www.medievalsoldier.org/>

Unpublished theses – one of the miracles of the internet age is the availability of many PhD theses:

John Marsh, *Landed Society in the far North-West of England c1332 -1461*, (Lancaster, 2000)

Shelagh Mitchell, *Some Aspects of the Knightly Household of Richard II*, (London, 1998)