6. Elizabeth and Richard – Marriage and Beginnings c.1396-1399

My funny valentine. Sweet comic valentine. You make me smile with my heart

From the song 'My Funny Valentine' by Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart.

Did the sight of Elizabeth make Richard Redmayn smile with his heart? And did the thought of Richard make Elizabeth smile during his many absences from home on royal service? The idea that Richard and Elizabeth may have married for love may be surprising because, for many years, historians (though chiefly modern historians with only a cursory knowledge of medieval sources) told us that medieval marriages were essentially hard-nosed business arrangements, a means of climbing the social ladder. From this miserabilist viewpoint, if Richard's eyes gleamed at the sight of Elizabeth, it was because he was thinking of her lands, not of her as a woman.

Happily, medievalists have opened up alternative views of medieval marriages, utilising a much broader range of sources and research into issues such as the history of emotions. We now have a cascade of evidence suggesting that, in the words of Professor Elisabeth van Houts in her book *Married Life in the Middle Ages 900-1300* 'a measure of sexual attraction, affection, and love were all considered ingredients that together might better ensure a lasting relationship'. This shouldn't be surprising – the oldest surviving valentine written in England dates from the fifteenth century, written by Margery Brews to her future husband, John Paston, in 1477.

This doesn't mean that all medieval marriages were romantic love affairs by any means but it encourages me to ask whether love and affection did play a part in Richard and Elizabeth's decision to marry. There's no way of producing a definite answer but we can explore possibilities – and who doesn't enjoy exploring this kind of intriguing, gossipy question?

To begin at the beginning of Richard and Elizabeth's relationship – how did they get to know each other? It's quite possible that they'd heard of each other before they met in person because the Redmayns, Aldburghs and Stapletons were linked through military service and reputation. Richard Redmayn may have served with the younger Brian Stapleton, Elizabeth's husband. Elizabeth's brother, Sir William Aldburgh, served with Richard Redmayn's father and probably Richard too on the Scottish Marches in the early 1380s. Richard and Sir Brian Stapleton (Elizabeth's father-in-law) were both skilled jousters and Richard (as one of the king's household) may have watched Sir Brian joust in 1390 at a tournament for Knights of the Garter. They also had many mutual connections amongst the northern gentry and nobility which made the geographical distance between Levens and Harewood immaterial.

Family connections are one thing, getting to know each other in person quite another. So how might Richard and Elizabeth have met, assuming they hadn't met and felt the pull of attraction before being widowed? Evidence from other families' letters and lengthy narrative stories known as romance literature suggests that family and friends may have played an important role. The first stage may have seen family and friends looking out for suitable partners for Richard and Elizabeth.

Then came the sharing of thoughts on the suitability of a prospective spouse (did sister Sybil offer Elizabeth her thoughts while walking in the garden at Harewood?) and hosting dinners where Richard and Elizabeth could get to know one another. Finally, family or friends might help negotiate the necessary financial settlement, thus tactfully distancing the couple from such discussions. I suspect that Jane Austen would have felt quite at home in this environment.

We have no idea whether they really did meet in this way but there are hints that, once Elizabeth and Richard met, they did make each other smile with their hearts. The first clue that attraction and affection developed is that, as a widow, Elizabeth had the right to choose her new husband or to remain unmarried. Many wealthy women in Elizabeth's situation revelled in this ability to choose (even if it was still wise to take note of family reactions) and around half the widows of Elizabeth's status chose not to re-marry. Therefore, if Elizabeth decided to marry, attraction and affection may well have determined her choice of Richard as her husband.

The second clue lies in the likely date of their wedding, 1396 or 1397, a full five or six years after Elizabeth was widowed. The reason why this is the likeliest date is because there's no evidence of Richard's presence in Yorkshire before September 1397 when he was involved in a dispute over land near Wetherby. Later that autumn Richard received his first royal appointment in Yorkshire, membership of a commission into law-breaking, and further appointments followed in 1398. If the marriage had been earlier (in 1394 or 1395), it seems highly probable that Richard would have received appointments in Yorkshire sooner than September 1397.

What has the date to do with affection? As explained in chapter 5, research by Professor Joel Rosenthal shows that most widows of Elizabeth's status who remained unmarried for five years went on to remain widows for life. By 1396 Elizabeth had indeed been a widow for five years, her life now organised round well-established routines, and would only re-marry for a strong reason, given this would bring major changes to her life – and what stronger reason would there be than love and attraction?

A third reason for thinking that Richard and Elizabeth were attracted to each other is geography. Elizabeth would have had plenty of suitors during her widowhood, some far more geographically convenient than Richard Redmayn. There's an equally good chance that Richard could have found a new wife much closer to Levens than Harewood. With their marriage, however, they both had to spend more time travelling longer distances, living in each other's homes and getting to know new neighbours and working with new household officials. Was it affection that made them take on such challenges?

If these arguments suggest that love and attraction did play a part in Elizabeth and Richard's marriage, then experience and human nature may also have contributed. Elizabeth and Richard were a mature couple who'd already experienced marriage. In an age when divorce was not possible they knew that marriage was for life, so they needed to be sure of the suitability of their spouse. Elizabeth, in particular, may have been all too aware of this because of the mistreatment of her sister Sybil by her husband, William Ryther. We don't know that Sybil's problems had begun before Elizabeth and Richard married but, if they had, it would have been a considerable warning to Elizabeth to make a well-informed choice of husband – we'll discuss the problems Sybil encountered

in chapter 10. Experience may also have taught them the importance of togetherness and mutual support, of having a trusted sexual partner, both friend and lover. If that sounds too modern an idea then it's worth noting that in Chretien de Troyes's romance *Erec and Enide*, written around 1170, Enide says she will be friend-lover to Erec as well as his wife.

Mutual respect for each other's abilities may also have been important, especially as they both knew the responsibilities that Elizabeth would have to carry with Richard absent a great deal. Elizabeth had two phases of experience in running a household, as wife and as widow and, if she was indeed 'her own woman' as suggested in the last chapter, this must have increased Richard's confidence in Elizabeth's capacity to take a full share in running their estates. As we've seen in Chapter 4, Elizabeth's role would be significant in maintaining and enhancing the Redmayns' 'good worship', the high regard in which they were held by other gentry and noble families.

And there's one final clue that I confess only occurred to me while revising this chapter. Richard could have chosen to be buried at or near Levens, his home territory, but chose to be buried in York, at the Blackfriars, the Dominican Friary where Elizabeth was buried. He also commissioned the effigies at Harewood which portray them as a couple. Is this apparent wish to be together in death, the most convincing evidence that they did indeed make each other smile with their hearts? It would be good to think so even if we can never know for certain.

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At some point before their wedding day, Elizabeth and Richard made formal vows of consent to each other in front of witnesses. The closest parallel today is becoming engaged but this taking of vows of consent was far more formal. Elizabeth and Richard stood together before their witnesses, perhaps in the hall at Harewood Castle, perhaps at Levens, and took hold of each other's right hands. Then Richard said 'I Richard, take you Elizabeth to be my wedded wife' to which Elizabeth replied 'I Elizabeth, take you Richard to be my wedded husband'. These words created a binding pact, the verbal equivalent of signing a contract of marriage.

Next came the reading of banns in church on three occasions and, in the run up to the wedding, exchanges of gifts which, if similar to gifts given at other high-status weddings, may have included jewellery, rings, fine clothing, furs and lace, wines and delicacies such as raisins, figs and dates. If affection did bind Richard and Elizabeth together then maybe they echoed Edward III and Queen Philippa who, when parted by military campaigns or government business, sent each other horses and hawks as symbols of the speed with which they hoped to be re-united and called each other *douce cuer* (sweetheart) in their letters.

The period before the solemnization of the marriage created time for Richard and Elizabeth to think and talk about the future. Like most of us on the verge of marriage, they must have been acutely aware that they were taking a huge, hopefully welcome and enjoyable, step that would create significant changes in their lives. And perhaps there were other emotions and thoughts too – anticipation, uncertainty, memories of their previous marriages and spouses, maybe self-doubt about their appearance and attractiveness, about living up to each other's expectations – yet more of these universal human feelings and thoughts that bring Elizabeth and Richard alive in front of us.

All of which brings us to the moment when Elizabeth and Richard stood together to take their wedding vows, though whether this was in Westmorland or Yorkshire we don't know, though wherever it was we can be confident that everything and everybody there was cleaned and polished, household staff in new livery, the best of food and drink ready for the guests. Elizabeth and Richard were probably relieved to have reached this moment and looking forward to their celebrations. They had every reason to be optimistic about the future. The mid-1390s was a good time to be a trusted supporter of King Richard II and everyone at the wedding must have anticipated more royal favours for the newly-married Redmayns – and they were right to be confident, for a time anyway.

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Did Richard and Elizabeth's first years of marriage suggest that such confidence was justified? From a personal point of view, yes. Their first child was born, a boy christened Matthew in the Redmayn tradition for first-born sons. Matthew's birth can have been no later than 1397-98 because he grew up to have his own son who was born in 1416. Sir Richard and Elizabeth must have been over-joyed by the birth of their son but, at roughly the same time must also have experienced grief over the death of the other Matthew Redmayn, Sir Richard's son by his first marriage, whom I introduced in Chapter 3. The elder Matthew last appears in the records in April 1398 which suggests he died soon afterwards. The second Matthew therefore now became the heir to the Redmayn name and lands.

There was also a second reason why young Matthew's birth was significant in terms of inheritance. Until now Elizabeth's heir to her half of the Harewood estates was Brian Stapleton, her son by her first marriage, but had young Matthew Redmayn's birth changed that? Would it be Brian or Matthew who would inherit Harewood? The story of the twists and turns of the inheritances of the half-brothers, Brian and Matthew, will reappear in future chapters as it ran for the best part of thirty years, raising questions about our perceptions of Richard Redmayn's character and behaviour.

Away from issues of inheritance, there was a second reason for the Redmayns to be confident. Richard continued to receive appointments and rewards from the king. As one of the king's household knights, Richard was spending time each year at court but was also very active in the north-west and increasingly in Yorkshire. He had already been Sheriff of Cumberland twice (in 1389-90 and 1393-4) but was now appointed twice more in 1396-7 and 1398-9), an example of Richard II's strategy of appointing household knights as sheriffs in counties where he wished to increase his royal influence. Sir Richard was one of the knights he chose, even though, in appointing Sir Richard twice in three years, the king was breaking a Statute which forbade the reappointment of a Sheriff within three years of serving in the role. Sir Richard was also appointed to royal commissions into law-breaking in the north-west and to commissions in Yorkshire from the autumn of 1397. These appointments, plus annuities which boosted his income, show how highly Richard was trusted by the king and his advisers.

What was Elizabeth doing in the late 1390s, apart from having at least one child? Sadly we don't know because she's invisible in our sources. Don't, however, imagine she was living a life of complete leisure. With Richard away so often she was shouldering significant responsibilities at Harewood and on her Stapleton lands and, perhaps, at Levens (although Richard's household staff and perhaps an unknown Redmayn relative must have been experienced and trusted in their roles).

However the multitude of issues Richard and Elizabeth had to manage meant they must have had to work hard to arrange how best to live both together and separately in their marriage. They were used to this to an extent in their previous marriages but there was now an extra geographical element to juggle involving both Levens and Harewood. They also had to adjust from patterns developed in widowhood to take into account the personality of their new spouse. Their first years of marriage may have felt very complex.

As a result, Richard and Elizabeth must have had many conversations about when Richard would be in the north-west, in Yorkshire and at the King's court and when Elizabeth would be at Harewood or Levens and whether and when she might accompany Richard to Westminster or wherever the royal court happened to be. They needed to keep in frequent touch by messenger and letter about estate management, business and personal issues and also with other people – family, friends, household staff, political contacts and royal departments. None of their letters survive but we can be confident there would have been many of them because multiple letters survive from other families, including the Stonors from the 1300s onwards and the Pastons and others during the fifteenth century and, of course, there's the wealth of government records which show how extensive and commonplace written communications were by 1400.

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The most notable sign of Richard's success came early in 1398 when he was appointed Master of the King's Horse, making him head of the largest department in the royal household and giving us further evidence of his skills with horses. In this role, Richard had overall responsibility for ensuring the royal stables functioned efficiently and were stocked with well-fed and well-cared for horses, though his role was not continuously hands-on. Over one hundred grooms and valets were employed to care for the variety of horses needed for hunting, day-to-day travel and transport, use by royal messengers and in readiness for warfare. One intriguing detail in the records of Sir Richard's department is that one of the clerks of the stables in 1399 was Nicholas Harewood. Had Richard met and been impressed by Nicholas at Harewood and taken him to work in the royal household?

What did Elizabeth and Richard talk about when he returned from the royal court? People, surely, were high on that list – who was doing well, who was out of favour, who Richard liked or couldn't stand, news about the king whom Richard had now known for a decade since becoming a household knight. Elizabeth was familiar with the names and at least some of the people. She'd had other good informants in her father, her first father-in-law, Sir Brian Stapleton, and her first husband. She may also have seen King Richard at first hand as her family's status and connections may have brought her into the King's presence during his several visits to York and, perhaps, on a visit or visits south.

Richard could also tell Elizabeth about the increasingly deferential behaviour required at court. When the king sat enthroned in his chamber, anyone he looked at had to go down on one knee. The king had to be addressed as 'your highness' or 'your high royal majesty', new high-flown language emphasising the gulf between the king and everyone else, even the royal dukes who were his uncles.

Far more dramatic, however – and far more significant for the future – was the news Richard brought home in 1397. The king had taken revenge upon three of the five noblemen who had dared

to challenge his style of kingship a decade earlier – and there was nothing half-hearted about his revenge. The earls of Arundel, Warwick and Gloucester were arrested and tried for treason. Arundel was executed, Warwick exiled for life and Gloucester – the king's uncle – was murdered by the king's supporters. These events were to have repercussions that eventually caused Richard and Elizabeth immense anxiety and fear, so it's important that I now explain what lay behind the king's actions.

Richard II had become king at the age of ten in 1377, succeeding his grandfather Edward III (his father, Edward the Black Prince, having already died). Much was expected of young Richard because of the military successes of his grandfather and father but his lavish expenditure and choice of advisers led to a crisis in 1386 that briefly threatened to depose him when he was just nineteen. Five noblemen, who became known as the Lords Appellant, appealed (accused) several of the King's advisers of treason. At the Merciless Parliament in 1388 the accused advisers were convicted. Those who hadn't fled into exile were executed. King Richard had to accept new councillors he didn't want and was required to obtain their approval for all his actions.

> *[It may help if I say that, for continued understanding of the Redmayns' story, you only need remember one of the five Lords Appellant (Arundel, Warwick, Gloucester, Nottingham and Henry of Lancaster). The one to remember is Henry who was heir to the Duke of Lancaster. His titles were earl of Derby, then earl of Hereford. In 1399 he became King Henry IV when he deposed Richard II.]*

King Richard's humiliation didn't last long, however. In 1389 he declared himself of age to rule (he was now 22) and took back control of government. Gradually the political atmosphere became calmer but King Richard had not forgiven the five Lords Appellant. In 1397, as explained above, he took his revenge, ordering the deaths or exile of the three senior Lords Appellant.

Next year, 1398, Sir Richard had more dramatic news to tell Elizabeth. A quarrel had broken out between the two remaining Lords Appellant, Henry of Lancaster (now earl of Hereford) and Norfolk (formerly the earl of Nottingham), a quarrel that King Richard ordered to be settled by a joust at Coventry. Richard Redmayn was almost certainly present at Coventry in his role as Master of the Horse and must have been as shocked as everyone else when, at the very last moment, King Richard cancelled the joust and exiled both men, Norfolk for life and Henry of Lancaster for ten years. His only concession was that if Henry's father, the Duke of Lancaster, should die while his son was in exile, then Henry might be able to return to England to take up his inheritance as Duke of Lancaster.

These decisions taken, the King decided to lead an army to restore his authority in Ireland, an expedition that would last several months. Sir Richard, as Master of the Horse, was centrally involved in planning. At the same time, he had to think about his family and prepare for all eventualities in Ireland, including his own death. He appointed eight lawyers to act for him during his absence, including two leading government officials and his neighbour, Sir William Gascoigne, a highly experienced lawyer working in the royal courts in Westminster.

Sometime in May 1399 Richard Redmayn said farewell to Elizabeth and rode away to join the King's army. What they didn't know was that the events about to unfold would threaten Richard's career and his life.

How do I know?

Notes on my sources and reading for Chapter 6

In addition to the biographies and sources listed earlier I found the following most helpful:

There are numerous studies of medieval marriage. Those I found most useful for this chapter are:

Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London,* 2006

Joel T Rosenthal, 'Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration and Life Choices' in S Sheridan Walker (ed), *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, 1993

Elisabeth van Houts, *Married Life in the Middle Ages 900-1300,* 2019

Keith Dockray, 'Why did Fifteenth-Century English Gentry Marry?' in M Jones (ed), *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, 1986

Bridget Wells-Furby, *Aristocratic Marriage, Adultery and Divorce in the Fourteenth Century*, 2019

The Soldier in Later Medieval England database:

https://www.medievalsoldier.org/ provided some of the details of the families' military records.

For Richard Redmayn's role as Master of the Horse in relation to the expedition to Ireland (including the reference to Nicholas Harewood) I used Dorothy Johnston's unpublished thesis, *Richard II and Ireland 1395-99* (Dublin, 1976)

For an outline and details of Richard II's reign I chiefly used:

G L Harriss, *Shaping the Nation, England 1360-1461*, 2005

Nigel Saul, *Richard II*, 1999

Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II, Manhood, Youth and Politics, 1377-99,* 2008.

Laura Ashe, *Richard II, a Brittle Glory*, 2016