

## 7. Living in the face of the unknown – June to August 1399

*History is an imaginative leap into the past with the aim of showing what it was like to live in the face of the unknown.*

Professor Robert Colls

That word ‘imaginative’ again! Back in chapter 2, I quoted Dame Janet Nelson’s belief that ‘*I take life history to involve trying as hard as possible, even if that means sailing close to the imaginative wind ... to make the acquaintance of my subject as a person, to guess plausibly, if no more, at what made him tick....*’ and now I’m quoting Professor Colls on imagination because if ever there was a chapter when I need to take an ‘*imaginative leap*’ into the past, this is it!

1399 was a critical year for Richard and Elizabeth Redmayn, perhaps THE most critical and alarming year they lived through together. For months on end they very explicitly lived ‘in the face of the unknown’ – so what made 1399 so frightening?

It was the year when Richard II was deposed and Henry IV was crowned – but royal politics is just the background story in this chapter

It was the year when Richard Redmayn’s career – and life – could have come to a disastrous end because of his involvement in the events of that deposition.

It was the year when Elizabeth and Richard felt more anxious, more alarmed, more frightened than at any previous time in their lives – and that fear was all the greater because, as events unfolded, they were surrounded by rumours, hearsay and distortion.

And yet, it wasn’t simply that they were afraid of what might happen next but that they had no way of knowing what each other was doing. When their world began to crash around them, Sir Richard was in Ireland and didn’t know for certain what was happening in England. Elizabeth, at Harewood, didn’t know how Sir Richard was faring in Ireland, when he might return or whether he was safe.

And yet, for all the drama and significance of the events of 1399 for the Redmayns, we know almost nothing about Richard’s actions and nothing at all about Elizabeth’s. Hence the need to take that imaginative leap, both in this chapter and the next – a leap that will help me tell the story of 1399 through the eyes of Elizabeth and Richard, to imagine how they may have felt and thought as events unfolded and, above all, to understand what it was like for them to ‘live in the face of the unknown’.

## Elizabeth – Harewood Castle, early July 1399

*Henry of Lancaster has landed on the coast.*

*He must be planning to win back his dukedom*

*But when the King returns from Ireland – will there be civil war?*

Living at Harewood castle had many advantages. It was new and comfortable and it must have been very tempting for Elizabeth to linger at the highest windows or on the roof-top walk to enjoy the views over Harewood's gardens and deer-park and along the Wharfe valley. However when Elizabeth looked out over the landscape that July in 1399, it wouldn't have been for the pleasure of the view. She was on the look-out for messengers or neighbours bringing the latest news.

Two months had passed since Sir Richard had ridden away from Harewood to join the King's expedition to Ireland. By now Elizabeth would have been hoping to hear of the king's – and her husband's – progress but instead she was focussed on an army gathering just a few miles from Harewood. The leader of that army, Henry of Lancaster, had recently landed on the Yorkshire coast despite having been exiled for life by the king. Elizabeth knew that Henry's return could turn out to be very dangerous for her husband, Sir Richard.

Henry's return was alarming because it promised conflict, even civil war, in England. Henry was the heir of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, the most powerful nobleman in England, and he was also the king's cousin and possibly the heir to the crown because the king didn't have any children. However Henry was also one of the Lords Appellant who'd outraged the king when they'd opposed his policies and choice of advisers. As we saw in the last chapter, King Richard had taken his revenge on the Appellants, including Henry who he'd exiled from England for ten years. The one light in Henry's exile had been that the king had suggested he might let Henry return to become duke when his father died. However, when the duke had died in February 1399, the king had snatched Henry's hope away. He'd increased Henry's punishment to banishment for life and seized the Duchy of Lancaster lands for himself.

This wasn't distant, abstract political information for Elizabeth. She and Richard knew everyone involved, in person or by reputation. They knew that Henry's return from exile without royal permission had changed the political situation. No King could allow a subject to flout his authority in such a way, hence the likelihood of conflict.

Each piece of news arriving at Harewood likely increased Elizabeth's fear that conflict was imminent. Henry had landed with just sixty supporters and apparently sworn on holy relics at Bridlington Priory that his only reason for returning was to regain his Duchy. Soon afterwards, however, Elizabeth heard more worrying news. Henry's support was growing rapidly as he made his way across Yorkshire via his Duchy of Lancaster strongholds, first to Pickering castle, then to Knaresborough which was just ten miles north of Harewood. Henry's supporters were members of his Lancastrian affinity, men Sir Richard and Elizabeth knew well, including their nearest neighbours, the Gascoignes

of Gawthorpe Hall. William Gascoigne was one of the lawyers acting on Sir Richard's behalf while he was in Ireland but he was also one of the duke of Lancaster's chief legal advisers and among the first to send Henry armed support after he landed. The Gascoignes may well have been Elizabeth's most reliable source of information.

Within days, Henry's army was passing within five or six miles of Elizabeth's home, heading south from Knaresborough to Pontefract, the strongest castle in the region. By now, his followers included the most powerful lords in the north, the earls of Westmorland and Northumberland and Northumberland's son, Henry Hotspur. More support came from Thomas Arundel, the Archbishop of Canterbury. As Archbishop he might sound a neutral figure but he was far from that for his brother had been one of the Lords Appellant, executed on King Richard's orders.

The scale and eminence of Henry's support must have increased Elizabeth's anxiety. The stronger Henry became the more likely it was that conflict would break out on King Richard's return – and her husband Sir Richard would face a critical clash of loyalties. Would he be honour bound to fight for King Richard, even if Henry's forces were stronger – and how would Sir Richard feel about such a choice between his anointed king, Richard II, and Henry of Lancaster, a man whose military and chivalric career he must have deeply respected?

In the midst of such thoughts, Elizabeth was still a busy woman. She had the running of the castle and estates to oversee, she was the mother of a young son (and possibly pregnant as their second son was born by 1401), she may have had messages to answer from the Redmayn estates at Levens. She must have been desperate to hear from her husband. Had the king and Sir Richard heard about Henry's landing and the extent of his support? And if they did know, what would the king do? Was he on his way back? Was Sir Richard with him? What was going to happen next?

All that Elizabeth could do was pray for her husband's safety.

**Ten days later ...**

**Sir Richard – Waterford, south-east Ireland, mid-July 1399**

*The King's returning to England tomorrow. His ships are being loaded.*

*Those ships are being unloaded again. Who knows when the king will leave?*

Sir Richard hadn't expected to be back at Waterford so soon. The king's army had landed there at the end of May, the beginning of an expedition that, if all went well, would only last six months. And it had gone well at first. They had marched into Leinster to put an end to the rising led by Art MacMurrough, the so-called 'King of Leinster' and the Irish had run from the first skirmishes. However MacMurrough had refused to submit and, without a decisive victory, the impetus of the English campaign faded. At that point, Sir Richard must have been thinking that it would take rather longer than six months before the King's authority in Ireland was re-established.

Then came the news that Henry of Lancaster had landed in England, throwing King Richard's plans into disarray. A swift return to England was essential but the king's army was spread across Leinster and many of the merchant ships conscripted to bring the army to Ireland had sailed back to their everyday roles as trading vessels, plying up and down the coast or across to Europe. To get King Richard home, along with a sizeable portion of his army, their horses and equipment, would take time. The greatest problem was finding enough ships. Messages had gone out, ordering ships to return to Waterford but who knew how long that would take?

In the meantime, Richard Redmayn was busy. As Master of the King's Horse, his task was to ensure there'd be enough horses (plus saddles, bridles, fodder etc) for the king and royal household on their return to England but, even if he collected what he thought were the right quantities, he had no idea whether there'd be sufficient ships that had been adapted to carry horses. At the same time, Sir Richard knew that other household officers needed ships to transport military equipment, the king's clothes, beds, pavilions and jewels, and personnel such as the royal clerks and priests – everything the king would need once back in England. Noblemen were also demanding ships for their own men and equipment. Who was going to have priority for the available ships?

Something else Sir Richard didn't know was how long he had for his task. That depended on when the King planned to return to England but the king and his advisers couldn't agree on timing. Was an early return the priority, even if this meant leaving many men and much equipment in Ireland, or should King Richard wait until the bulk of his army could travel with him? Already there'd been arguments and confusion, leading to the ships at Waterford being loaded and then unloaded again. The latest news was that an advance guard led by the earl of Salisbury would be sent to land at Conwy and then move on to take control of Chester, the centre of support for the King – but how definite was that plan?

As he worked, Sir Richard must also have been looking ahead with trepidation. He knew Henry of Lancaster's considerable qualities as a soldier and his experience on crusade to Prussia. Whatever Henry was planning would be done efficiently and he'd have the support of the powerful Lancastrian affinity, the knights and lawyers who provided advice and service to the dukes of Lancaster. If Sir Richard had been in England rather than Ireland he might have been one of those men himself as he too received an annual fee from the duke of Lancaster. Not that there was anything unusual about that. Many men served both the king and individual nobles without compromising their loyalty to the king but, until now, none of them had faced a conflict between loyalty to the crown and service to Lancaster.

Sir Richard may also have experienced a tremor of fear about what might lie ahead when he returned to England. Back in the early years of King Richard's reign, the Lords Appellant had heaped the blame for the country's problems on the king's closest advisers. Convicted of treason, some of those advisers were executed, others fled abroad. Could history be about to repeat itself? Would the current royal advisers and household officers, including Sir Richard himself, be blamed for the king's decisions, especially the decision to exile Henry of Lancaster for life? What might Sir Richard's fate be if they were?

For the moment, however, all Sir Richard could do was supervise the collection and care of the best horses available – but it was now a week since King Richard had heard of Henry of Lancaster’s landing, even longer since Henry had landed. How much support had Henry built up already? Had the duke of York, the King’s deputy in England, been able to raise men to defend the country against Henry? How much longer would it be before the king returned to England?

**Two to three weeks later ...**

**Elizabeth – Harewood, early August 1399**

*King Richard has landed in Wales and is heading for Chester.*

*Some of the King’s supporters have been murdered in Bristol.*

*Support for the king is disintegrating.*

Nothing had reduced Elizabeth’s worries in the month since she’d first heard of Henry’s landing on the Yorkshire coast. She still had no news of her husband’s whereabouts. There were stories that the king had landed in Wales but there was no definite information about where he’d landed, who was with him and whether he’d brought his whole army back from Ireland. The rumour that he was heading for Chester made sense as that was where his support was strongest but what Elizabeth really wanted to know was whether Sir Richard was safe.

Particularly worrying for Elizabeth were reports that the Duke of York who, as Regent, was supposed to be raising an army to challenge Henry of Lancaster, had actually met Henry and reached some kind of agreement with him. That sounded as if support for King Richard was disintegrating. And then there’d been rumours that some of the king’s supporters had been executed in Bristol. Could Sir Richard have been one of them? If his ship from Ireland had landed at Bristol then yes, that was possible ... but it was more likely, surely, that he was with the king in Wales. He was one of the king’s chief household officers after all.

If Sir Richard was with the king, Elizabeth must have expected he’d be safe. That was reassuring ... if only it wasn’t for the latest rumours. It was being said that the king’s army, the soldiers who’d returned with him from Ireland, were deserting him. That sounded desperate, chaotic. Was Henry’s army closing on the king? Was there anyone left who supported King Richard? This all sounded unbelievable but if it was true ... where could her husband Sir Richard be? Was he safe from the king’s enemies? Was his life in danger?

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Rumour, news, speculation, chaos – what did this mean for Elizabeth and Sir Richard? For the previous decade, Sir Richard had been gaining in status and influence until he'd become a leading member of the royal household. Everything had been going so well, especially now Elizabeth and Richard's first son had been born – but was Henry of Lancaster going to challenge King Richard for the crown? And if he did, would he see Sir Richard as one of his enemies, someone to be blamed and punished for the king's decision to exile Henry for life?

On the other hand, the Redmayns could take comfort in the fact that Henry knew Sir Richard and there were men amongst Henry's allies to speak up for Sir Richard if needed. Powerful men too – the earl of Northumberland and his son, Hotspur. Sir Richard had known them for many years, as we've seen. And there was their neighbour, William Gascoigne, the lawyer who was one of Henry's most trusted advisers, and many others, men Sir Richard has worked with many times. Surely Sir Richard would return safely. If only Elizabeth and her family could hear some definite news.

'Living in the face of the unknown' – we all do this all the time but we only become aware of the unknown when something alarming or out of the ordinary occurs. Realising how alarming and nerve-wracking the Redmayns' experiences were in 1399 has made for a very uncomfortable cat-sitting moment. And the Redmayns were just one of thousands of families who experienced these fears that summer in 1399. What would happen next – and would they see husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, friends ever again?

### **How do I know?**

Notes on my sources for Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 are given together, at the end of chapter 8.