

8. What did happen to Sir Richard? August to October 1399

Holy Monkeys, Batman!

Kelly Macdonald, *on seeing her portrait on Sky Arts 'Portrait Artist of the Year'*

Anxiety, fear, a desperate need to know what was really happening – they must have been the dominating emotions for Elizabeth and Richard that summer of 1399. And by now you too probably want to know what happened to Richard. At the end of the previous chapter we left him in Waterford, waiting to return to England with the King. What did happen to him after that?

I well understand the need for an answer. That's exactly how I felt as I sat reading the most likely source of information, Sir Richard's biography in the volumes of *The House of Commons 1386-1421*. However, detailed that biography is for parts of Richard's life, there's a big gap in its account of the summer of 1399. It says Sir Richard left England with the king in May and then ... nothing! There's no record of his activities for five months and then, in October, he re-appears, now loyal to Henry of Lancaster, the newly crowned King Henry IV. Sir Richard had seemingly leapt from loyalty to Richard II to loyalty to Henry IV, leaving no trace of where he'd been and what he'd done that summer or how easy or difficult that leap of loyalty had been.

That blank in Richard's life was utterly frustrating. If Professor Rawcliffe, Professor Roskell and the other eminent historians of The History of Parliament Trust had found no information about his whereabouts and actions then what hope did I have of filling that gap?

And then, browsing through academic articles on the events of 1399, I found a clue, a big, wonderful, totally unexpected clue when one piece of information leapt off the page at me.

Holy Monkeys, Batman!

That blank space in Richard's summer wasn't blank any more!

Here's the sentence that made me so excited. It's from Dr Dorothy Johnston's article *Richard II's departure from Ireland, July 1399*, published in the *English Historical Review* in 1983.

'[Sir John] Stanley had joined Henry's cause before 20 August, when he [arranged] the release of Janico Dartas, a squire who like Richard Redmayn, the controller of the king's horses, was imprisoned at Chester'.

Sir Richard was imprisoned at Chester in August!

Just a couple of lines with a reference to a document in the National Archives but it was the first, the only evidence of Sir Richard's whereabouts that summer.

Armed with this information, my curiosity escalated. Could this evidence of Richard being imprisoned help me work out where he'd been and what he'd done between being in Waterford in mid-July and in prison in Chester in the middle of August?

Going back to my books and sources, including Dr Johnston's article and invaluable thesis on *Richard II and Ireland*, I found that the king had finally left Waterford around 24th July and that Sir Richard's work in Waterford had paid dividends. Some horses were brought back though many had to be left behind as there weren't enough ships available that had been adapted to carry horses. The king did have more soldiers with him than expected but at the expense of leaving equipment behind, including weapons, armour and the tents, pavilions and beds which normally made the king and his nobles comfortable when travelling.

There's no explicit reference to Sir Richard travelling with the king but his status as Master of the King's Horse and the practical importance of his role in the return from Ireland strongly suggest he was with the king. And if he didn't return from Ireland with the king, how had he ended up in prison at Chester?

The king and his army landed safely at Milford Haven in the far south-west of Wales but it took a week to travel forty miles to Carmarthen, slow progress given the need to confront Henry of Lancaster. Then, at Carmarthen, the king heard news that must have demoralised him. The soldiers raised by the duke of York, who'd been left in command in England, had refused to fight against Henry, and York himself had met Henry and agreed not to oppose him. Support for the king was disintegrating. Unsurprisingly, given this news, even the soldiers he'd brought from Ireland were now deserting him.

The few days the king spent at Carmarthen were a turning point. The royal party split in two. The king, seemingly afraid he was about to be captured by Henry's men, headed north to Conwy, hoping to link up with the earl of Salisbury and the advance guard who'd been sent ahead from Waterford. The king's desperation can be gauged by the stories that he travelled disguised as a priest with fewer than twenty companions. Their journey north took around nine or ten days only for him to be taken into custody by Henry of Lancaster at Flint castle on 16 August.

The rest of King Richard's household was left behind at Carmarthen and when their head, the earl of Worcester, heard of the king's secret departure, he broke his white wand, the symbol of his office as Steward of the Household, and declared the royal household at an end. Worcester and his colleagues then travelled to Chester to submit to Henry of Lancaster.

Did Richard Redmayn travel with the king or was he left behind with Worcester? The chief argument for him staying with Worcester and the majority of the household is that he's not listed as one of the king's travelling companions in an account written by Jean de Creton, a Frenchman who was at Conwy when King Richard arrived there. Creton names two knights among the king's travelling companions, neither of whom was Sir Richard. That said, Creton only names 9 of the 13 men he says were with the king so it's possible that Sir Richard was amongst the nameless four.

The alternative argument, that Sir Richard was one of the king's companions, is the evidence provided by Dr Johnston that he was imprisoned alongside Janico Dartas. As Dartas was on Creton's list of the king's companions and was imprisoned, then it seems likely that Sir Richard, his fellow prisoner, had also been with the king on the journey north from Carmarthen. It may also be relevant that Sir Richard and Janico Dartas had already known each other for a decade or more. Dr Simon Walker's research reveals that Dartas, who was from Navarre, spent many years in England. He served with Sir Richard's connections, the earl of Northumberland and his son, Hotspur, and fought at Otterburn in 1388 where Sir Richard's father was one of the English commanders and Sir Richard may also have fought. Dartas was also, like Sir Richard, a notable jousting, an esquire in the royal household at the same time as Sir Richard and took part in Richard II's first expedition to Ireland, as had Richard Redmayn.

[Every fibre of my fingers wanted to type 'had probably known each other' rather than 'had already known each other' in that last paragraph because there's no conclusive evidence that they had known each other for some years but after several drafts I finally persuaded myself not to hedge around my statement and leave out that cautious 'probably' – the evidence that they knew each other may not be conclusive but it is compelling!]

The other 'prison-linked' argument for Sir Richard being with the king is that the earl of Worcester and others left behind do not seem to have been imprisoned when they met Henry at Chester – so as Sir Richard was imprisoned it's less likely he was with Worcester's group.

Reviewing that evidence, there seems to be a slightly stronger argument that Richard travelled with the king and that this then led to his imprisonment along with other members of the king's party. If he was imprisoned, however, his time in prison was happily brief, just four or five days. It likely began on 16th August at Flint castle (where Henry of Lancaster met the king and his companions) or later that day at Chester, by which time the king was clearly Henry's prisoner, and ended on 20th August, the day that Dartas was released and Henry and the king left Chester for Westminster. During the intervening few days, several of Henry's supporters may have spoken to Henry on Sir Richard's behalf – perhaps the earl of Northumberland, Hotspur, William Gascoigne or Richard's step-brother, Lord Greystoke.

What next? Hopefully Richard immediately headed to see Elizabeth and their family and put an end to her three months of anxiety. Events had moved so fast that, unless Richard sent a messenger on ahead, the first Elizabeth heard of his imprisonment was probably from Richard himself.

I started this chapter frustrated by the gap in our knowledge of Sir Richard's movements in the summer of 1399. Happily, I've gone some way to filling that gap with the discovery that he was imprisoned so it's time to turn to my second question for this chapter and that's about Sir Richard's change of loyalty. At some point he decided to support Henry of Lancaster who was crowned that October as Henry IV. This support for Henry may seem surprising, given that Sir Richard had been so close to Richard II, so why did he turn from that old loyalty and support Henry, the man who had imprisoned him at Chester?

A cynical view is that rewards of wealth and power were all that men like Sir Richard were interested in – and Richard did receive rewards within a month of Henry's coronation. Although he was replaced as sheriff of Cumberland (his term of office was due to end within two months anyway) King Henry renewed the grants Sir Richard had received from Richard II and his £20 annuity from the king's own duchy of Lancaster.

However, while wealth and power have been the sole motives for some people in every period of history, it's not true for everyone. As Professor Colin Richmond wrote of the gentry of the fifteenth century, *'Men were not Pavlovian dogs, jumping at the chance of a fee, a rent charge, a stewardship here, a parkership there ... We must not try to eliminate the subtleties, the richness of the texture of choice and decision lords and men were daily engrossed in.'*

In fairness to Richard, therefore, we should be looking for those 'subtleties, the richness of the texture of choice' that may have contributed to his decision to support Henry and not leap to the conclusion that his loyalty was easily bought. If that sounds naïve it may be worth taking a few lines to exemplify, through the process by which Henry IV became king, the subtle, sophisticated thought that was a feature of late medieval government and society.

For all the strength of the support for Henry, he needed legal justifications for his kingship. Research was undertaken to identify historical precedents for replacing a king. Detailed descriptions of Richard II's constitutional and personal failings were set out and he was required to renounce the crown to avoid setting a precedent for deposing a king by force. Overall, Henry's claim was based on God's will, the failings of Richard's government and Henry's own descent from previous kings, all carefully avoiding discussion of who had the closest claim by blood. Much intellectual thought therefore went into presenting the legal case for Henry's right to rule.

So, returning to Sir Richard's decision to support Henry IV, could there have been more subtle reasons other than the desire for rewards that may explain his choice?

One possibility is that Sir Richard respected Henry's abilities and ideals and so felt more comfortable with Henry as king than he had been with Richard II. Henry was renowned for his knightly prowess, his soldiering and jousting, his crusading expeditions to Prussia, all qualities that mattered to Sir Richard and also suggested that Henry had the ability to establish stability and peace in England. In contrast Sir Richard had direct experience of the instability of Richard II's rule, corroded by the king's desire for revenge on his critics. Stability may have been particularly important to both Sir Richard and Elizabeth in the wake of Sir Richard's experience as a prisoner. How could they best ensure that their ancestors' achievements in increasing the family's lands, power and status were maintained?

Sir Richard would also have been familiar with the distinction between loyalty to the individual wearing the crown and loyalty to the crown as an institution, and that there were occasions when it was legitimate to put loyalty to the institution of monarchy and the country before loyalty to the man on the throne. This distinction may have influenced his decision to support Henry. In doing so he was putting the good of the country before the good of the individual, Richard II.

Another reason for Sir Richard giving his support to Henry was that many men he knew well had been supporting Henry since his return from exile. Why not join them, especially as he himself had long-established ties with the duchy of Lancaster? Sir Richard would also have been aware that Henry needed his backing. Henry lacked supporters amongst the nobility – some nobles were too old to provide significant support, others were still children and yet others stubbornly loyal to Richard II. Richard Redmayn wasn't a nobleman but he was powerful and respected in both the north-west and Yorkshire – exactly the kind of experienced knight Henry needed to buttress his regime.

The final contributory factor may have been the most persuasive. The work of the Nobel prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman and his colleague, Amos Tversky, has shown that instinct and emotion play a far bigger part in our decision-making than we care to admit. For Sir Richard and Elizabeth, therefore, whether to support Henry IV or Richard II, may have been a decision that revolved around their instinctive feel for what was best for them and their children and how best to avoid the sensations of fear and alarm that had been aroused by the events of 1399 and by Sir Richard's imprisonment.

One final point about Richard's support for Henry IV – though the evidence suggests he gave Henry his support very early in the new reign this doesn't mean he never had second thoughts, moments when he wondered if he'd made the right choice. One of those moments may have come very soon after the new king's coronation. In early January 1400, just three months into Henry's reign, a group of noblemen and bishops planned to assassinate Henry and restore Richard II as king. Fortunately for Henry, the plans of the Epiphany Rising (as it became known) were leaked, giving him time to take action. The Rising disintegrated and its leaders fled, only to be murdered by the commons.

Despite the speed with which the rising fell apart, it may well have left Sir Richard and Elizabeth wondering if supporting Henry IV was the right choice. They'd have heard that the rising could have been far more dangerous if better co-ordinated and that there were still many supporters of Richard II eager to restore their king to his throne. Even the news that Richard II had been starved to death at Pontefract castle soon after the rising didn't stop many people believing the rumours that King Richard was still alive. Sir Richard had made his choice but it would be a considerable time before he knew that it had been the right one.

Am I pleased with what I've found out about Richard and Elizabeth in 1399, in this and the previous chapter? I certainly am. I'm still left with uncertainties about the Redmayns' experiences in 1399 but, Holy Monkeys, it's been a fascinating story to try to unravel.

Firstly, I'm pleased to have explored the revolution of 1399 from the perspective of a single family. In just a few weeks Sir Richard and Elizabeth's lives had been turned upside down and they stand for thousands of families who experienced similar anxieties, fears and upheaval and, in some cases, bereavements as a result of other people's choices and actions.

Secondly, it's been important to think through the uncertainties and anxieties that Elizabeth experienced. It's all too easy to see the events of 1399 solely through the eyes of the men involved,

especially the kings and noblemen, but Elizabeth must have been deeply affected by the developing onrush of news and rumours and then by a gathering, looming sense of crisis. As the mother of a young family, she had come through one period of widowhood. That summer she may have feared that she was about to face another.

Thirdly, I've filled that blank space in Richard's experiences that summer. I know more about the responsibilities Richard shouldered in his work as Master of the King's Horse in Ireland. His responsibilities were considerable and had to be carried out under pressure mixed with uncertainty – a deeply stressful experience. I also know about his possible movements when Richard II returned from Ireland and his imprisonment but what also feels important is now being able to build on this knowledge about where he was and what he did, to think about how these experiences may have affected him. Within the space of just a handful of days, Sir Richard had plummeted from his senior role in the royal household to imprisonment in Chester castle. He didn't know if or when he'd be released and there may even have been moments when he wondered if not just his career but his life was hurtling to a close.

This may seem an unlikely occasion to experience one of those cat-sitting moments but, if I think back to my own deeply traumatic moments in hospital, I do feel an acute awareness of Richard as a fellow human being living 'in the face of the unknown'. And that in turn, using my own experiences of the impact of trauma, makes me wonder about what long-term effects the experiences of the summer of 1399 may have had on Richard's thoughts, feelings and choices in the future.

How do I know?

Notes on my sources and reading for Chapters 7 and 8

For these two chapters, in addition to the biographies and sources listed earlier I found the following most helpful:

Dorothy Johnston, *Richard II's departure from Ireland, July 1399*, *English Historical Review*, 1983.

and her unpublished thesis:

Dorothy Johnston, *Richard II and Ireland 1395-1399* (Dublin, 1976)

Extracts from Jean de Creton's chronicle and other contemporary accounts can be read in:

Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397-1400, The Reign of Richard II*, 1993

For the quotation from Colin Richmond about the motives of nobles and gentry see:

Colin Richmond, 'After McFarlane' in *History*, 68, 222 (February 1983), 46–60