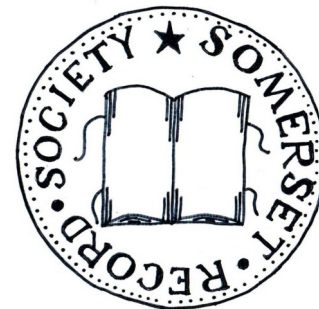


OFF THE RECORD

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOMERSET RECORD SOCIETY

ISSUE 7: SUMMER 2024



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2024 Somerset Record Society Annual General Meeting will be held at the Town Hall, Chard Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard, TA20 1PP on Saturday 5th October from 2pm. There are various public car parks nearby, the nearest being the Lace Mill car park on Boden Street.

There will be a short break after the meeting for refreshments after which Volume 102 will be launched by its author, Colin Brett, who will give a lecture on 'Tudor Somerset Wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury'.

Papers for the AGM are enclosed with this newsletter.

Members are welcome to bring guests. There will also be the opportunity to purchase previous publications by the Society.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Volume 102

Entitled 'Somerset Wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1501 to 1569', edited by Colin J Brett. This volume will be available at the Annual General Meeting.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

If you would like to contribute an article to the next newsletter please email submissions to the editor at offtherecord@somersetrecordsociety.org.uk

Articles should be received by 31st March 2025. If you are submitting an image with your article please indicate that you have sought the necessary copyright permission for it to be reproduced.

FUNERAL OF SIR JOHN STAWELL

Researching in the British Library recently, I was surprised to find amongst a set of naval manuscripts a detailed account of the funeral of Sir John Stawell (1600-62), probably the greatest landowner in Somerset at that date. This reveals not only the scale of his landholdings in Somerset but also his defiantly, perhaps anachronistically, feudal outlook. It evokes a funeral of such heraldic grandeur that in modern Britain could only be compared with that of a sovereign.

Stawell, as is well-known, was a dedicated servant of Charles I during the 1630s and 40s, who raised a regiment at his own expense to fight the Parliamentary armies in the first civil war. In consequence his ancestral home at Cothelstone, on the southern flank of the Quantocks, held by his family since the 12th century, was largely destroyed by cannon from the Bridgwater garrison, and Stawell was sent to the Tower and his estates were sold. On his release at the Restoration, Stawell's lands were restored, but he died soon afterwards at Low Ham near Langport in February 1662. His elaborate funeral took place two months afterwards.

The document, in BL Add Ms. 32094, provides instructions for the conduct of the funeral, which involved a vast procession on horseback from Ham to Cothelstone, a distance of some 22 miles, which took more than a day to complete. The order of precedence in the procession is set out in comprehensive detail. It would be led by two 'conductors', followed by gentlemen, esquires and knights riding in pairs, side by side.

There were two trumpets at the head, then Sir John's standard — a flag. Then came 'the bayliffes of his severall mannours', twenty-two in total. Then invited guests, the great and good of Restoration Somerset, including leading members of the Berkeley, Bassett, Dodington, Phelps and Warr families. Then eight divines, also riding 'two and two'. Then Sir John Poulett, followed by George

Speke, high sheriff of Somerset.

Two more trumpets, a second standard and the 'mourning horse' announced the second part of the procession, led by the preacher, Dr Meredith, and two knights of the Bath bearing pennants, 'the one of his single coat and the other of his quarterings with the arms of his lady'. Then Stawell's domestic servants, led by two huntsmen, two grooms of the stable, his baker, caterer, gardener, cook, scuttler, chamberlain and steward. His page, riding alone, followed by two 'officers of his hounds' completed this part of the procession. The third and final part was made up of seven gentlemen (one a surgeon), nine military officers, a doctor of physic, and two esquires.

At last, in the train of all these mourners, came the accoutrements of the deceased, in all their heraldic pomp. The gauntlet and spurs, born by Rouge Dragon; the helm and crest, by Bluemantle; the sword and target by Richmond Herald; the coat of arms by Norroy King of Arms. Finally his body 'in the charriot covered with velvet' drawn by six horses, followed by his son and heir George Stawell Esq, chief mourner, and his four assistants: Ralph Stawell, Angel and George Gray and Gregory Gibbs, and several other knights, esquires and gentlemen not in mourning.

At the end of the first day, Tuesday 22 April, the procession reached Bishops Lydeard, about two miles south of Cothelstone, where the chariot was attended in the churchyard by servants throughout the night. On Wednesday 23 it was brought to the church of Cothelstone, 'and there placed within a hearse of velvet adorned with his arms and badges' until Dr Meredith had given his sermon and Stawell's achievements (his arms and accoutrements) had been offered.

The document goes on to describe the feast provided to the mourners, and the rooms in which the different social ranks were entertained; and notes abruptly that at the end of this lengthy and elaborate event the procession returned the way it came, to Lower Ham.

Wikipedia has an excellent summary of Sir John Stawell's career, if less authoritative than John Wroughton's entry in *ODNB*. SRS members can find additional detail of Stawell's tribulations during the 1640s and his feud with John Ashe of Freshford in the introduction to SRS vol.101, *Clothiers and Merchants in Spanish Cloth*.

John Gaisford

909: IS WELLS CATHEDRAL SCHOOL REALLY 1,115 YEARS OLD?

Wells Cathedral School has literally existed since time immemorial i.e. from before surviving records. Today it claims a foundation date of 909 AD, firmly within the Anglo-Saxon period in the reign of Edward the Elder, son of Alfred the Great and second king of England. This makes Wells potentially the 15th oldest school still open in the world (the oldest is the King's School Canterbury which, with a foundation date of 597, makes Wells look a positive stripling). However there are huge 'ifs' behind this claim. We have no written evidence of the school's existence at all until 1188 when the school is indirectly referred to in a land charter – one of its signatories was one Peter De Winton described as Master of the School (*Magister Scolar*) at Wells. Moreover the record of the school's existence is so fragmented that the school De Winton presided over may not even be the same one that existed in the 15th century when regular records begin.

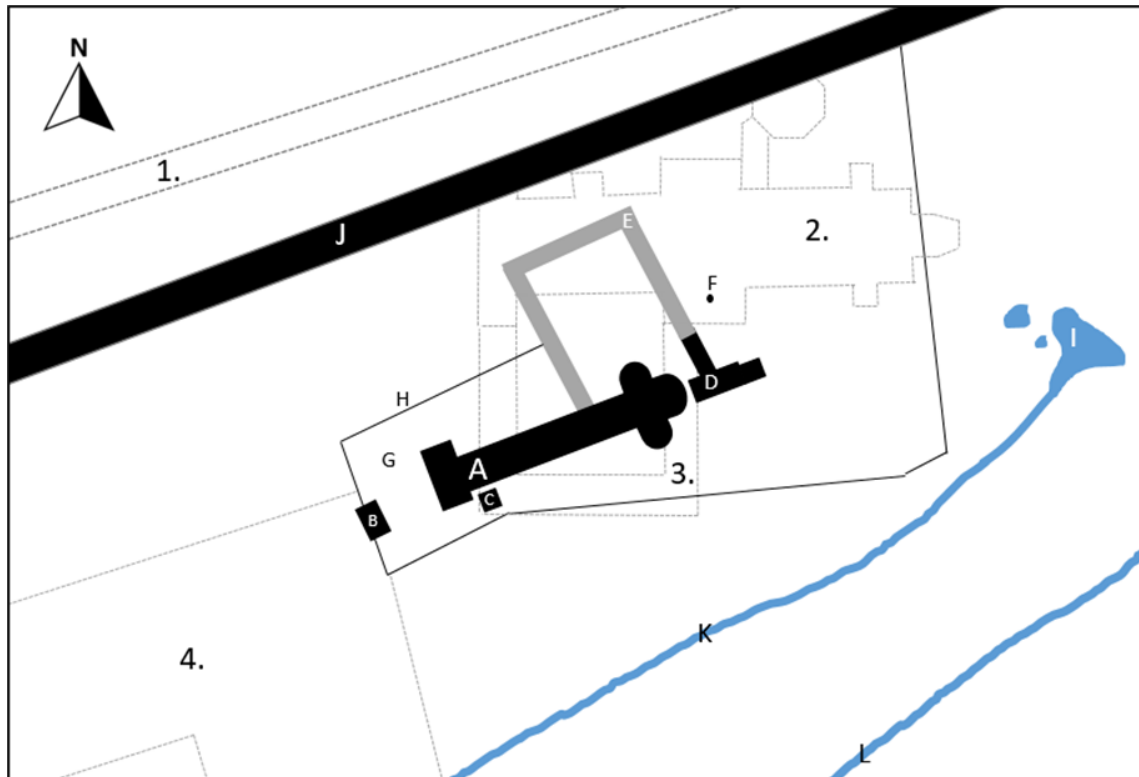
That is the bad news. However, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. In fact we should not be surprised. A huge amount of the cathedral records were lost during the Reformation of the 16th century, in fact only a single document survives from before the Norman Conquest related to the diocese of Wells, the papal bull appointing the last Anglo-Saxon Bishop, Giso. Moreover the chance survival of the 1188 reference eliminates the most likely possibility of the school's abeyance.



The only remnant of Edward the Elder's cathedral surviving above ground, the original font now located in the current cathedral's south transept.

Standard Norman practice was to move bishoprics to large towns, and this was done in the case of Wells in 1090 when a new cathedral was built in Bath. Wells was demoted and would not become a cathedral city again until the current building began construction in 1239. However the De Winton reference tells us that the school survived the loss of cathedral status and the way it is written implies that the school was not a new institution in 1188.

There are also compelling reasons for suggesting the foundation date of 909. This was the year that Edward the Elder divided the former, huge diocese of Sherborne into three pieces, the most northerly of which became the diocese of Wells. He also ordered that a new stone cathedral be founded, the font of which survives today in the current cathedral. The man responsible for directing the project was Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury,



- A: Edward the Elder's cathedral (909)
- B: Gatehouse (extant Penniless Porch is built on the foundations)
- C: Possible bell tower
- D: St Mary's Mortuary Chapel (mid-10th century)
- E: Projected plan of 10th century cloister (including cathedral school?)
- F: 10th century font (current position)
- G: Vestibule area
- H: 10th century wall
- I: Wells
- J: Original route of St Andrew's Street
- K: Millstream
- L: St Andrew's Stream

- 1. Modern route of St Andrew's Street
- 2. Plan of the current cathedral (1176-1450)
- 3. Plan of the current cloister (13th century)
- 4. Plan of the modern Market Square

and architect of a renaissance in learning in the reign of Edward's father, Alfred the Great. It was under Plegmund's influence that Alfred ordered that all new cathedrals should have schools attached to them for the education of future priests in Latin and for the sons of the elite who would be taught in Old English. Given Edward was assiduous in fulfilling his father's wishes in other ways, it seems unlikely that he would have neglected to found a school at Wells. Moreover his choice of Athelm, a noted scholar in his own right, as first Bishop of Wells also points to the existence of some sort of educational institution. Interestingly, Athelm was uncle to King Edgar's Archbishop of Canterbury Dunstan of Baltonsborough who in 973 would write the English coronation service which we saw enacted for the 47th time last year. This raises the tantalising (if unprovable) possibility that Dunstan was one of the first Wellensians.



Victorian window in the cathedral's north transept showing Edward the Elder - king in 909.

There is therefore a persuasive if circumstantial case for a foundation date of 909. Our greatest school benefactor Canon Edward Plumtre certainly thought so. He essentially re-founded what was by the 1880s a moribund institution and it was he who seems to have settled on 909 as the school's foundation date, and indeed prevailed on the then Headmaster George Abrams to adopt an Anglo-Saxon school motto in tribute to the school's roots: 'Be yourself' in both Latin and Old English '*Esto Quod*

Es/ Beo Þat þu eart' derived from a passage from the oldest surviving textbook in English, Aelfric of Eynsham's *Colloquy* written in the 990s: 'Whether you be a priest, or monk, or peasant, or soldier, know this: **Be what you are**. It is much humiliation and shame for a man not to be that which he is, and that which he should be'.

Can we prove any of this? Sadly, probably not. There are however two possibilities for future research. Although the vast majority of mediaeval documents relating to Wells were destroyed during the Reformation, correspondence with the Papacy would have been duplicated and it is quite possible that definitive evidence survives in a distant corner of the Vatican Apostolic Archive. Anyone pursuing this line of enquiry would need reservoirs of patience (it is the largest archive in the world - over 53 miles of shelving) and fluent mediaeval Latin (i.e. not me!). Alternatively archaeology might help. The foundations of Edward's cathedral were unearthed in 1978 by Warwick Rodwell and the edge of a cloister discovered that presumably would have contained the first school building. However, excavating that would require digging up the floor of the current cathedral's nave, bodies and all...

So is the school 1115 years old? In my view, yes. Probably.

Chris Eldridge

OUR LITERATE ANCESTORS

There's a widespread belief that our ancestors, back in the Middle Ages, were mostly illiterate. When I gave a lecture in Taunton last autumn, one of the audience suggested that the figure was 98%! It's often assumed that only clergy were literate and that teachers in schools were also clergy. In fact a widespread ability to read, English and often Latin, can be shown in two ways. First there is the huge survival of documents and books from the Middle Ages, which some people wrote for others to read. Secondly, a large number of schools can be shown to have existed. And these came into existence only because people wished to be literate.

Nobody kept systematic records of schools in the Middle Ages, so our knowledge of them depends largely on casual references to school buildings and teachers. I have been collecting these for over sixty years, and it is becoming clear how many there were. Since nearly all teachers charged fees, there had to be a demand for the education that they supplied, and the demand was evidently high.

The earliest recorded schools in Somerset are at Bath, which first appears in 1113, and at Wells in 1140. These were the two cathedral cities of the diocese, and the Church required all cathedrals to maintain a school. There were probably other schools in the county in the 1100s but it is only later on, when records become more plentiful, that we encounter them. The 1200s bring us Bridgwater, Crewkerne, and Taunton, and the 1300s Axbridge, Dunster, Glastonbury, and Wellington. Ilminster turns up in the 1400s, and Bruton and Mells in the early 1500s. Nearly all these places were market towns, so it is probably safe to say that there were similar schools in Chard, Frome, and Yeovil, where we have not yet discovered any.

All these schools were probably grammar schools teaching reading, writing, and also Latin. That is because fees for learning to read alone were small, and schoolmasters needed to teach Latin in order to make a decent living. But beyond the grammar schools, there were unguessable numbers of elementary schools teaching children to read English or to sing. They were kept by parish clerks, choirmasters in churches, and literate people both men and women who combined teaching with a craft such as weaving or sewing. Such work could be done in tandem with teaching a small class. Very few of these schools are recorded, but they have turned up in Shapwick, Wrington, and Yeovil.

Even that is not the whole story because the larger monasteries kept schools for the boys they maintained out of charity in their almonries, to

which favoured boys from outside were also admitted. We hear of these at Barlinch Priory, Glastonbury Abbey and Taunton Priory among others. The nuns of Cannington Priory educated wealthy girls. The great households of the wealthier gentry and the nobility also maintained teachers for the proprietor's children, wards and even choristers if there was a well-staffed household chapel.

Altogether there were numerous opportunities to learn to read in medieval Somerset, open to boys and girls. Only boys went on to learn grammar or Latin, and it was more expensive to do so, but the likely presence of grammar schools in the cathedral cities and market towns shows that many parents sent their sons to such schools. Knowing Latin opened up careers besides that of a clergyman. The skill was needed by gentry, merchants, and administrators. And always in education there is a desire for the status that it gives to one's children.

One Somerset school provides evidence of its teaching. This was at Barlinch Priory in the early 16th century. The schoolmaster, probably a layman, dictated notes to his pupils and made them write simple sentences in everyday Latin. 'In the middle of the night I was very alarmed, for my window rattled in the wind.' 'I was here in school today at half past five [a.m.].' 'A wasp pierced my hand with a sting.' 'If I go out of school without the master's leave, I shall be beaten, beyond a doubt.'



A 15th century French image depicting Aristotle teaching Alexander the Great and other boys

I am planning a website to make available all the information I have collected about schools over the whole of England. I would be pleased to hear of any schools before 1550 that anyone has found in Somerset, and the information will be properly credited to the discoverer. In return I can pass on what I have found. Bath is a particular problem. No medieval school has yet been found there after 1113 although there must have been at least one grammar school and several reading schools. I can be reached by email at n.i.orme@exeter.ac.uk

Nicholas Orme



NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

This year the Council welcomed four new members. Below is a short introduction to each of them.

John Gaisford

John Gaisford is an early modern social historian with a special interest in West Country cloth manufacturers and merchants. His PhD thesis (Birkbeck, University of London, 2015) was on 'Capital in the Countryside: Social Change in West Wiltshire, 1530-1680' and explored the impact of the white broadcloth trade on rural society. He has published articles on Somerset themes in the *Agricultural History Review* and *Huntington Library Quarterly*. He is the editor of SRS vol. 101, *Clothiers and Merchants in Spanish Cloth: the Ashe family of Somerset, Wiltshire and London, 1627-65*.

Melanie Devine

Melanie Devine was born in North Yorkshire, and much of her interests in the past have centred on the Late Medieval period in that area. Her unpublished doctorate, 'Richmondshire, 1372-1425', was completed in 2006, and examines the Honour of Richmond, historically held by the Dukes of Brittany, and the subsequent power and influence of John of Gaunt and the Neville family.

She has published essays in two volumes:

'The Dog that Did Not Bark: Richmondshire and the 1405 Rebellion', in *Richard Scrope, Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg, (Shaun Tyas, Donington, 2007) which was also presented at the conference to mark the 600th Anniversary of the beheading of the Archbishop of York, Richard Scrope in 1405.

'The Lordship of Richmond in the Later Middle Ages' in *Liberties and Identities in the Medieval British Isles*, ed. Michael Prestwich, (Boydell, Woodbridge, 2008)

And a series of five annual articles for *The Richmond Review*:

Richmondshire in the Later Middle Ages, A J Pollard and M J Devine, (Richmond and District Civic Society, Richmond, number 33, 2010); *Richmondshire and the Realm in the Later Middle Ages, part i, 1342-1399*, (Richmond and District Civic Society, Richmond, number 34, 2011); *Richmondshire and the Realm in the Later Middle Ages, part ii, 1342-1399*, (Richmond and District Civic Society, Richmond, number 35, 2011); *The Livre des Domaines des Ducs de Bretagne en Engleterre, part 1 and part 2*, (Richmond and District Civic Society, Richmond, numbers 36 and 37, 2013 and 2014)

Chris Eldridge

Chris Eldridge comes from Cheshire and was first attracted to history by the Roman remains of Chester where he went to school. He studied at Magdalene College, Cambridge and after a brief stint in industry became a history teacher. After teaching at Highgate School in London, Manchester Grammar School and the Royal Grammar School, Guildford he was appointed Head of History at Wells Cathedral School in 2013.

Inspired by the school's foundation date of 909 he developed a specialism in early medieval history and in recognition of his work promoting this period in secondary schools he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 2021. He is the author of *Aenglaland: Nation Forging and State Building in Anglo-Saxon England 593-1002* (Perepитеia Press, Bristol 2015), 'Teaching, Learning and Sharing Medieval History for all' in *Teaching History No.165* (Dec. 2016) and *Imperium: The Fall of Antiquity and the Birth of Europe 284-118* (Perepитеia Press, Bristol 2018). He is married and has two children, both at Wells Cathedral School.

Phil Norrey

Phil was awarded a first class BA degree in History at the University of Bristol in 1984. He went on to complete a PhD in 1988 with a thesis entitled 'The relationship between Central Government and Local Government in Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire 1660-1688'.

Phil pursued a career in Local Government, working for both Somerset County Council and Devon County Council over the years. He oversaw the transfer of the then Devon Record Office from central Exeter to Great Moor House on the outskirts of the city, and later sponsored the project to establish the South West Heritage Trust, bringing together archival services in Somerset and Devon in 2014. He also presented a paper on the men of the Somerset Light Infantry 1914/15 to the 'Somerset Remembers' First World War Project research symposium in 2015.

Phil retired from Devon County Council in 2022 providing him with more time to indulge his passion for historical research! He is currently editing the Bull Manuscripts, held by the University of Bristol, for future publication by the Society. This is a collection of the family correspondence of the Bull family of Shapwick which covers the period from 1606 to 1690.

It seems likely that many of you, like me, will have missed a fascinating piece of craftsmanship concerning the Bayeux Tapestry. Over a thirty-three year period, the Bayeux Tapestry was re-created, by hand, on three million tiny pieces of steel. The pieces are off-cuts from patterning disks used in large, industrial knitting machines. Each piece is about 7 square millimeters in size and there are 72 on each disk.

The tiny pieces of metal were laid out to form a continuous surface upon masking tape and an eight coloured version of the original was created on the surface using enamel paints. It was then given three coats of varnish.

The project was carried out by Michael Linton, aided in the final section by his daughter, Rachael. It is some sixty-four meters in length and weighs 350 kilograms.

Details, many pictures of the work and many other interesting items can be found at www.1066.co.nz. It is well worth a visit, especially as it has now ceased touring and been put into conservation.

David Victor

FARLEIGH HUNGERFORD, THE HUNGERFORDS, AND RICHARD DUKE OF GLOUCESTER

This paper focuses on an indenture of 14 May 1469 between Richard Duke of Gloucester, the future Richard III, and Margaret Lady Hungerford and Botreaux (d. 1478). Margaret's original survives among the Hastings Manuscripts at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California and Gloucester's counterpart is copied into his cartulary in British Library MS Cotton Julius BXII.¹ The present author used the indenture when charting the Hungerfords' struggle to retain their lands during the Wars of the Roses and Gloucester's maximisation of the great estate.² The Duke appears in a sympathetic light.

The rise of the Hungerfords on the Somerset/Wiltshire border is documented in their cartularies³ and their lives in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.⁴ There were three barons Hungerford: Walter (d. 1449), his son Robert II (d. 1459), and his grandson Robert III, Lord Hungerford and Moleyns. Each married an heiress. The lands accumulated in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Devon, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset and Wiltshire were scheduled to become

the largest noble estate in southern England, but this destiny was never fulfilled. In 1453 Robert III was captured at Châtillon, the last battle of the Hundred Years War, and ransomed. All the Hungerford estates were mortgaged to pay the ransom. Robert III was loyal to the Lancastrian Henry VI and a diehard enemy of the Yorkist Edward IV. He was attainted for treason in 1461, executed in 1464, and the Hungerford lands were forfeited. The most important of them were bestowed by King Edward on his under-aged brother Richard Duke of Gloucester. However Gloucester's officers could not secure his rights. The mortgages meant that Robert III never had possession of any of the Hungerford lands and his mother Margaret, in her own right Lady Botreaux, proved a doughty opponent. The Moleyns lands, also mortgaged, belonged to Robert III's wife Eleanor Moleyns. Three times Margaret was placed in custody, but she strove nevertheless to carry out the wills of Walter and Robert II, to pay off the ransom, and to preserve the Hungerford inheritance for her eldest grandson Sir Thomas (ex 1470), her great granddaughter Mary (later Hastings, d. 1533) and her second grandson Sir Walter (d. 1516). Margaret and her trustees had legal rights and were in possession, but the Duke had the power and the reversion when the ransom was paid and after her death. Strangely he did not exert his might as he did later against the dowager-countesses of Oxford and Warwick.



East Gatehouse, Farleigh Hungerford Castle

The 1469 indenture was the peace treaty that terminated hostilities. It handed immediate seisin of Farleigh Hungerford Castle to the Duke, the orderly succession of the Hungerford properties to him after Margaret's death, paid off the ransom and enabled the pious benefactions that Margaret wanted so much. The ultra modern castles of Farleigh and Sudeley (Glouc.) were the jewels of the young Duke's southern estates, although it cannot be demonstrated that he resided in either of them. After 1471 Gloucester became the greatest of northern magnates instead and indeed swapped Farleigh and Sudeley for other properties in the North.⁵ That in 1473 his sister-in-law Isabel Duchess of Clarence gave birth there to Margaret, the future countess of Salisbury,⁶ may indicate that he leased Farleigh Castle to his brother George Duke of Clarence.



The tomb of Sir Thomas Hungerford (d.1397) and his wife Lady Joan (d.1412) in the chapel at Farleigh Hungerford Castle, father of the first baron Hungerford

Despite Robert III's treasons, 'the right high & myghty prince Richard Duk of Gloucestre' was not in control and therefore 'condescended, accorded, concluded & agreed' to the terms of the indenture. He secured the castle, manor, park and church of Farleigh and the original manor of Hungerford Court in Berkshire. Virtually all the Wiltshire and Cornish lands were retained by Margaret, the ransom trustees, and other trustees of Heytesbury almshouse and the second Hungerford chantry in Salisbury cathedral. In the short term, Margaret won, but only for her life. She promised not to convey any of these properties away from Duke Richard and guaranteed that all would pass to him on her death. Margaret could not obtain the necessary royal licence for the two foundations by herself, but Richard promised of 'his benigne grace' to assist the two foundations as 'mediatour and meane to the kynges highness ... to gete the kynges licence' within a year or as quickly as possible. 'And the seid duk of his more ample grace hath graunted the seid Margaret ... to be her verray special and gracious lord, during the which [time] the seid Margaret trustith will be to her a noble treasure', and to permit her to live out her last years 'without vexacion or trowble'. Since Margaret was exceptionally pious, Richard may have been gratified 'that she may daily pray to god for the royal estate of her souerayn lorde and also for the noble estate of seide duke, her good and gracious lorde'. Duke Richard won the assent to the indenture of King Edward, who duly signed it.

Syon Abbey. Gloucester nevertheless complied with the indenture: licences were forthcoming in 1472 for the almshouse, which survives, and the chantry, where indeed Margaret was buried.⁷ His observation for the law, his compassion to Margaret, and fulfilment of his promises even after further treasons portrays Gloucester more favourably than his normal reputation.

Footnotes:

1. Huntington MS HAP 3466; British Library MS Julius BXII ff. 126-28.
2. M. Hicks, *Richard III and his Rivals* (London. 1991). chs. 9-10, 13. These are the context of this paper.
3. *The Hungerford Cartulary, parts 1 and 2*, ed. J.L. Kirby, Wiltshire Record Society 49, 60 (1994-2007).
4. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, xxviii (2004), pp. 822-7.
5. M. Hicks, *Richard III: The Self-Made King* (London, 2019), p.187.
6. *Complete Peerage*, xi. 199.
7. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1467-77*, pp. 306, 311.

Michael Hicks

Actually the agreement came just in time, as Margaret's grandson Sir Thomas committed further treasons and was executed in 1470 and Margaret herself was consigned again to temporary custody at