Divisive Weddings and a Funeral: Royal Women and Reading's Abbeys

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Reading Abbey's connections with Queen Adeliza and Empress Matilda, the wife and daughter of its founder, Henry I, are well known: the former was a prominent patron who is probably buried there, and the latter brought the abbey's prized relic, the hand of St James, to England in 1125.[1] The connections of several other royal women are considerably more obscure or have become confused in recent histories. This article explores the variety of relationships existing between the monastic foundations at Reading and medieval royal women. Its primary focus is three women whose role and connection with those abbeys requires some clarification and correction in the popular record and, in some cases, among scholars too. The first of these is Queen Ælfthryth (d.c. 1000) who was King Edgar's second or third wife. She is reputed to have founded a nunnery whose estates were subsequently given to Henry I's abbey, but the circumstances of this foundation are fraught with complications and misrepresentations. This article re-examines Ælfthryth's possible role in the nunnery's foundation and considers the probable circumstances of its demise. The second royal woman is Blanche of Lancaster (d. 1368) who married John of Gaunt at the abbey in 1359. That ceremony is frequently conflated with the details of an earlier event, leading to assertions that it occurred in 'the queen's chapel' within the abbey.[2] There was no such chapel, so the different ceremonies and their context are set out below. Finally, Constance of York (d. 1416), one of the key perpetrators of the strife between Blanche's descendants and her own house, was the last member of the royal family to be buried at Reading Abbey. Constance's decision has not yet been fully explained so a possible resolution is offered here as well as a correction to the date sometimes given for her burial.

Ælfthryth and Reading's first abbey

Queen Ælfthryth's role in Reading's history has become a spicy factoid to insert in tourist leaflets and even the inside of the town's buses. At the time of writing, an image of Reading Minster visible to travellers on the number 10 is accompanied by the legend,

> In 979, Queen Aethelfrith, wife of King Edgar of England, founded a royal nunnery on this site as an act of repentance for the murder of her stepson, King Edward the Martyr. All that remains of this nunnery is a Saxon door, most likely used by the nuns to attend services. Danes destroyed the nunnery in the 11th century.

Every clause in this paragraph is either questionable or wrong, yet similar statements are scattered across the internet, drawing on writings from the sixteenth century and more recent popular works.[3] The foundation date given here is based solely on the fact that Edward the Martyr died in 978. The location of the nunnery is an educated guess but many scholars consider it more likely that the nunnery was located on the same site as Henry I's abbey.[4] Moreover, archaeologists have dated the present Minster's oldest doorway to the twelfth-century and the only Saxon survival discovered on the site is a coffin containing ninth-century coins.[5] As previously indicated, Edgar's queen was not called Aethelfrith, but Ælfthryth, which is sometimes modernised to Elfrida. Numerous scholars have pointed out that the stories of Ælfthryth's role as regicide are late and compromised, and this will be examined further below alongside the even later speculation of her role as foundress. Finally, as Pauline Stafford argued more than twenty years ago, the assertion that Reading's nunnery was destroyed by the Danes is another late hypothesis, one that ignores evidence of an abbess at Reading mentioned in the Domesday Book.[6]

Reading nunnery's foundation, and the stories that have come to surround it, originated at a point when religious reformers were attempting to mould a Christian kingdom, powerful laymen were resisting elements of this, and hierarchies of authority were contested. It is essential to understand this wider context before trying to unravel the stories of Ælfthryth's act of regicide and her monastic foundations.

King Edgar (r. 959–975) supported the Benedictine reform movement yet refused to embrace the key expression of Christian society which was indissoluble, monogamous marriage. When he died young leaving children by three different mothers, political tensions were inevitable and were perhaps only resolved with the death of his eldest son, Edward the Martyr.[7] Edward's mother was named in an early twelfth-century chronicle as Æthelflaed the White.[8] Yet she has left so little trace in the sources that it is impossible to be certain whether they were actually married or if she was still living when Edgar married other women. Edgar's first clearly recorded wife was Wulfthryth who was probably chosen so that the king could build an alliance with her powerful family: he had apparently earlier tried to woo her kinswoman, Wulfhild, who refused to leave her nunnery for him.[9] After the birth of a single child, Edith, this marriage was dissolved and Wulfthryth became abbess of Wilton. Wulfthryth, like her daughter and stepson, was later venerated as a saint. It was after dissolving his union with Wulfthryth that Edgar married Reading nunnery's supposed founder, Ælfthryth. She too came from a powerful family. Her father was Ordgar, a magnate in south-west England who was created ealdorman at the time of her royal marriage. Her first husband had been Æthelwold, who was ealdorman of East Anglia and son of Æthelstan Half-King. So, although later stories depicted her marriage to Edgar as a love-match, it is most likely that it was sensibly politically motivated. Ælfthryth's first royal son, Edmund, predeceased his father but their younger son Æthelred was eventually to become king.[10]

Only a couple of years into the marriage with Ælfthryth, it appears that Edgar wished her children to be considered more throne-worthy than his firstborn, Edward. In the witness list of the foundation charter of the New Minster at Winchester, drawn up in 966, Ælfthryth's infant son Edmund was named after the king and Archbishop Dunstan as *clito legitimus* and so preceded his older brother Edward who was merely *clito procreatus*. They were followed by Ælfthryth, *legitima prefati regis coniunctx*.[11] This charter had been drawn up by Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester who was eventually an important ally to Ælfthryth. It was also Æthelwold who drew up the *Regularis Concordia* in about 970. This document set out the regulation of monastic houses in England,

including the king's oversight of male houses. According to its preface, Edgar

> wisely ordered his wife, Ælfthryth, to defend the houses of nuns like a fearless guardian, so that a man might help the men, a woman the women without any breath of scandal.[12]

A number of scholars have explored the possibility that Ælfthryth's revered status as queen had been buttressed by a coronation ceremony and have speculated on the connections between this ritual and the new iconography of the coronation of the Virgin to be seen in Æthelwold's Benedictional, a central document of the reform movement.[13] This has led to further conjecture about the inclusion of similar iconography in the later abbey at Reading, although details and evidence for Ælfthryth's coronation remain speculative.[14]

Ælfthryth's powerful position was thrown into jeopardy in 975 when Edgar died unexpectedly young. He was buried at Glastonbury Abbey, former home of another of the key Benedictine reformers, Archbishop Dunstan. Despite Ælfthryth's respected position and apparent support from Bishop Æthelwold, her only surviving son, Æthelred, did not become king. Instead, there seems to have been a struggle for power lasting some months before the throne was eventually given to Edward.[15] Edward's age is unknown, but he was perhaps as old as fourteen whereas Æthelred can only have been about seven.[16] The earliest sources are very vague about the circumstances of Edward's accession. The E text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that in the following year there were

> very manifold disturbances throughout the English race. And Ealdorman Ælfhere ordered very many monastic institutions to be overthrown which King Edgar earlier ordered the holy bishop Æthelwold to establish. And at that time also Oslac, the famous earl, was banished from the English race.[17]

This makes it look as if lords who had been unhappy with their estates being allocated to the new monasteries had seized the chance to set up a king who could be manipulated to undo Edgar's works. However, as

Anne Williams has demonstrated, the dispute was probably considerably more complex, neither party needs to be seen as particularly pro or anti-Benedictine reform in this, and Ælfhere was probably also one of Ælfthryth's allies.[18] The witness lists of Edward's surviving charters indicate that there was still considerable continuity between regimes and Archbishop Dunstan had not abandoned the court as he did on earlier occasions of conflict. A more significant motivating factor for those who chose Edward was very probably his greater age and consequently the hope that he might be able to provide stability more swiftly. The regime was nonetheless to be short-lived.

In 978, perhaps on 18 March as one version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* related, King Edward was murdered. The earliest notice of this is exceptionally short: 'King Edward was murdered and prince Æthelred, his brother came to the throne.'[19] Twenty or so years after the event, Byrhtferth of Ramsey gave a much more detailed account of events which has informed most subsequent interpretations. He explained, somewhat improbably, that Edward had been 'seeking the consolations of brotherly love' on a visit to ten-year-old Æthelred. Then 'thegns who were ardent supporters of his brother' went to meet the king: 'armed men surrounded him on all sides,' pulled him to right and left and injured him at which he 'jumped down from his horse and died'.[20] Byrhtferth was writing in the knowledge that Edward was now considered a saint. This means that his account, like all those that followed, is likely to have been coloured by assumptions of what saintly kingship meant and to have been mindful of the potential implications of retellings on the contemporary cult. In addition, Michael Lapidge has argued that Byrhtferth's entire work had scant concern for historical accuracy and was effectively 'an elaborate pastiche of literary, biblical and liturgical models.'[21] If we choose, nonetheless, to take Byhrtferth's account as broadly accurate, there are plenty of reasons to be sceptical of later stories that Ælfthryth was responsible for Edward's death. In the first place, Byhrtferth had actually wrongly identified Edward as Ælfthryth's elder son, so within his text there would be no obvious motive for her to conspire against him. Nor is there justification to assume that Byhrtferth meant that the murderers were Ælfthryth's household men, as some later writers have, since he was clear that they were *optimates et primores*.[22] According to a lament in the E text of *The*

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the king's relatives failed to avenge him, but this too should not be read as evidence of guilt because in the politically fragile situation that followed, it may well have been impossible to punish such powerful figures.[23] The location of the murder, close to Ælfthryth's home, was quite likely because anyone planning to create regime change would be wise to ensure that their preferred alternative candidate was close by to create a smooth transition, especially if the candidate's youth might still be seen as a barrier by some.

We also need to be cautious about the nature of Edward's 'martyrdom': without Byrhtferth's assertions of the thegns' diabolical wickedness and plotting, it is not impossible to see the death he described as an unfortunate accident in a violent altercation rather than premeditated murder. It is perhaps worth noting Byrthferth's curious observation that the king 'had with him very few thegns, for he feared no one, "trusting in the lord and the might of his power."'[24] Byrhtferth was seemingly conscious that it sounded unlikely that a king could be so easily taken down. Given that Byrhtferth had also acknowledged Edward's reputation for violence towards his household members, it is perhaps worth remembering that Æthelbald of Mercia was slain by his own bodyguard. Neither an accident nor death at the hands of men employed to protect him would have been appropriate for a king who came to be venerated as a saint. This may well explain why Byrhtferth struggled to present a plausible narrative. This need to avoid detail in early versions of the narrative would leave ample room for later writers to fill in the gaps in their knowledge by constructing Ælfthryth – the queen who supplanted St Wulfthryth and whose authority was clearly resented by some nunneries – as the real villain of the story.[25]

Further reason to be sceptical of Byrhtferth's account may be found in Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (1014) which suggested a very different story: 'a very great betrayal of a lord it is also in the world, that a man betray his lord to death . . . Edward was betrayed, and then killed, and after that burned.'[26] As Susan Ridyard has pointed out, those promoting the cult of St Edward 'had a vested interest in the existence of relics'.[27] If Wulfstan was right, this suggests that the community at Shaftesbury had invented the tale to be found in a later manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and in Byhtrferth's work (with varying details), that Edward had first received a poor burial

at Wareham before being translated a year later to Shaftesbury. All the above suggests that Edward was not a particularly obvious candidate for sainthood. Susan Ridyard has persuasively argued that the cult was rooted in a desire to sacralise kingship in such a way as to protect Edward's younger brother from a similar fate:

> if Æthelred was the principal beneficiary of Edward's murder he was also above all men the one most threatened by it. Edward had been removed after a short reign because he proved unacceptable to the magnates of his kingdom. Once the precedent had been set, was there any reason why his successor should not be similarly removed? ... the cult of St Edward ... was a categoric statement that kings should not be treated thus.[28]

Unfortunately for Ælfthryth, this rewriting of history to create a hagiography swiftly led to a negative rewriting of her story. Once Edward was recognised as a saint, it was impossible to imagine that his murderers were motivated by his behaviour or poor kingship (even if some mention of his violent behaviour prior to kingship might be acknowledged), so Byhrtferth offers the idea that the killers were 'ardent supporters' of his 'more gentle' ten-year-old brother.[29] The earliest surviving text to blame Ælfthryth for inciting the murder was the *Passio Sancti Eadwardi* which was created in the late eleventh century, perhaps by Goscelin.[30] The story then evolved over the decades until Henry of Huntingdon's indictment in the 1130s: 'it is said that his stepmother . . . stabbed him with a dagger while stretching out a cup to him'.[31] By this point her alleged guilt for her stepson's murder was just one strand of Ælfthryth's supposed wickedness. Chroniclers claimed that she had deliberately seduced King Edgar and contrived the death of her first husband in order to marry the king, despite the fact that their marriage could not be valid because Edgar had been godfather to the son of her first marriage.[32] Towards the end of the twelfth century, the *Liber Eliensis* even accused her of murdering Ely's founding abbot, Byrhtnoth, after he caught her practicing witchcraft and repelled her attempted seduction.[33] In a comparative study of royal saints' cults, Christine Fell argued that Edward's tale was 'inevitably pressed into the hagiographical pattern' of earlier royal saints, as well as being 'partly a

folk-tale pattern' so that 'whatever her actual role, [Ælfthryth's] hagiographical one would inevitably be as a scape-goat'.[34]

If Ælfthryth was not founding nunneries in penance for Edward's murder, should we imagine her founding Reading nunnery at all? Quite possibly yes. Once her son was king, Ælfthryth resumed her senior position at the court, at least through Bishop Æthelwold's lifetime, and after what looks like a brief absence in the years immediately after his death, she was back at court through the 990s.[35] Precise details of her relationships with nunneries are difficult to unravel. She was evidently an important patron of Wherwell where she finally retired, and may have been its foundress, or refoundress.[36] In the twelfth-century William of Malmesbury claimed that she had founded both Wherwell and Amesbury as penance for Edward's murder.[37] William's explanation may have been an attempt to reconcile the conflicting traditions about Ælfthryth as both murderess and recorded foundress of these nunneries. Surviving evidence of Æthelred's role in his brother's cult likely served to reinforce this notion since the son who had benefitted from his mother's wickedness might here be assumed to be seeking to expiate her crime.[38]

The earliest surviving text attributing Reading nunnery's foundation to Ælfthryth seems to be Leland's mid-sixteenth century *Itinerary*. He reports having read this information, whereas his suggestion of its location is only 'constant fame,' so there was perhaps an earlier written account.[39] Evidence of the existence of the nunnery at all is frustratingly scant. The manor of Reading belonged to an earlier queen, Edgar's stepmother, Æthelflæd, and since it was quite common for the same lands to be allocated to successive queens it is quite likely that Ælfthryth owned Reading too at some point. Certainly, both Æthelflæd and Ælfthryth held Cholsey before the latter granted it to Æthelred in the 990s and he founded a monastery there.[40] In this context, it is easy to imagine Ælfthryth founding a nunnery at Reading not long before her son founded his abbey at Cholsey. The Hyde Register listed an abbess of Reading, Leofrun, among the 'illustrious women' who had provided alms to their house. Her name appears immediately beneath that of Herelufu, Abbess of Shaftesbury, whose death in 982 was recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[41] It is likely that this abbess of Reading is the same Abbess Leofrun who was mentioned in a charter of 990–992 supporting Queen Ælfthryth in

witnessing to the rights of a certain Wynflæd whose lands in Berkshire had been seized by one Leofwine.[42] Leofrun was most likely appointed to the role at Reading by Ælfthryth.

The only other abbess associated with Reading is Leofgifu who held the church there in 1066, with lands assessed at 8 hides, including two mills and two and a half fisheries.[43] If, as is commonly supposed, Reading nunnery had already been destroyed by Vikings in 1006–7, when they burned the village there as well as those at Wallingford and Cholsey, then this might refer to Abbess Leofgifu of Shaftesbury.[44] However, it is unclear why King William would have chosen to take the land at Reading away from Shaftesbury in order to endow Battle Abbey when no other Shaftesbury estates were confiscated. It seems more likely that, as Pauline Stafford has argued, the nunnery still existed in 1066 and was dissolved some time after the conquest.[45]

Reading nunnery's presumably small size and its location on royal lands made it vulnerable. It is likely that a number of nunneries found themselves suddenly short of both occupants and endowments in the years after the conquest as a consequence, ironically, of a new wave of reform. For centuries wealthy families had sent their daughters to receive education in nunneries. King Edgar's attempt to win Wulfhild and his subsequent marriage to Wulfthryth indicate how acceptable it was for such girls to move in and out of nunneries according to their family's needs. In the aftermath of the conquest, apparently even more women entered nunneries, now anxious to avoid being forced into marriage with men who had taken over their husbands' or brothers' lands.[46] However, the Norman archbishop Lanfranc, appointed in 1070, swiftly began to try to cleanse the nunneries of those women who did not have a genuine vocation. In a letter to bishop Gundulf of Rochester he was unequivocal that 'those who have been neither professed nor presented at the altar are to be sent away at once without change of status, until their desire to remain in religion is examined more carefully.'[47] Powerful independent nunneries like Wilton were evidently able to ignore this campaign of reform, but Lanfranc was adamant that this was 'the king's policy and our own' so somewhere like Reading probably had little option but to comply.[48] It used to be assumed that when Henry I's charter for Reading Abbey referred to the earlier religious houses being 'destroyed for their sins' this must have been the

standard explanation for God allowing religious houses to be burnt by Vikings.[49] Inappropriate mixing with the secular world might be a rather more apt explanation at Reading at least. If the community was rendered too small to be viable that might explain King William's decision to grant its property to his new abbey at Battle before 1086. It is possible that not all vestiges of that nunnery had been dispersed before the new abbey was established in 1121. The later abbey's impressive relic list, drawn up towards the end of the twelfth century, mentioned two pieces of Edward the Martyr's skull, two large bones of his, a tooth and a piece of his shirt, as well as a large bone belonging to his grandmother St Ælfgifu of Shaftesbury.[50] This is, of course, purely speculative since such relics could also have come from Leominster or elsewhere. Wherever they originated, they will have served to keep alive in Reading the stories associated with the nunnery's probable founder.

From Adeliza of Louvain to Isabel of France

As Pauline Stafford has demonstrated, Henry I founded his abbey primarily on the wealth and heritage of three earlier houses all on land traditionally owned by English queens.[51] It was an apt choice if Henry wanted to make penance for royal abuse of monastic privileges or indeed for the dubious nature of his own first marriage. His queen, Edith-Matilda, was a great great granddaughter of King Æthelred and had spent much of her life living in nunneries in spite of Lanfranc's injunctions. She had arrived at Romsey Abbey when she was about six, where her aunt Christina was in charge of her, and when she was about twelve, in 1093, she had moved to Wilton.[52] When Henry I sought to marry her in 1100 there were those who argued that she was known to have worn a veil and must be a nun so that marriage was impossible. Archbishop Anselm seems to have felt deeply conflicted, but after considerable investigation and debate he performed the wedding ceremony, perhaps judging that the good of the political union this signified outweighed the questionable nature of her education.[53] Arguably this was another divisive royal wedding interwoven with Reading abbey's history. When civil war erupted in the wake of Henry I's death, King Stephen's delegate to the papal court argued that Matilda

had no right to the English throne because her mother's status as a nun made her parents' marriage invalid.[54]

Pauline Stafford suggests that the choice of queens' lands was also apt for a foundation that was not just about penance but also about celebrating the king's fresh start with his new queen Adeliza. According to William of Malmesbury, Henry I chose to locate his abbey at Reading because of its convenient location.[55] But Stafford speculates that its historical association with royal women may also have been significant, and he may even have chosen to marry Adeliza at Windsor precisely because of its proximity to Reading.[56] Adeliza's own patronage of the abbey was evidently a consequence of Henry I's burial there. On the anniversary of his death she granted the abbey the manor of Aston and its church, worth £20, from her dower lands as well as 100s worth of land at Stanton Harcourt and 100s annually from her hithe in London to pay for commemorations on subsequent anniversaries.[57] She later arranged for candles to burn permanently at Henry's tomb and gave the abbey the church at Stanton Harcourt and a collection of churches in and around Berkeley.[58] She also encouraged others to make similarly generous gifts.[59] At her death she was probably buried in the abbey presbytery, although at a little distance from Henry I.[60]

Reading Abbey's status as Henry I's mausoleum gave it a valuable association with legitimate kingship in subsequent decades. Consequently, when Henry II and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, were still relative newcomers to the throne in the wake of the anarchy that had followed Henry I's death, Reading provided an obvious choice for the burial of their three-year-old eldest son, William, in 1156.[61] William's burial seems to have created a particular bond between this queen and the abbey. A few years after the burial, Abbot Roger wrote to Eleanor promising her the same elaborate commemorations after her death as they habitually performed for monks in the community.[62] Such a grant of confraternity was very unusual at this early period and was presumably a response to a direct request from the queen, wishing to retain a connection with her firstborn son. Most of the religious houses she supported were in Poitou and there is no record of specific grants from Eleanor to Reading Abbey.[63] She did act on their behalf when they petitioned her about one sheriff of London's unjust seizure of lands and another's failure to hand over promised estates.[64]

Nonetheless, four decades later, the abbot's generous promise may have been forgotten when she died since her name is missing from later records of the abbey's obits, even though Henry II and King John are mentioned as well as Henry I and his queens.[65]

For Adeliza and Eleanor, their relationship with Reading Abbey was intimately connected to their identity as queens – as wife of a king or mother of his heirs. The same may have been true for Ælfthryth who would have been enacting her queenly role as guardian of nunneries and perhaps working in tandem with her son, the king, in her foundation. For most subsequent queens, any links were less personal. In the mid-thirteenth century the abbey was farming land at Lyndhurst in the New Forest which subsequently became part of Eleanor of Castile's estates.[66] In 1291 it emerged that the queen's bailiffs there had been overstepping their remit by demanding additional payments for the grazing of the abbot's animals and the king assigned several men to 'correct the excesses of the Queen's bailiffs'.[67] John Carmi-Parsons has noted various indications of cash-flow problems for the queen just before this which might have motivated her officers to press the bailiffs to try to improve their collections, but the queen herself may never have realised that a house of religion was being unjustly charged since the resolution occurred after her death.[68] Her successor, Margaret of France, seems to have been granted the same rights and received 40 shillings annually from Reading Abbey for a tenement there, a privilege she retained in her widowhood from 1307.[69] Nonetheless, it was now to Margaret's successor, Isabella, that contemporaries looked to exert influence in the abbey's interests. In 1308 Isabella petitioned her husband to permit a couple of donors to alienate in mortmain various estates in Herefordshire for the abbey.[70] The following year she successfully petitioned Pope Clement V regarding the abbey's holdings at Thatcham.[71] Such public acts of intercession were a key feature of medieval queenship and did not signify any particular interest in the abbey on Isabella's behalf, although she probably accompanied her husband on some of his stays there.[72] Her son, Edward III, was a particularly frequent visitor to the abbey and it was in his reign that the next divisive wedding occurred.

Blanche of Lancaster

The wedding of Edward III's third son, John of Gaunt, to Blanche, co-heiress of Henry of Grosmont duke of Lancaster, is one of the major events of Reading Abbey's history that were commemorated in paintings commissioned by Jamieson Boyd Hurry in the early twentieth century. Hurry instructed the artist, Horace Boardman Wright, to depict Robert Wyvil, bishop of Salisbury, presiding at the wedding.[73] However, many more recent works, including the latest biographies of John of Gaunt, identify the officiant as the clerk of the queen's chapel, Thomas de Chynham.[74] The confusion stems from the fact that Blanche and John underwent a formal betrothal ceremony before their wedding.[75]

Mark Ormrod has argued that the marriage was arranged in 1358 as part of Edward III's wider strategy to strengthen royal authority by bringing estates and titles at the edges of the kingdom into his family. In addition, David II of Scotland had recently suggested that he might make one of Edward III's children his heir: if John of Gaunt was already in a strong position in the north of England this would prepare him for such a role.[76] In the event that never happened and unexpectedly Blanche and John's descendants became kings of England instead when their son Henry usurped the throne, a usurpation which later became the justification for the Wars of the Roses.

Blanche was co-heiress of Henry duke of Lancaster and perhaps only twelve years old at the time of the betrothal whereas John was eighteen.[77] Two other couples were betrothed in the same ceremony: Lionel of Clarence's three-year-old daughter Philippa was committed to the earl of March's son, six-year-old Edmund Mortimer, and the king's twelve-year-old daughter Margaret promised to marry eleven-year-old John Hastings, earl of Pembroke. According to the exchequer records, the ceremony occurred in the queen's chapel, although we do not know which palace this was in, and Thomas de Chynham, the clerk of the queen's chapel, was paid £10 for performing the ceremony.[78]

It was quite common for medieval betrothals and proxy weddings to be performed within the queen's quarters, especially for royal children.[79] This was a space at court that was associated with particular intimacy, away from the more public realm of the king's rooms. A

fragment of Philippa of Clarence's mother's household accounts that survived bound into the covers of a manuscript of works by Lydgate and Hoccleve included reference to payment in September 1358 for the dress that Philippa wore, and the king himself paid £216 13s 4d for 2000 pearls for her and Margaret.[80] Margaret died before her wedding took place, but Philippa and Edmund's union was to prove just as significant as that of John and Blanche. It is not clear when they were actually married but their descendants were to provide the house of York with a claim to the throne, a claim which would ultimately derail Blanche and John's own Lancastrian royal line.[81]

A contemporary chronicler, the Anonymous of Canterbury, recorded John and Blanche's wedding date as the feast of St Dunstan, 1359, which was Sunday 19 May. He named the officiant as Robert, bishop of Salisbury.[82] The bishop was a much more appropriate celebrant than the clerk of the queen's chapel would have been, and he was evidently chosen because Reading was, at this time, in the diocese of Salisbury.[83] Indeed, when Henry I was married at nearby Windsor two centuries earlier an unpleasant dispute had erupted when the archbishop of Canterbury rejected the bishop of Salisbury's claim to perform the wedding and appointed the bishop of Winchester instead.[84] Edward III spent more than £226 on linens, silks, cloth of gold and other fabrics for furnishing the scene of the post wedding festivities at Reading.[85] Other expenses incurred included over £139 for goods from the London goldsmith, John of Chichester; £20 for a ruby ring, £18 for a jewel encrusted belt and £20 for a tripod with a cup of silver gilt which seem likely to have been wedding gifts.[86] The guests almost certainly included most of John of Gaunt's siblings. His brothers Edward, Lionel and Edmund were certainly all present for the celebratory jousts afterwards.

Contemporary chroniclers' accounts of these jousts are frustratingly vague. The Anonymous of Canterbury thought they occurred in Reading and London, whereas a monk at Westminster, who was probably John of Reading, thought some happened en route from Reading but focussed on the extraordinary tournament at Smithfield which took place over the three days before Ascension Day.[87] Here the mayor of London, sheriffs and aldermen undertook to hold the field against all comers, but at the end of the jousts it was revealed

that the king, his sons and other nobles had been disguised as the city officials.[88] A century later, John Capgrave, whose patron was a grandson of John and Blanche, claimed that the wedding had been followed by three days of jousts at Reading 'in honour of the new Diana'.[89] It was not uncommon to compare royal women with Diana goddess of hunting, famed for her beauty and chastity, and she would have been an appropriate character for a tournament to celebrate.[90] There had certainly been royal tournaments at Reading in 1340 and 1348 so it is very possible that Capgrave and the Anonymous of Canterbury were correct although there seems to be nothing explicit in royal financial records to confirm this.[91]

Despite her young age, Blanche became pregnant almost immediately after the wedding. Her first child was a daughter, Philippa, who was destined to marry the king of Portugal. Philippa of Lancaster's many children included Henry the Navigator and the formidable Isabel duchess of Burgundy. When Philippa's younger brother Henry IV's line died out in 1471, many saw her offspring as the senior Lancastrian line.[92] This connection was even noted in 1501 when her great great granddaughter Katherine of Aragon's descent from 'Lancastre' was mentioned in the pageantry celebrating Katherine's marriage to Arthur Tudor.[93] In this way, the consequences of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster's union shaped Europe profoundly. Blanche's father died just a year after young Philippa's birth and he was swiftly followed by Blanche's elder sister Maud. This meant that the entirety of Blanche's father's estate now passed into John of Gaunt's hands, along with the title of duke of Lancaster. Gaunt became the most powerful man in England beside the king, but Blanche did not live to see his power in Richard II's reign because, after giving birth to five children, she died on 12 September 1368.[94]

In 1399, John and Blanche's only surviving son, Henry of Bolingbroke, deposed Richard II and launched the royal House of Lancaster. Among those who had most to lose by this regime change was the family of Constance of York, the rebel countess who was the last member of the royal family to be buried at Reading Abbey.

Constance Despenser and the House of York

Constance was the only daughter of John of Gaunt's younger brother Edmund of Langley, first duke of York. She was about three years old when her father acquired rights to the marriage of Thomas Lord Despenser in order to provide her with a husband.[95] Thomas became one of Richard II's closest friends and was made earl of Gloucester in 1397.[96] Despite initially accepting Henry IV's usurpation, Despenser was one of the principal rebels involved in the Epiphany plot of 1400 and was lynched in Bristol on 16 January.[97] Constance, who was pregnant with their third child, had perhaps been with him at Cardiff Castle when news of approaching men at arms prompted Despenser to set sail, only to be betrayed by the ship's captain.[98] The king initially seized all Despenser's goods and lands but on 11 February he gave Constance £200 worth of goods, chattels, beasts, corn from Cardiff castle and elsewhere, and a collection of her own jewellery.[99] The *Vita Ricardi Secundi* reported that Despenser had fled Cardiff 'taking all his jewels with him', so the jewels being returned to her may have been taken directly from him.[100] In the next few weeks King Henry followed this up with a grant to Constance of estates worth 1,000 marks annually, control of her son Richard's inheritance until he came of age, and custody of the boy himself.[101] Her second daughter, Isabella, was born at Cardiff on 26 July.[102] However, on 17 May 1403, Henry IV granted custody of her son and his estates away to Constance's brother, Edward duke of York.[103] It is impossible to know whether Constance had provoked this or whether the king was using dubious means to sort out his own debts to the duke.[104] Either way, it was perhaps provocation for her subsequent treason.

In December 1404 Constance was either recruited into a plot against Henry or initiated one. By this point her son was living in the queen's household, as were the young earl of March, Edmund Mortimer, and his brother Roger. Constance was with them at Windsor Castle that Christmas and this apparently provided the opportunity to arrange for replicas to be made of castle keys.[105] Six weeks later, in the middle of February, one of Constance's men smuggled the Mortimer brothers and Richard Despenser out of the castle and she took them towards Wales.[106] It was generally assumed that she was attempting to

join up with Owain Glyndwr and the Mortimer boys' uncle, Sir Edmund Mortimer, who had been touting his nephews' superior claim to Henry IV's throne for some years.[107] The party were captured at Cheltenham and on 17 February Constance was brought before the king's council at Westminster where she accused her brother Edward of instigating the entire plot as well as trying to kill the king during the Christmas festivities at Eltham. When Edward denied this she summoned a champion to prove her story in trial by combat. Thomas duke of Clarence intervened to stop proceedings and Constance and Edward were both imprisoned.[108] However, Edward's subsequent career suggests that Henry IV was not persuaded of his guilt. Constance was initially 'safely and securely kept' at the king's castle of Kenilworth.[109] Yet less than a year later her confiscated goods were returned to her, and in June 1406 she was once more given a life interest in her dower estates.[110] Her good fortune was not untypical for noblewomen in Henry IV's reign: just weeks before Constance launched her rebellion, Maud Ufford, countess of Oxford, had been pardoned for her part in distributing white hart badges and preparing for a landing from France by a man she may genuinely have believed was Richard II.[111] The king's leniency towards Constance was perhaps also motivated by the fact that she was probably discovered to be pregnant shortly after her imprisonment. Certainly, at some point she had another daughter, Eleanor, as a result of an affair with Edmund Holland, earl of Kent. In the January before her rebellion, Kent had procured permission to marry whoever he wished 'of the king's allegiance' despite his minority, so they had probably planned to marry until her act of treason made him change his mind.[112]

Constance never did remarry. In 1414 her only son died and was buried with his father in the Despenser family's traditional mausoleum at Tewkesbury Abbey.[113] For almost a century, every principal Despenser family member, and many of their retainers too, had been buried at Tewkesbury.[114] Yet when Constance herself died in 1416, she chose Reading Abbey instead. Martyn Lawrence has suggested that this was because of her royal ancestry but this alone does not explain her decision.[115] Her very royal great nephew, George duke of Clarence, later chose burial at Tewkesbury for himself and his wife, Constance's own great granddaughter, Isabel Neville. There were also other more

obviously suitable locations for Constance, such as King's Langley where her parents were buried. The last recorded royal burial at Reading had been almost two centuries earlier. The answer is probably to be found in the estates she was permitted to hold after her husband's death, these included the manor of Caversham, just across the River Thames from Reading. If this property had become her principal home through her widowhood, her choice of Reading would make more sense. In each instance where a list of her properties was given, that which came first was Caversham.[116] After her treason in 1405, all her properties were confiscated on 12 March, but, on 23 February, only days after her actions had been discovered, the king had already confiscated Caversham and appointed a yeoman usher of the queen's chamber to take over the park there.[117] This certainly suggests that Caversham was considered her most significant residence. The manor was given to Queen Joan, at the queen's petition, that April, but looks to have been restored to Constance in June 1406 and eventually passed to her daughter, Isabel, and the Beauchamps.[118] A number of writers have asserted that Constance was not actually buried at Reading until 1420, but this is a consequence of careless reading.[119] Her burial is recorded in the Tewkesbury Founders' book which has almost no punctuation, leading unwary readers to assign the date 1420 to her burial rather than to her son-in-law becoming earl of Worcester in the following sentence.[120] Constance's independent interest in Reading Abbey lies in stark contrast to the engagement of many of her royal predecessors who had been drawn by family connections.

In 1461, Constance's granddaughter, Anne Beauchamp, was at the heart of the politics that finally did place Edmund Mortimer's heir on the throne because she was the wife of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (the Kingmaker). The new king himself, Edward IV, was Constance's great nephew. Edward IV made yet another divisive wedding associated with Reading Abbey. At Michaelmas 1464 his Great Council were meeting at the abbey when he advised them that he had secretly married a very unconventional bride. She was Elizabeth Woodville, widow of a Lancastrian knight and daughter of a minor lord who partly owed his title, Lord Rivers, to his own unconventional marriage with the widowed duchess of Bedford. The council made no secret of their anger that they had not been consulted on the match and some contemporaries

believed that this marriage was the origin of the earl of Warwick's subsequent disaffection and eventual rebellion.[121] Nonetheless, a couple of days after the announcement, the earl of Warwick and the king's brother, George duke of Clarence, formally escorted the new queen into the abbey church where she was she was 'openly honoured as queen by the lords and all the people.'[122] It was a hastily invented ritual to compensate for the secrecy of their wedding.[123]

The eldest child of that marriage, Elizabeth of York, was Henry VII's queen and her connections to Reading Abbey echo those of queens in earlier centuries. In March 1502 Elizabeth sent a priest on a month-long pilgrimage on her behalf which included a visit to the 'Childe of grace at Reding'.[124] As Ron Baxter has suggested, the pilgrimage was very likely connected to the death of her eldest son, Arthur. Some time previously a prayer for Arthur's wellbeing had been addressed to this same Child of Grace. Coincidentally, this object of devotion had been given to Henry I by William Duke of Aquitaine whose daughter Eleanor also mourned her eldest son through prayers at Reading.[125]

As a case study of royal women's interaction with monastic institutions, Reading's abbeys reveal a rich variety of circumstance, engagement and motivation. For Eleanor of Castile and Isabella of France, it was just a quotidian element of the practice of queenship, while for Blanche of Lancaster and Elizabeth Woodville it was the defining moment of their royal status. For Adeliza of Louvain and Eleanor of Aquitaine it was much more deeply personal, connected to family members buried there. For Constance it was presumably personal too, but in a lonelier fashion. The details of Blanche's wedding, Constance's burial date and Eleanor of Aquitaine's obit all demonstrate the ease with which the stories of such interactions are misremembered and the persistence of misrepresentation even after scholarly reinvestigation, but none more so than Ælfthryth's much re-written story of regicide and penance.

Notes

1 R. Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), pp. 36–7; 48–57.

2 Baxter, *Royal Abbey*, p. 114; K. Warner, *John of Gaunt. Son of One King, Father of Another* (Stroud: Amberley, 2022), p. 53.
3 L. Toulmin Smith, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543* (London: George Bell, 1907-10), I, p. 110. S. Hylton, *Reading in 50 Buildings* (Stroud: Amberley, 2016), p. 11; R. Tames, *England's Forgotten Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), p. 32.
4 J. Dils, *Reading: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2019), p. 7. So far archaeologists have found no sign of the nunnery. Most archaeological exploration has been in the vicinity of the abbey which might suggest that the Minster is still the more likely site.
5 G. G. Astill, *Historic Towns in Berkshire: An Archaeological Appraisal*, Berkshire Archaeological Committee, publication 2 (Reading: Berkshire Archaeological Committee, 1978), pp. 77–9.
6 P. Stafford, '*Cherchez la Femme*. Queens, Queens' Lands and Nunneries: Missing Links in the Foundation of Reading Abbey,' *The Historical Association* 85 (2000), 4–27.
7 A. Williams, '*Princeps merciorum gentis*: the family, connections and career of Ælfhere ealdorman of Mercia 956-83,' *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1981), 143–72 at 170.
8 W. Stubbs, ed., *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, Rolls Series 63 (London: Longman, 1874), p. 423.
9 P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Batsford, 1983), p. 32.
10 P. Stafford, 'Ælfthryth (d 999x1001)', *Oxford DNB online*, ed. H. C. G Mathew and B. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) accessed 16/01/2022.
11 BL MS Cotton Vespasian A. viii; Sean Miller, ed., *Charters of the New Minster, Winchester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 103.
12 Quoted in P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith. Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 63.
13 J. Nelson, 'The Second English Ordo', *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Nelson (London: Hambledon, 1986), p. 370; M. Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 159; BL Add MS 49598.
14 Stafford, '*Cherchez la Femme*,' pp. 25–6; Byhrtferth of Ramsey, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), p. 111 n. 69.
15 R. Lavelle, *Aethelred II King of the English 978-1016* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p. 38.

16 This would fit with both Eadmer's belief that Edward was born before his father's coronation and Janet Nelson's argument that Edgar was first crowned in 961, 'Second English Ordo', p. 370. It is perfectly possible that Edgar had become a father at 17.
17 M. Swanton ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London: Phoenix, 2000), pp. 121–2. 'Swyðe mænigfealde styrunga geond Angel cyn. 7 Ælfere ealdorman het towurpon swyðe manig munuc lif þe Eadgar cyng het ær þone halgan biscop Aðelwold gestaðelian. 7 on þam timan wæs eac Oslac se mæra eorl geutod of Angelcynne.' C. Plummer and J. Earle eds., *Two of the Saxon Chronicles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892), pp. 121–2.
18 Williams, '*Princeps merciorum gentis*,' pp. 143–72.
19 Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, pp. 122–3.
20 D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway, *English Historical Documents c. 550–1042* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. 841; Byhrtferth, *St Oswald*, pp.136–41. Confusingly the verb 'to stay' is singular, *manebat*, which has led Lapidge to infer that it refers to the young prince remaining with his mother rather than accompanying those who went out to greet the king. If he is right, then the leading men were not necessarily staying with Ælfthryth as Douglas's translation indicates, but instead converging on her property at the same time as the king.
21 M. Lapidge, 'Byhrtferth and Oswald', *St Oswald of Worcester. Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 72–3, quotation from Brooks' 'Preface' at p. x.
22 Byhrtferth, *St Oswald*, p. 138.
23 Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 123
24 Byhrtferth, *St Oswald*, pp. 138–9.
25 P. Stafford, 'The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries,' *Medieval Queenship*, ed. J. Carmi Parsons (Stroud: Sutton, 1994), pp. 149–58; Stafford, '*Cherchez la femme*,' 9–11.
26 D. Whitelock, ed., *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (London: Methuen, 1952), pp. 41–2.
27 S. J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 47.
28 Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 167.
29 Byhrtferth, *Oswald*, pp. 136–9.
30 C. E. Fell, *Edward King and Martyr* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1971), pp. xvi, xx.
31 Henry Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 325.

32 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, pp. 257–9; Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis/History of the English*, ed. and trans. I. Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ll. 3954–6 p. 214

33 J. Fairweather trans. *Liber Eliensis* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 153–4.

34 C. Fell, 'Edward King and Martyr and the Anglo-Saxon Hagiographic Tradition', *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. Hill, British Archaeological Reports. British Series 59 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 10–12

35 S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready'* (978-1016) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 176–86.

36 P. Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England,' *Past and Present* 163 (1999), 3–35, at 25–8.

37 William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England*, trans. D. Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 116, 126.

38 Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, p. 156.

39 L. Toulmin Smith, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543* (London: George Bell, 1907-10), I, p. 168.

40 Stafford, '*Cherchez la femme*,' p. 10.

41 Walter de Gray Birch, ed., *Liber Vitae: Register and Martyrology of New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester* (London: Simpkin & Co., 1892), p. 58. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 124. Unfortunately, it does not seem possible to find a date of death for any of the women who appear later in this list.

42 A. J. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), no. 66, pp. 136–9.

43 A. Williams and G. H. Martin, eds., *The Domesday Book* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 146.

44 R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk eds., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), II, 459.

45 Stafford, '*Cherchez la Femme*,' pp. 8, 14.

46 Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, ed. and trans. G. Bosanquet (London: Cresset, 1964), p. 129.

47 H. Clover and M. Gibson, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), no. 53, p. 167.

48 Clover and Gibson, *Letters of Lanfranc*, no. 53, p. 167. Henry I's future queen, Edith-Matilda, as well as Harold's daughter Gunnhild both lived at Wilton before leaving for marriage.
49 Stafford, '*Cherchez la femme*,' p. 5.
50 Baxter, *Royal Abbey*, pp. 309, 316.
51 Stafford, '*Cherchez la femme*,' *passim.*
52 L. L. Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), pp. 17–18.
53 Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, pp. 28–9.
54 M. Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 75.
55 Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, I, p. 747.
56 Stafford, '*Cherchez la femme,*' pp. 6, 23.
57 B. R, Kemp, ed., *Reading Abbey Cartularies*, 2 vols (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1986-7), I, pp. 44, 301–2, 403–4, 353.
58 Kemp, *Cartularies*, I, pp. 130, 225–6, 302–3, 404–7.
59 Kemp, *Cartularies*, I, pp. 226–8, 369, 416–17, 483–4.
60 Baxter, *Royal Abbey*, p. 37.
61 R. V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 129.
62 C. R. Cheney, 'A monastic letter of confraternity to Eleanor of Aquitaine,' *English Historical Review* 51 (1936), 488–93.
63 Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, p. 129
64 Kemp, *Cartularies*, I, pp. 357–8.
65 Cheney, 'Monastic letter', p. 492; B. Kemp ed., *Reading Abbey Records. A New Miscellany*, Berkshire Records Society 25 (Reading: Berkshire Records Society, 2018), pp. 121–3.
66 Kemp, *Cartularies*, I, pp. 257–8.
67 Kemp, *Cartularies*, I, p. 258.
68 J. Carmi Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile: Queen and Society in Thirteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 85.
69 *CPR 1301-07*, p. 413; *CPR 1307-13*, p. 216.
70 Kemp, *Cartularies*, I, p. 100; *CPR 1307-13*, p. 138.
71 Kemp, *Cartularies*, II, p. 264.
72 Baxter, *Royal Abbey*, pp. 108–9.
73 J. B. Hurry, *The Marriage of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster at Reading Abbey* (Reading: E. Poynder and Son, 1914), p. 49.
74A. Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-century Europe* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), p. 34; H. Carr, *The Red Prince: The Life of John of Gaunt the Duke of Lancaster* (London: Oneworld, 2021), pp. 39–40; Warner, *John of Gaunt*, p. 53.

75 Mark Ormrod explained the correct sequence of events but seems to have been overlooked by Carr and Warner because the logic of his arrangement only becomes clear on reading all of the sources cited in his footnotes. W. Mark Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 391.

76 Ormrod, *Edward III*, p. 391.

77 Froissart recorded that she was only about twenty-two at her death in 1368. Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 34. She was described as 'of full age' in July 1361 but this was often only 14 or 15 for girls so provides no further clue to her age *CFR 1356-68*, p.164.

78 F. Devon, ed., *Issues of the Exchequer* (London: John Rodwell, 1837), p. 170. The late date of this payment, July 1359, has added to the confusion regarding the process. Philippa's dowry was paid just a few days later. Most of the jewels purchased for the wedding itself were not actually paid for until October 1360, Devon, *Issues*, p. 172.

79 J. L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 249.

80 E. A. Bond *et al* ed., 'Chaucer as Page in the Household of the Countess of Ulster', *Chaucer Society Publications: Life Records of* Chaucer 4 vols. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1875-1900), 3, p. 100; Devon, *Issues*, p. 172.

81 It is commonly asserted that they were married in 1368 but this seems to be a consequence of an error in *The Complete Peerage* because the reference given for this date there is actually to the payment of her dowry in 1359. *G.E.C.* VIII, pp. 447–8. They were definitely married by 1370 when Philippa was referred to as the earl of March's wife, but perhaps as early as 1364 when she was called the countess of March. T. Rymer and R. Sanderson, eds, *Foedera*, 4 vols. (London, 1830), 3:2, pp. 725, 887.

82 C. Scott-Stokes and C. Given-Wilson eds., *Chronicon Anonymi Cantuarensis. The Chronicle of Anonymous of Canterbury 1346-1365*, (Oxford, 2008), pp. 48–9. The date is confirmed in John of Reading's briefer account: J. Tait, ed., *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi cantuariensis 1346-1367* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1914), p. 131. Some writers give 20 May as the date of the wedding. I have not been able to find any medieval source for this date and a Monday seems much less likely since Sunday was the preferred date for weddings at this period. J. Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), p. 32.

83 John Capgrave, writing some decades later for their great grandson, Henry VI, also identified the celebrant as Robert, bishop of Salisbury. John

Capgrave, *Liber de Illustribus Henricis*, ed. F. C. Hingeston, Rolls Series 7 (London: Longman, 1858), p. 164.

84 Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, ed. M. Rule (London: Longman, 1884), p. 292.

85 *CCIR 1360-64*, pp. 36–44.

86 Devon, *Issues*, pp. 170–2. Silver buckles costing £30 from one Benedict Zakaríe that the king's daughter Isabella gave to Blanche may also have been a wedding gift. Devon, *Issues*, p. 173.

87 Scott-Stokes and Given-Wilson, *Chronicon Anonymi Cantuarensis*, p. 49; Tait, *Chronica Johannis de Reding*, p. 131.

88 Ormrod, *Edward III*, p. 391

89 Capgrave, *Liber de Illustribus Henricis*, p. 164

90 Eg Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, p. 59.

91 Ormrod, *Edward III*, pp. 235, 299.

92 B. Williams, 'The Portuguese Connection and the Significance of the Holy Princess,' *The Ricardian* 6 (1983), 138–45.

93 G. Kipling ed., *The Receyt of the Ladie Kateryne*, EETS 296 (1990), p. 14.

94 J. J. N. Palmer, 'The Historical Context of the "Book of the Duchess": A Revision', *The Chaucer Review* 8 (1974), 253–61.

95 *CPR 1377-81*, p. 186.

96 *G.E.C.* IV, p. 279.

97 J. Luxford, ed., *The Founders' Book. A Medieval History of Tewkesbury Abbey* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2021), pp. 98–9.

98 C. Given-Wilson ed., *Chronicles of the Revolution 1397-1400 The Reign of Richard II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 238.

99 *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 223.

100 Given-Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution*, p. 238.

101 *CPR 1399-1401*, pp. 204, 226; *CFR 1399-1405*, p. 48.

102 Luxford, *Founders' Book*, p. 101.

103 *CPR 1401-1405*, p. 235.

104 John Grove, valet, was paid £50 to 'safely and securely' keep her daughters, possibly on 13 December 1404 – if this date is correct, it suggests that the king already had reason to be suspicious of Constance, but it is also possible that the order was actually given after her treason. They may have continued to reside at Cardiff where Elizabeth was buried not long afterwards. Devon, *Issues*, p. 300. Luxford, *Founders' Book*, p. 101.

105 J. H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry the Fourth*, 3 vols. (London, 1884-98), I, p. 40; John Capgrave, *The Chronicle of England*, ed. F. C. Hingeston (London: Longman, 1858), p. 288.

106 Wylie, *Henry the Fourth*, I, pp. 40–42.
107 Capgrave, *Chronicle of England*, pp. 288–9.
108 Riley, *Johannis de Trokelowe*, pp. 398–9.
109 Devon, *Issues*, p. 300.
110 *CPR 1405-1408*, pp. 100, 194.
111 Wylie, *Henry the Fourth*, I, pp. 417–28.
112 *CPR 1401-1405*, p. 478.
113 Luxford, *Founders' Book*, p. 101.
114 M. Lawrence, 'Secular Patronage and Religious Devotion: The Despensers and St Mary's Abbey, Tewkesbury,' *Fourteenth-Century England V*, ed. N. Saul (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), p. 92.
115 Lawrence, 'Secular Patronage', p. 92.
116 *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 204–5; *CFR 1399-1405*, pp. 48, 104.
117 *CPR 1401-1405*, p. 496. The order was made at Windsor Castle.
118 TNA SC 8/231/11526; *CPR 1405-1408*, p. 4. I am grateful to Ellie Woodacre for these references. There seems to be no other indication of Joan holding the manor at a later date, so it was presumably returned to Constance with her other estates in June. *CPR 1405-1408*, p. 194; *CPR 1413-1416*, p. 71.
119 Emily Sarah Holt speculated that the late burial was due to the 'dark cloud of royal wrath' under which she died. E. Holt, *The White Rose of Langley* (1875), p. 324. Kathryn Warner repeated the mistake in 2020 and it is to be found on many websites, K. Warner, *The Rise and Fall of a Medieval Family: The Despensers* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2020), p. 192.
120 Luxford, *Founders' Book*, pp. 101–3.
121 *Calendar of State Papers, Venice, Volume 1, 1202–1509*, ed. R. Brown (London: Longman, 1864), p. 114; Jehan de Wavrin, *Anchiennes Cronicques d'Engleterre*, ed. M. Dupont, 3 vols. (Paris: J. Renouard, 1858–63), II, p. 326; N. Pronay and J. Cox eds., *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486* (London: Alan Sutton, 1986), p. 115.
122 J. Stevenson, ed., *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France during the Reign of Henry the Sixth*, Rolls Series 22 (London: Longman, 1861–1864), II, p. 783.
123 Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, pp. 78–9.
124 N. Harris Nicolas, *Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York* (London: William Pickering, 1830), p. 3. That October she also sent a lawn shirt to the Child of Grace as well as an offering to Our Lady of Caversham, p. 50.
125 Baxter, *Royal Abbey*, pp. 64–5.