
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

English History as Evidenced in Tewkesbury Abbey.

SAXON, Norman, Plantagenet—these are the three powerful dynasties which Tewkesbury Abbey brings to mind. There are indeed no remnants of Saxon work in the glorious fane, but its first founding about the year 715 was due to the piety of two noble brothers, Oddo and Doddo, whose very curious portraits are to be seen in the "Registrum Theokusburiae," attired in armour and bearing models of the church in their hands. Very early in its history the Abbey was selected as a resting-place for the great of the earth, for Leland says that Earl Hugh carried thither the body of Berthric, who usurped the Wessex crown, and laid him in the Chapel of St. Faith. Hugh himself was buried in the nave.

Like most religious houses, Tewkesbury suffered considerably at the hands of the Danes—so much so, indeed, that it became dependent on Cranborne Abbey, founded by Hayward de Meawe, on whose grandson, Britric, Matilda of Flanders vainly bestowed her affections. Britric was Lord of Gloucester and King Edward the Confessor's envoy at her father's Court, so no doubt they saw a good deal of each other, and his rank, wealth, and handsome appearance rendered him quite a fitting husband for the fair Matilda. Unfortunately, however, he did not reciprocate her love, and the lady never forgot what she deemed a slight. As all the world knows, she afterwards married William, Duke of Normandy, and when they became King and Queen of England she persuaded her husband to grant her all Britric's lands, and caused him to be arrested and flung into prison at Winchester, where he subsequently died. In this way the Manor of Tewkesbury came into the possession of the Normans, and William Rufus bestowed it upon his cousin, Robert Fitz-Hamon, who was also a great general. At the instigation of Abbot Giraldus of Cranborne, Fitz-Hamon refounded Tewkesbury, and to him we practically owe the main part of the grand church. He was mortally wounded at the

siege of Falaise, and was brought to Tewkesbury, buried in the chapter-house, and more than a hundred years later his body was transferred to the ambulatory, and eventually enclosed by the beautiful Founder's Chantry as we now see it, with its open screen-work of Perpendicular design and exquisite fantracery of the ceiling. Fitz-Hamon was the father of four daughters, and a marriage was arranged between one of them, named Mabel, and Robert, an illegitimate son of King Henry, who was created first Earl of Gloucester, and acquired the broad acres his wife brought with her. This warlike Earl, who generaled the army of his half-sister, the Empress Maud, and took such a prominent part in the strife for the Crown which for so many years raged between her and King Stephen, did not neglect gentler matters, for he completed the Abbey Church and much of the tower. Although we usually think of him as a great soldier, he was also something of a scholar; to him William of Malmesbury dedicated his masterpiece, and beside his lavish expenditure on Tewkesbury he founded a priory at Bristol, where he was buried. In fact, endowing abbeys seems to have run in the family, for his successor built Keynsham in memory of his only son, and chose to lie there rather than at Tewkesbury.

Henry II. acted as guardian to his daughters, and it was doubtless thought an excellent idea to convey such good lands to Prince, afterwards King, John, by marrying one of them to him. John, however, subsequently divorced her, and she took the manor to a second husband, Geoffrey de Mandeville, but the earldom finally passed to her sister Amice, who had wedded Richard de Clare, Earl of Hertford.

The powerful family of the Tewkesbury de Clares is as well represented in the Abbey Church as it is in English History. Portraits of three of them are to be seen in the painted glass of the fourteenth-century windows in the choir, in company with Fitz-Hamon, Robert Fitzroy, and Hugh le Despenser, all in armour of the period, and below them, under the choir pavement, lie their bodies.

There is Gilbert de Clare, who leagued with the barons against King John, and signed Magna Charta. So proud was he of the part he had played in the Constitution that he had graven on his tablet the words "Magna Charta is law; let the King henceforth beware." His widow, Isabelle, afterwards wedded Richard, Earl of Cornwall, brother of King Henry III., but she evidently remembered her first husband, for when dying she desired to be buried next him; Earl Richard very properly thought this proceeding incorrect, so the fair Isabelle ordered her heart to be interred in De Clare's grave, while her body was laid to rest before the High Altar at Beaulieu Abbey. Oddly enough, Tewkesbury remains intact, while not a stone upon another is left of Beaulieu Church.

Richard de Clare was a Crusader, and fought in the Holy Land, and a sister of his was the grandmother of King Robert Bruce of Scotland. Gilbert, the Red Earl, wedded the Princess Joan, daughter of King Edward I., and alternately supported his royal father-in-law and Sir Simon de Montfort in the strife between the barons and the Monarch. "A stout and brave man who had no fear of death"; so runs the legend on his tomb, and it concludes with the very appropriate words "Pray and Fight."

These were indeed doughty men of valour, accustomed to hold their own with the Sovereign; but even these were eclipsed by Gilbert de Clare, tenth Earl of Gloucester, who acted as Regent for Edward II., both in England and France, was killed at the Battle of Bannockburn, and laid to rest in Tewkesbury Choir by his wife, the Lady Maud, and his father. From the north-west window he still remembers that proud inscription graven in Latin by his arms on the tablet, "Gilbert, the third of the name, tenth and last Earl of Gloucester and Hertford, died on June 23, 1314. He was slain in battle, to the joy of the Scots."

Gilbert left no heirs, so the Manor of Tewkesbury passed to his sister Eleanor, who had married Hugh le Despenser, a name which has become a byword in English history of

that period. This Hugh played the part of royal favourite, and it is generally considered that his father shared in the profits which accrued thereby. However, when the wretched King fled to Wales he did not forsake him, and so was taken prisoner, hung, drawn, and quartered after the barbarous custom of the times. Very likely it was at his wife's instigation that his poor remains—such as they were—were collected together, and thus found rest in the consecrated Abbey of Tewkesbury. His son married the Lady Elizabeth Montacute, daughter of the Earl of Salisbury, and their effigies lie under the lace-like canopy of the Despenser monument. He is in armour, with his head reclining upon a helmet and his feet on a lion, and she is dressed in a flowing gown and square head-dress of the period, while a dog lies at her feet. After his death Lady Elizabeth married Sir Guy de Brien, who was also Lord Welwyn, and a soldier of great renown, acting as standard-bearer to King Edward III. at the Battle of Crécy, and performing prodigies of valour. Very likely he was the same Guy who built the quaint Castle-Manor of Woodsford, which still guards the passage of the Frome. Together they rebuilt the Choir of Tewkesbury, and he is also credited with vaulting the tower, for his arms appear on the bosses. At the same time the beautiful apsidal chapels were erected. His tomb is in the ambulatory, wrought into the stone screen-work of the Chapel of St. Margaret, over against the Despenser monument, where his wife chose to rest by her former husband. Perhaps she loved him best of the three, for the Lady Elizabeth was a widow when she wedded Hugh Despenser, and therefore the valiant Guy lies all by himself beneath a canopy or a very similar tomb, also clad in armour and with a lion at his feet.

Tewkesbury Manor passed to Elizabeth's nephew, Edward le Despenser, who fought at Poitiers, and was one of the first Knights of the Garter. To his memory his wife built the beautiful Trinity Chapel, where she was buried; and at its summit, beneath a rich canopy of exquisite proportions, the

figure of Lord Despenser kneels for ever in prayer, with his face turned towards the High Altar.

His son Thomas married Constance, daughter of the Earl of Cornwall and niece of the Black Prince; faithfully served Richard II., and at his death was attainted, executed, and buried beneath the sanctuary lamp, which burned before the altar as a sign that "the house was evermore watching to God." "Rather death than dishonour" is inscribed on the brass commemorating him. His son Richard, who also lies in the choir, was the last of the Despensers, and his sister Isabelle, by her marriage with Richard Beauchamp, carried the manor into that illustrious family. He was killed at the siege of Breaux, and the young widow of twenty-one expressed her grief in stone by erecting the magnificent chantry chapel, which, oddly enough, is usually called by the name of her cousin and second husband, the Earl of Warwick, to whose memory she built the Beauchamp chapel at Warwick. The exquisite chantry possesses two roofs, with superb vaulting and richly-carven tracery; and amongst the heraldic decorations of the Clares and Despensers are blazoned the Royal Arms of England and France, Castile and Leon.

Isabelle, who must have been endowed with the spirit of an artist, elected to be buried in the choir next to her father, and ordered a truly imperial tomb to perpetuate herself. Her statue was to be of marble, and by it were to stand St. Mary Magdalen, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Anthony; there were also to be figures of "poor men and women in humble apparel with beads in their hands," which may have referred to her charitable character or some pious foundation for the indigent. Unfortunately, all this magnificence has disappeared. Her young son became a great favourite with Henry VI., who showered all manner of dignities upon him, including such titles as King of the Isle of Wight, King of Jersey and Guernsey, beside creating him Duke of Warwick. But he died at twenty-one, was buried under the tower, and his sister Anne took the Tewkesbury estates to her husband, that great maker of English history, the famous Richard Neville, the "King-maker." This popular

soldier, given to lavish hospitality and celebrated for his personal valour, generaled in turn the Yorkist and Lancastrian armies during that Civil War which was peculiarly a war of the nobles, and plunged in blood both the Red and the White Rose. He was the most powerful man in all England, and a cousin of Edward of York, whom he placed upon the throne. Subsequent events caused him to espouse Queen Margaret's side; and the tie was cemented when he gave his second daughter, Anne, in marriage to the young and gallant Prince Edward, King Henry's only son and rightful heir to the Crown. Anne's sister and co-heiress, Isabelle, had already been wedded to the Duke of Clarence, brother to Edward IV.

The "Kingmaker," fighting to the last, fell at the Battle of Barnet, with his brother, his captains, and his army. Twenty days later Queen Margaret and her soldiers marched to Tewkesbury, and encountered King Edward's force some half-mile or so distant from the town. In a field called Bloody Meadow the fight raged, and the Lancastrians were defeated. Nobles fell slain on either side, Prince Edward was taken prisoner; even the Abbey Church ran with blood, so that it had afterwards to be specially cleansed and reconsecrated. To the Abbey were carried the bodies of the fallen for interment in hallowed ground. Under the floor, in front of the altar to St. James, above which a modern window bears in its tracery the red and white roses of Lancaster and York, were laid the Duke of Somerset, Lord John Somerset, the Earl of Devon, Sir Richard Courtenay, Lord Thomas Courtenay, and Sir Humphrey Hadley. Sir Thomas Tresham was buried by a pillar standing betwixt the altars of St. Nicholas and St. James. Tradition has it that the metal plates on the oak door of the vestiarium were made by the monks from armour and weapons found in the precincts after the battle. To a grave under the tower was borne—probably at night, when attention would not be aroused—the body of Prince Edward, only son of King Henry and Queen Margaret, foully slain after the fight. It is said that he "was homelie interred with the other simple

corpses in the church of the monasterie of the blacke monks in Teukesburie." There were none to mourn as the good monks of the Abbey Church received corpse after corpse and laid the poor mangled bodies to rest in mother-earth, and the last of the Plantagenet princes received no further ceremonial than the others, some of them comrades, some of them foes. Yet in a measure he claimed his own when brought to Tewkesbury Abbey, for through his wife Anne, daughter and co-heiress of the Duke of Warwick, he took a part in that long, illustrious, semi-royal line which from Norman Fitz-Hamon, the founder of the Abbey, had held Tewkesbury Manor down to the end of the fifteenth century. Writing in 1680, a chronicler speaks of the Prince's grave as "a fair tombstone of grey marble, the brass whereof has been pickt out by sacrilegious hands, directly underneath the Tower of the Church, at the entrance into the Quire, and sayed to be layd over Prince Edward who lost his life in cool blood in the dispute between York and Lancaster, at which time the Lancastrians had the overthrow."

As far as Tewkesbury Abbey is concerned, English history practically stopped with the Battle of Tewkesbury, fought on that May morning in the year of our Lord 1471. It had taken a share in the history of England right down to the end of the fifteenth century—no mean or small record. It comes very distinctly before our mind, this sudden ending of all things, when we walk around the glorious Abbey Church and read the illustrious names of men and women known to fame, who scorned to be mere puppets, and stood forth in the glare that beats upon those who live in the public eye to take a part in making or marring the records of their own times. After the Dissolution and Reformation scarcely anyone of real celebrity seems to have been buried in the Abbey; its walls read like the nations which have no history, and are therefore deemed happy. But it is a blank nevertheless. Certainly the world came to an end when the sunset flamed redly over the Battle of Tewkesbury. Yet one flicker of brilliance lit its silent gloom five years later, when Warwick's daughter, Isabelle, Duchess of Clarence

and legal descendant of Fitz-Hamon, lay in state in the choir for no less than five-and-thirty days. For her reception a vault was contrived behind the High Altar, and little more than a week after her burial her murdered husband, whose vacillation had partly caused her father's death and the Lancastrians' defeat, was brought from the tower to share her resting-place.

Looking through the iron gates, the casket containing their remains can be seen placed half-way up the wall in safety from occasional floods. On a brass in the pavement are engraved two suns in splendour, the badge of the House of York, and a Latin inscription :

"LORD GEORGE PLANTAGENET, DUKE OF CLARENCE, AND LADY ISABEL NEVILLE, HIS WIFE, WHO DIED, SHE ON DEC. 12TH, 1476, HE ON FEB. 18TH, 1477.

"I came in my might, like a sun in splendour,
Soon suddenly bathed in my own blood."

Nevertheless, it would have been more fitting for the tomb of one of the last direct descendants of the second founder of Tewkesbury Abbey to have been surrounded with the coats-of-arms borne by her celebrated ancestors through four centuries —Fitz-Hamon, De Clare, Le Despenser, Warwick, Castile and Leon, France, and the Royal Arms of England.

Truly, it is English history which we read in the glorious Abbey Church of Tewkesbury.

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