

Anne Mowbray: In Life and Death

Inscription:

Here lies Anne, Duchess of York, daughter and heiress of John, late Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal, Earl of Nottingham and Warrene, Marshal of England, Lord of Mowbray, Segrave and Gower. Late wife of Richard, Duke of York, second son of the most illustrious Prince Edward the Fourth, King of England, and France, and Lord of Ireland, who died at Greenwich on the 19th day of November in the Year of Our Lord 1481 and the 21st year of the said Lord King

Just over 40 years ago, on 15 January 1965, the London Museum announced that the remains of Anne Mowbray had been discovered a few weeks earlier in Stepney. The date for the announcement had been carefully chosen, the anniversary of her wedding to Richard, Duke of York, the younger son of King Edward IV. The story hit the headlines as the poignancy of Anne's story and her marriage at the age of five caught the imagination of the media. I am sure many members will remember this important discovery but for those newer and younger members it is perhaps appropriate to recall the brief life of one of the great fifteenth-century heiresses and to review the events of 1964-65.

Anne was born on 10 December 1472 and baptised at Framlingham church by William Waynflete seven days later. She was the daughter of John de Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, a distinguished supporter of the house of York, and his wife Elizabeth Talbot, half-sister to Lady Eleanor Butler. John died suddenly when his daughter was just three years old and she immediately became a great heiress. She became a ward of the crown and King Edward assumed the management of her estates. Two years later she married the King's son who had been created Duke of Norfolk almost a year earlier.

The marriage of the children took place in St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster on 15 January 1477/8, a ceremony that was attended by the great and the good of the Yorkist court and recorded for posterity by a herald. The reason, however, for such a good attendance was rather sinister. Parliament had been assembled to hear the bill of attainder against George of Clarence. Whilst his nephew prepared to become a bridegroom, George of Clarence languished in the Tower awaiting his fate.

There is no documentary evidence about the remainder of Anne's life. It is generally presumed she became part of the Queen's household as it was at the royal manor of Greenwich that she died in November 1481. King Edward spent £215 16s 10d on her burial and ordered three barges to transport the body in state to Westminster. King Edward's open



Northcote's reconstruction of the marriage of Richard and Anne

handedness, however, was not difficult to understand. He had arranged matters such that if Anne died without issue, her lands and titles would remain with her husband. She was bur-

ied in the Chapel dedicated to St Erasmus in Westminster Abbey but in 1502 the chapel was demolished to make way for the construction of Henry VII's own mausoleum. Anne's body was removed to the Abbey of the Minoreesses without Aldgate, a few hundred yards north of the Tower of London where her mother had become a 'tenant' in 1487/8. This may only have been meant to be a temporary arrangement and it has been suggested that it was due to an outbreak of plague in 1515 that her return to the Abbey was indefinitely postponed and then forgotten.

On 11 December 1964 three workman crashed a 14lb hammer through chalk and brick walls to reveal the vaulted chamber, measuring 6' in height and 7' in length, where Anne's coffin had been placed. It was found 11' underground on a site near St Clare Street off the Minories. The workman, contacted the police and the press. The London Museum (now the Museum of London) were contacted some three hours later. Although commended by the Museum for their prompt action (*The Guardian*) the workmen were later criticised by officials of the Museum as the coffin had been stood on end for press photographs 'thus destroying any chance of the bones remaining intact and in their original position' (*The Telegraph*). Labelled as 'found property', and thought to be a Roman burial, the hundred-weight leaden coffin was then taken to Leman Street police station before being transferred to the London Museum. Here a special room was set up to examine the coffin and its contents. The coffin was opened on the instruction of the Coroner and with the approval of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster in the presence of the Director of the museum and a six-strong team of archaeological, medical and technical specialists with overhead cameras recording the proceedings. There was, however, criticism of the procedure as the discovery of the coffin should have been reported to the Home Office and a licence obtained for the exhumation. The matter was raised in the House of Lords by Lord Stonham the following month.

Regardless of protocol, the remains, which had been wrapped in linen, were minutely examined during the following months

by a team of specialists, led by Dr Francis Celoria, and which included radiologists, anatomists, osteologists and dentists. It was widely reported that the findings would be published in the form of a comprehensive report. Eventually the investigation ended and arrangements were made for Anne, or what was left of her, to be re-interred in Westminster Abbey. The ceremony took place in the evening of 31 May 1965. Anne was laid-in-state in the Jerusalem Chamber, as she had been in 1481, surrounded by burning candles and a long wreath, almost the length of the coffin, was placed next to it. She was carried 'between flickering candles through the cathedral to the Henry VII Chapel followed by a dozen clergy dressed in white'. The Queen was represented and Lord and Lady Mowbray represented Anne's family. The Home Secretary, who had finally been involved and had issued a licence for the remains to be returned to the coffin, also attended.

Plans for the reburial in the Abbey had been announced at the press launch back in January and the *London Evening News* quoted the museum as saying that Anne would 'in a sense, be reunited with her husband Richard'. This was firmly rejected by Lawrence Tanner, librarian and keeper of the Muniments at Westminster Abbey, who said that the Dean and Chapter had decided to rebury Anne in the Abbey 'because she was originally buried there' and he was sorry that this 'suggestion crept into the Press hand-out. It was not authorised by the Dean and Chapter'. *The Telegraph* further quoted him as saying 'There was no question of reuniting the bones with the bones of her husband ... Whether those bones are the remains of Richard, Duke of York, is quite another question'. This statement appears to be a *volte face* by Mr Tanner, who members will be familiar with as the co-author of the report on the examination of the alleged bones, with Dr Wright, over thirty years earlier! However, this rebuttal was overlooked by many reporters who glibly wrote along the lines that the children would be reunited in death. The treatment of the 'Princes in the Tower' story by the press during this time was an unequivocal 'they were probably murdered in the Tower in 1483 or 1485', obvi-

ously the line fed to them by the press release but which for the most part was fortunately not exploited to encompass any involvement by Richard III. Whether due to laziness of the media in researching their stories or the work of the Society it is difficult to comment.

Anne Mowbray's story is a sad one, a little girl who in her own time only touched history when she born, when she married and when she died. In the 20th century she made news as her remains, in the name of science, went under the microscope. Not for the faint-hearted the reports of what was found in the coffin nor to view the photographs made available to the public. Ironically the complete findings of the investigation never made the light of day, although reports have been published on her skeleton in *London Archaeologist* and her dental health in the *British Dental Journal*. The Society hopes the file is not finally closed and will continue to make enquiries.

If the archaeological results are not forthcoming do we learn anything from re-visiting the documentary evidence? There is one curious anomaly and this was raised at the time of the discovery in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* by Eado P J Stourton, a latter-day relative of Anne. He had always understood that the ceremony in 1477 was a betrothal and not a marriage. The inscription on the coffin is quite clear – Anne is Richard's wife and the report

of the ceremony on 15 January 1477 is that of a marriage. However, a dispensation for the couple was required as they were related within the forbidden degrees but what the Pope actually agreed to was the 'espousals forthwith, and as soon as they reach the lawful age to contract marriage'! Clearly, King Edward was prepared to ride roughshod over the niceties, and when as tradition demanded, the procession of the wedding party was halted and the marriage forbidden because of the couple's relationship, no doubt the king looked sufficiently stern in case anybody dared to read the papal bull that John Gunthorpe had produced so that the ceremony could proceed. Nothing was going to come between the crown and the Mowbray inheritance. If Richard of Gloucester can be accused of being acquisitive he had learned, no doubt, from a master – his brother.

Wendy Moorhen

Further reading:

Anne Mowbray by Philomena Jones, *The Ricardian*, vol 4, no 61, June 1978, pp. 17-20 (re-printed in *Crown & People* edited by James Petre)
The Mowbray Inheritance by Anne Crawford, *The Ricardian*, vol 5, no 73, June 1981, pp. 334-40 (re-printed in *Crown & People* edited by James Petre)
The Ladies of the Minories by W E Hampton, *The Ricardian*, vol 4, no 62, September 1978, pp. 15-22

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