

# Henry IV's date of birth and the royal Maundy

Ian Mortimer

University of Exeter

---

## Abstract

The date of Henry IV's birth has proved problematic for two key reasons. The failure of any contemporary chronicler to note the date is one. Another is the assumption that medieval people assigned their birthdays to a specific calendar date. This note argues that Henry IV was born on a moveable feast – Maundy Thursday 1367 – and celebrated his birthday accordingly. In addition, it suggests that the origin of the custom of the sovereign's age-related donations, on Maundy Thursday, lies in Henry's own attempt to draw attention to the fact that he, like Richard II, was born on a religious feast day.

---

The question of Henry IV's date of birth is problematic for two reasons: one is simply that the direct evidence is imprecise; the other is that such a small detail has been considered trifling or unworthy of scholarly attention. Several dates have been proposed – among them 7 April 1366, 30 May 1366 and 3 April 1367 – but none has been subjected to detailed scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> The authors of Henry's entry in the recent *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* are of the opinion that he was born 'almost certainly in 1366 and perhaps on 7 April', while Anthony Goodman favours a date in early 1367 in his study of John of Gaunt.<sup>2</sup> J. L. Kirby, the author of the sole monograph on Henry IV, saw no reason to go into greater detail than the authors of the second edition of the *Complete Peerage*, who selected the range 4–7 April 1366.<sup>3</sup> J. H. Wylie declined to come to a conclusion at all.<sup>4</sup> The best study yet published of Henry's early life – K. B. McFarlane's *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* – similarly did not want to bother with the question, stating: 'I do not propose to waste time dealing with the evidence on this point, but there can be little doubt that he was born within the year [4 April 1366–3 April 1367], and that is good enough for anyone but an astrologer'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These are drawn respectively from A. L. Brown and H. Summerson, 'Henry IV (1366–1413)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); *Expeditions to Prussia and the Holy Land made by Henry Earl of Derby*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith (Camden 2nd ser., lii, 1894), p. lxxxii; and Henry's entry in the old *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>2</sup> A. Goodman, *John of Gaunt* (1992), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Kirby, *Henry IV of England* (1970), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry IV* (4 vols., 1884–98), iv. 330.

<sup>5</sup> K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford, 1972), p. 13.

Despite McFarlane's dismissive flourish, it is reasonable to pursue the matter for four reasons. First, it is probable that McFarlane was wrong, for it is likely that Henry was born on or about 15 April 1367 (as this note will argue). Given that the matter is one of public as well as academic interest, it behoves the profession to consider it, even if one of the most influential scholars of the last fifty years declined to do so. Second, it matters biographically whether Henry was younger or older than his cousin and rival Richard (born on 6 January 1367), and whether he saw himself as the first-born surviving grandson of Edward III at the time when their rivalry was forming. This is especially the case during the period when Henry was in Richard's household, at the ages of ten and eleven, when boys are particularly sensitive to differences in age. The third reason is to know how old he was in January 1382, when (according to his household accounts) he was jousting in public at the royal wedding celebrations. If he was just fourteen at the time, then this is an exceptionally young age. Examples of fifteen-year-olds taking part in public jousts are rare, and fourteen-year-olds almost unknown (with the possible exception of the Black Prince).<sup>6</sup> The fourth reason lies in the close association between Henry's age and his Maundy Thursday gifts. It seems probable that the modern tradition of the number of recipients of Maundy Money being the years in the sovereign's age derives from Henry's choice to celebrate his birthday on Maundy Thursday. If this is correct, it would appear that the commemoration may have been part of a display in which Henry was publicizing his date of birth, probably in contrast to Richard II's emphasis on his being born on the Epiphany, to draw attention to himself as a recipient of divine favour.

Henry is the only Plantagenet monarch whose date of birth is in doubt (Henry V's being a problem for which a solution has long been available, even if not yet historically spelled out).<sup>7</sup> The only contemporary

<sup>6</sup> Roger Mortimer (1329–1360), 2nd earl of March, won fame in a tournament in Sept. 1344 when he had not yet reached his 16th birthday (see *Adae Murimuth Continuatio Chronicanum*, ed. E. M. Thompson (1889), p. 159 (for the event); I. Mortimer, *The Greatest Traitor: the Life of Sir Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March* (2003), p. 215 (for his age)). It is not clear whether Edward of Woodstock actually fought in the Windsor jousts of Jan. 1344 (when he would have been 13), or was just present (see Thompson, p. 155). Henry also took part in the May Day jousts at Hertford in 1382, when he would have been just 15.

<sup>7</sup> According to C. T. Allmand, 'Henry V (1386/7–1422)', in *O.D.N.B.*, quoting his own *Henry V* (1992), p. 7, the date is still open to question. However, as remarked in a footnote on the same page of the monograph, the question is really which one of two dates is correct: 16 Sept. 1386 or 9 Aug. 1387. In deciding between these we should note that Henry of Lancaster's accounts for Michaelmas 1387–Michaelmas 1388 clearly show that Thomas, the younger son, was born before Christmas 1387, as Christmas livery was purchased for his nurse in 1387 (The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Record Office, DL 28/1/2 fo. 20v, noted in Wylie, iv. 159). A payment to the midwife who assisted at his birth is also noted in this account, as are cloth, kirtles, tunics and sandals for Thomas as well as his older brother. As a result of this, *O.D.N.B.* correctly states that Thomas was born in the autumn of 1387. On this basis, Henry cannot have been born later than the winter of 1386–7. Thus the date of 16 Sept. 1386 (specified in Manchester, John Rylands University Library, French MS. 54) must be

chronicler who mentions the event is Froissart, who states that Henry IV was born seven years after he overheard a conversation at Berkhamstead in late 1361.<sup>8</sup> Capgrave – who was not quite a contemporary – gives us the place (Bolingbroke in Lincolnshire) but not the date. The location is confirmed by the English continuation of the *Brut*, written in about 1430.<sup>9</sup> This is not much to go on, but we also have two other types of direct evidence: the enrolments of rewards in 1367 to those who brought the news to the king and the prince; and the age-related gifts mentioned in Henry's own wardrobe accounts, which are extant for the years 1382, 1391–3, 1395 and 1397–8.

The most extensive discussion of this matter until now has been the note in the revised edition of the *Complete Peerage* (under 'Lancaster'). This places no weight on the rewards to the bearers of the news, and in fact does not mention Edward III's payments to the news carriers at all. Nor does it mention Froissart's statement regarding Henry's year of birth. Instead Henry's wardrobe account book of 1382 is taken as a starting point. This states that on 3 April 1382 the duke of Lancaster made provision for thirteen poor men to receive alms from Henry, to which Henry added two more because 'he was fifteen years old', at a cost of an extra two shillings.<sup>10</sup> This provoked one amateur Victorian writer to state in *Notes & Queries* that 3 April 1367 was his precise date of birth.<sup>11</sup> The *Complete Peerage* pointed out that the account did not in fact specify a day but merely indicated that Henry was fifteen on this date in 1382, that is, born after 4 April 1366. It then remarked that giving age-related amounts of money on Maundy Thursday is still a practice observed by the sovereign, and that it remained a custom among the aristocracy 'until the Reformation'. It went on to argue that Henry was born 4–7 April 1366, on the grounds that he was fifteen on 3 April 1382 and yet twenty-nine on 8 April 1395. It suggested that the one age-related gift which does not fall into this pattern – that for Maundy Thursday 1397, when Henry gave presents to thirty-two men, suggesting he was then thirty-two – was a result of Henry adding a year to his age, in the tradition of Maundy payments.

---

preferred over 9 Aug. 1387, not as a matter of likelihood, as Allmand states, but because of the impossibility of the later date applying to Henry. It follows that the statement quoted by Allmand that Henry was in his 26th year at his coronation (Apr. 1413) is erroneous; he was already 26. His father was at Monmouth later in Sept. 1386, as shown by an indenture between Henry of Lancaster's chamberlain and treasurer dated 24 Sept. (T.N.A.: P.R.O., DL 28/1/2 fo. 28). In addition, Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 8 refers to an astrological work compiled in Henry's reign which also points to 16 Sept. 1386, and even gives the time of the birth. The date of 16 Sept. 1386 therefore appears to be as reliable for Henry V as that assigned to any other late medieval king.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Froissart, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain and the Adjoining Countries*, ed. T. Johnes (2 vols., 1848), ii. 678.

<sup>9</sup> A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, ii: *c.1307 to the Early 16th Century* (1982), p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> *The Complete Peerage*, comp. G. E. Cockayne (14 vols. in 15, 1910–98), vii. 417; T.N.A.: P.R.O., DL 28/1/1 fo. 5v.

<sup>11</sup> Hermentrude, 'Date of Henry IV's birth', *Notes & Queries*, 4th ser., xi (1873), 162.

There are many objections one can make to this note. First, the methodology employed – finding the date which fits through the cracks of the inconsistencies in the documents – requires us to believe that Henry would have counted his age as fifteen on the eve of what he knew to be his sixteenth birthday. This implies a precision which is not in keeping with the man's religious generosity nor with the spirit of the age. Moreover, even if this is allowed, there is no date which satisfies all the accounts. Unfortunately, the *Complete Peerage* only cites four of the accounts rather than all seven for which age-related payments are extant. The 1382 account does indeed seem to require Henry to have been born on or after 4 April 1366, but the 1398 one (which the note fails to mention) requires him to have been born on or before the same date. And the one possible date which satisfies both accounts – 4 April 1366 – would be incompatible with that for 1393 (also not mentioned), which gives his age as twenty-six on 6 April, indicating a date after 6 April 1366.

The biggest flaw in the *Complete Peerage* note, however, is its assumption that the modern celebration of Maundy ceremonies was in place by 1382 and that Henry was just following precedent in making an age-related payment. The royal Maundy was not related to the monarch's age before Henry's accession.<sup>12</sup> The earliest known royal distributions of Maundy alms are those of King John, who gave clothes and money to thirteen paupers in 1210 and thirteen pence each to thirteen paupers (14s 1d in total) in 1213.<sup>13</sup> Edward II engaged in the *pedilavium* or foot-washing (a custom associated with the Maundy Thursday celebrations) of fifty paupers in 1326, when he was approaching forty-two.<sup>14</sup> Edward III gave a penny each to fifty paupers on Maundy Thursday 1353, when he was forty; at the same time his son, Lionel, made a donation of 14s 1d (presumably thirteen pence to thirteen paupers, like John).<sup>15</sup> Edward continued to give pittances to fifty paupers on Maundy Thursdays, probably for the rest of his reign. He certainly did so in 1361 and 1363.<sup>16</sup> In 1377 he did not make a donation on Maundy Thursday, carrying it over to the following day, when he gave twenty-five shillings, probably sixpence to each of his usual fifty paupers.<sup>17</sup> Earlier in his reign he had distributed 200 pennies among 200 paupers on the Maundy Thursdays of 1338 and 1339 (when he was aged twenty-five and twenty-six respectively).<sup>18</sup> So, royal Maundy ceremonies had traditionally involved donations to thirteen, fifty or 200 paupers; never a number related to the

<sup>12</sup> B. Robinson, *Silver Pennies and Linen Towels: the Story of the Royal Maundy* (1992), pp. 63–4.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, *Silver Pennies*, pp. 24–5.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson, *Silver Pennies*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> T.N.A.: P.R.O., E 101/392/12 fo. 35r.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, *Silver Pennies*, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> T.N.A.: P.R.O., E 101/398/9, fo. 23r.

<sup>18</sup> *The Wardrobe Book of William de Nonvell, 1338–40*, ed. M. Lyon, B. Lyon and H. S. Lucas (Brussels, 1983), p. 211. See also T.N.A.: P.R.O., E 36/204 fos. 75v–76r, where nearly all his religious offerings in 1341–4 are donations to 50 or 200 paupers.

king's age. Richard II gave sixpence each to eighty-nine paupers on Maundy Thursday 1384, hardly commensurate with his age then.<sup>19</sup> Significantly this was two years after Henry of Bolingbroke's first extant age-related payment. It would appear that when Henry started making age-related payments on Maundy Thursday 1382, he was not following a royal precedent.

This raises the question of whether he was following some other tradition, for example a custom of Duke Henry of Lancaster, his maternal grandfather. On this matter it is not possible to be certain, for certainty would require us to consult chamber or wardrobe accounts which are no longer extant, but it is very unlikely that he was following an aristocratic family tradition. No earlier examples of aristocrats making age-related payments on Maundy Thursday have yet come to light. Elizabeth de Burgh made a gift to fifty paupers in 1352, when she was fifty-seven, suggesting that Edward III's habit of making Maundy donations to fifty recipients was a more general one, not just restricted to the royal family.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the earliest age-related donation by a non-royal aristocrat yet found is that of Henry's wife, Mary de Bohun, who in 1388 made Maundy donations to eighteen women, she being at that time aged eighteen.<sup>21</sup> This implies that the custom might have come from her family. However, when Henry made his first age-related Maundy donation in April 1382, Mary was still only twelve and living with her mother. Thus, she is unlikely to have influenced his gift-giving practices. It is far more likely that she picked the custom up from Henry after she starting residing with him, in 1384 or 1385.

This view that Henry was the first to make age-related Maundy gifts is supported by the text of Henry's account. The donation was originally John of Gaunt's initiative, but John's specific intention was that his son should make a donation to thirteen paupers. This was a traditional number, reflecting the number of men – twelve disciples and Christ – at the Last Supper. King John and Lionel of Antwerp had made donations to thirteen men, as mentioned above. But the account states that it was Henry himself who extended the donation to reflect the number of years in his age, paying for the extra two paupers out of his own wardrobe. Henry also changed the form of his Maundy Thursday donations over the years. In 1382 he gave a shilling to each pauper. In 1391 he gave a pair of shoes. The following year, russet cloth and shoes.<sup>22</sup> The year after that,

<sup>19</sup> T.N.A.: P.R.O., E 101/401/2 fo. 37v.

<sup>20</sup> J. Ward, *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry, 1066–1500* (Manchester, 1995), p. 220. The author is grateful to Philip Morgan for alerting him to this reference.

<sup>21</sup> Henry's account for 1387–8 records that his wife made a Maundy Thursday payment to 18 poor women in 1388. She was aged three or four at her father's death in Jan. 1373. T.N.A.: P.R.O., DL 28/1/2 also records various items of clothing given by her to these 18 poor women.

<sup>22</sup> Toulmin Smith, p. 116.

a tunic and a pair of shoes. In 1395 each pauper received a tunic and hood of russet, as well as a pair of shoes and thirteen pence. In 1397 and 1398 each pauper received russet cloth only. From these personal variations, and from his initial change from his father's original design, it would appear that the annual donation was very much Henry's own initiative, and little or nothing to do with an earlier aristocratic precedent.

There are several reasons to suspect that, in making his age-related Maundy Thursday donations, Henry was celebrating his birthday. First, however, the celebration of a birthday on a moveable feast requires comment. All previous writers who have discussed or dismissed this aspect of Henry IV's life have presumed that Henry would have celebrated his birthday on a specific day, for instance 25 April. This is not necessarily the case. Edward II, for example, who was born on 25 April, would have identified his birthday with St. Mark, the saint whose feast day it was. Similarly, Edward III gave offerings on his birthday (13 November) to St. Brice. The chroniclers also thought of dates of birth according to the saint's day. When a man was born on an important feast day, even if it was a moveable feast, the religious connotation applied. A later, but reliable, first-hand example of this comes from the pen of the sixteenth-century diarist, Henry Machyn, who noted his own birthday as 16 May in one year and 20 May in another.<sup>23</sup> These dates are apparently inconsistent, which is very surprising for a diarist, but they are both the Wednesday after Whitsun in their respective years.<sup>24</sup> Machyn was dating his birthday not to a single date but in relation to a moveable feast. A well-known earlier case of a royal anniversary being established on a moveable feast is that of King John's regnal year; as John was crowned on Ascension Day 1199, this resulted in regnal years which started on a different day and were consequently of different lengths. To return to Henry's 1382 account, the statement that he was fifteen on Maundy Thursday does not necessarily mean that he was born on that date, but nor does it mean that he was not, in the sense that Maundy Thursday each year may well have been the day on which he marked the anniversary of his birth. If he marked his birthday on Maundy Thursday, we should expect some apparent inconsistency in the calculation of his age on specific dates, with irregularly long and short years, which is indeed what we have.

Of the seven extant accounts detailing Henry's payments on Maundy Thursday, three – those for 1382, 1391 and 1393 – suggest that he was born in the year 1366–7, and three – 1392, 1395 and 1398 – suggest the

<sup>23</sup> *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, ed. J. G. Nichols (Camden Soc., xlii, 1848), pp. 63, 283.

<sup>24</sup> I. Mortimer, 'Tudor chronicler or 16th-century diarist? Henry Machyn and the nature of his manuscript' *Sixteenth Century Jour.*, xxxiii (2002), 981–98; I. Mortimer, 'Machyn, Henry (1496/1498–1563)', in *O.D.N.B.*

year 1365–6.<sup>25</sup> The first three were drawn up by Hugh Waterton and Richard Kingston but the last three were all drawn up by William Loveney. Given the reckoning of a birthday on a moveable feast as outlined above, they are not necessarily inconsistent. There were two ways of calculating a man's age in the medieval period: age last birthday (the modern method) and age next birthday. If the gifts recorded by Waterton and Kingston relate to Henry's age in completed years, and those recorded by Loveney relate to his age next birthday, then all but the 1397 account indicate a date after Maundy Thursday 1366 and on or before Maundy Thursday 1367.<sup>26</sup> This implies that Henry's treasurer had a say in his calculation of his age, but in fact this is not as unlikely as it first appears. If Henry needed to ask how old he was, then his treasurer or someone of similar rank may well have provided him with details about his age.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, if Henry gave orders for an age-related gift to be made, and declared or learned that he was in his twentieth year, for example, then either he or his treasurer could interpret that as meaning he was nineteen or twenty, and make provision accordingly. Loveney always went for the higher age.

Support for the hypothesis that his age-related donations were connected to his birthday – and that the year-next-birthday method of dating his age might have applied – comes from an earlier series of age-related gifts. From the late twelve-eighties, Edward I marked the birthday of his eldest son, the future Edward II, by age-related donations corresponding to his son's age next birthday.<sup>28</sup> Edward III similarly marked his birthday with a large number of donations: 300 or 400 paupers each year. Obviously this is not an age-related number, but nevertheless it is worth observing that he did celebrate his birthday in the form of a distribution of alms to paupers, as Edward I had done for his son.<sup>29</sup> Also, age-related payments were not made for other purposes in this period, so far as one can determine. Given that there was a recent precedent –

<sup>25</sup> These are listed in Wylie, iv. 331.

<sup>26</sup> The 1397 account oddity is perhaps explained by the fact that Maundy Thursday in 1367 fell on 15 Apr., and of all the Maundy Thursdays for which we have evidence, that of 1397, which fell on 19 Apr., is the only instance when he had moved past 15 Apr. and into his next year. An alternative explanation is provided by later evidence. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries the monarch's age was deliberately calculated to be two years in advance of his age last birthday (as Henry's was in 1397), this being explained as the king's age on his next birthday 'plus one more to represent the year of Grace, the further year which, by God's grace, it was hoped that the monarch might live' (see Robinson, *Silver Pennies*, pp. 64–5).

<sup>27</sup> A. McHardy, 'Richard II', in *The Reign of Richard II*, ed. G. Dodd (Stroud, 2000), pp. 11–32, at p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> On his 13th birthday – the day Prince Edward started his 14th year – Edward I gave 1,400 pennies to paupers (100 for each year of his age), and on his 16th birthday, he gave out 1,700 pennies (see H. Johnstone, *Edward of Carnarvon 1284–1307* (Manchester, 1946), pp. 8 n. 2, 86).

<sup>29</sup> In 1338 and 1339 Edward III gave pittances to 400 paupers (Lyon, Lyon and Lucas, p. 211). In 1342–3 and 1353 he gave to 300 paupers (T.N.A.: P.R.O., E 36/204 fo. 76r; E 101/392/12 fo. 35v).

perhaps even a royal custom – of marking a birthday with donations to the poor, it is worth considering that in amplifying his Maundy Thursday gift in this way, in 1382 and every year thereafter, Henry was following Edward III's example and marking his birthday. This possibility is made much more likely by two specific aspects of the oblations. First, Henry personally linked this donation to his age – a practice otherwise only known from a previous royal birthday – and, second, he marked his age *only* on Maundy Thursday: he made no age-related gifts at Easter, Whitsun or Christmas, for example. Thus it would appear reasonable to suggest that the most likely date for Henry's birth is Maundy Thursday (15 April) 1367 and that he accordingly celebrated his birthday on Maundy Thursday each year.

Prince Edward's reward to the bearer of the news of his nephew's birth was not enrolled until 18 November 1367.<sup>30</sup> The *Complete Peerage* sees no inconsistency between this and a birth in April 1366. No explanation for the delay was given, but Kirby provided two in his *Henry IV of England*, suggesting that it might either be very belated or might refer to another son.<sup>31</sup> This is unsound on both counts. First, if this related to another son, some payment should have previously appeared enrolled in respect of the news of Henry's birth in 1366. Rewards were normally paid for the news of the birth of an heir, so for the prince to reward the bearer of the news of a younger son and not the heir, while the heir was still alive, is unrealistic. But more significantly, as Kirby knew, Edward III's exchequer paid a reward of five pounds to Ingelram Falconar on 1 June 1367 for bringing news announcing that a son had recently been born to the duke and duchess of Lancaster.<sup>32</sup> Although the enrolment of a patent letter might be delayed, especially as it was on behalf of the prince of Wales, who was in Gascony at the time, the payment to Falconar on the issue roll for Easter term 1367 implies that the writ ordering the payment had been delivered not long before. Comparing other specific events in England for which payments appear on the issue rolls, we may note that payment to bearers of news was normally made between one and two months after the event.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the 1 June payment is not the only one from Easter term 1367; another was made on 14 July.<sup>34</sup> It would

<sup>30</sup> *Complete Peerage*, vii. 417, quoting *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1377–81*, pp. 194–5.

<sup>31</sup> Kirby, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Issues of the Exchequer*, ed. F. Devon (1837), p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Devon, p. 170 (payment on 3 May 1359 for an event on 4 March 1359); and p. 191 (payment on 5 July 1367 for a horse taken at Najera on 3 Apr. 1367 and brought to Edward III in England, so within three months of the battle but probably less than six weeks after the order to pay the reward for this beast). The obvious examples to the contrary – the late rewards paid to men returning from Poitiers – are explained by the fact that these men were returning from Gascony.

<sup>34</sup> Goodman, p. 46, using T.N.A.: P.R.O., E 403/431 mm. 13, 19. The author is grateful to Professor Goodman for supplying him with the MS. reference. The second payment was made to Blanche, widow of Sir Robert Bertram.



appear that the first payment was specifically for letters announcing the birth and the second was for spoken news ('rumoribus') about the child, perhaps relating to the churching and baptism. The key point is this: had the writ to pay either of these rewards been received much before Easter, it would not have lingered in the exchequer for more than a month or two before being paid, as shown by the relatively prompt payments elsewhere in the rolls at this time; and if it had been paid before Easter, it would have appeared on the issue roll for the previous (Michaelmas) term. So, working on the payment for the receipt of the letter, we may rule out a date for Henry's birth much before the end of March 1367 (Easter falling on 18 April that year). Considering that the writing of the letter and its delivery from Bolingbroke would have taken time, and so would the writing and delivery of the king's writ to the exchequer, and the payment and recording of the sum, it is very unlikely that Henry was born after mid May 1367. The resultant span of late March to mid May 1367 tallies with the 15 April 1367 postulated above.

April 1367 is supported by other, circumstantial evidence. One might reasonably have expected John of Gaunt to have been present at the churching of his wife, which in the case of male children normally took place thirty-three days after the birth. In May 1366, however, John remained at Westminster. So, too, did his brother Edmund. There are no signs of members of the royal family moving to Bolingbroke to celebrate Blanche's churching a month after the April 1366 date proposed in the *Complete Peerage*.<sup>35</sup> A year later, however, John of Gaunt was overseas. It was not feasible for him to return to attend the churching, and it would have been unseemly for another member of the family to have held a great gathering in his absence. This would explain why Henry's birth went almost entirely unrecorded. With no large-scale feast or tournament to celebrate the churching of the duchess and the baptism of the heir, few noblemen and women would have travelled about circulating the news at the chronicle-writing monastic establishments at which they stayed.

On the strength of this evidence, it would appear that we should re-date Henry's birth with certainty to the period late March–mid May 1367, and probably to Maundy Thursday that year (15 April). This means that Henry was slightly younger than Richard, obviously, but it also means that he was indeed only fourteen when he appeared publicly in the tournament to celebrate Richard II's wedding to Anne in January 1382. Moreover, it seems that 1382 marks the start of age-related Maundy donations. The explanatory wording of Henry's account for that year suggests that was the first time that Henry decided to make his age-related offering. Within six years, his wife was following his example, and

<sup>35</sup> Typescript index of Edward III charter roll witnesses, copied from T.N.A.: P.R.O., C 53/149 (39–40 Edward III).

not very much longer after that the practice spread. It seems that it became fashionable for prominent Lancastrian families to celebrate in the same way, collectively commemorating the birth date of the founder of the dynasty. The fifth earl of Northumberland's ordinary of 1510 repeats many aspects of Henry's own Maundy gifts as earl of Derby, for example the gift of 'as menny Gownes to as menny Poor Men as my Lorde is Yeres of Aige with Hoodes to them and one for the Yere of my Lordes Aige to Come Of Russet cloth'.<sup>36</sup> As a pro-Lancastrian custom, it was regularly performed by Henry VII and the Tudors.<sup>37</sup> Cardinal Wolsey's Maundy ceremonies and those of Queen Mary also mention canvas or russet cloth, shoes and money, and calculate the age as of next birthday, like Henry's own (as written up by Loveney).<sup>38</sup>

If this analysis is correct, it may well be that the origin of the practice as a pro-Lancastrian rite stems from Henry's choice publicly to celebrate his religious birthday as a response to his cousin Richard celebrating his birthday on the Epiphany. In addition to the date, the story of the three kings being present at Richard's birth (which Richard himself drew attention to in the Wilton Diptych), was clearly circulated to add to the king's halo of sanctity and, through this sanctity, of his being above the law. This would have found a powerful answer in Henry's public association with the Maundy rites, in which even kings were expected to abase themselves and wipe the feet of paupers. Indeed, it is no surprise to find Henry undertaking to perform exactly that demonstration of humility in the 1382 Maundy ceremonies, paying for a cloth to perform this ritual wiping. We can only speculate that he instigated such a contest of royal birthday demonstrations in response to Richard's order for him to remain in the Tower during the Peasants' Revolt the previous year – an order which almost cost Henry his life – but either way, we may be certain that as a Lancastrian symbol and a signifier of royal humility, the ceremony remained potent, for it survives to this day. It is therefore ironic that the age-related aspect of the royal Maundy ceremony – which was probably designed by Henry to publicize his important religious birthday – has eclipsed him and his date of birth altogether.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in B. Robinson, *The Royal Maundy* (1977), pp. 26–7.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson, *Silver Pennies*, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Robinson, *Royal Maundy*, pp. 28–31.