

Prebendary Richard de Courtenay

Just after the Black Death, we met Prebendary Richard de Thormerton who spent his life fighting but failing to keep all his (many) prebends (and the income that went with them).

It was common for sons of the aristocracy to obtain a living from the church by joining the clergy. So, in 1374, we meet another Prebendary: Richard, son of Sir Philip Courtenay of Powderham Castle, Exeter and grandson of Hugh de Courtenay, 10th Earl of Devon. Better still, he was nephew of the Archbishop of Canterbury and descended from King Edward I.

Does a lineage get any better? He was a renowned intellectual but best known for his stunning good looks, being nicknamed the *Flower of Devon*.

Richard was educated at Exeter College, Oxford where he met the future King Henry V. He entered the Church and rose rapidly, holding Whitchurch Prebend from 1374 to 1410. In his time, Wells Cathedral neared completion and they raised the chimneys in Vicar's Close.

Oxford University elected him Chancellor three times, first in 1407. He fought both King Henry IV and Pope Gregory XII for the independence of the University. He won some battles but King and Pope triumphed in the end.

In 1410, he became Dean of Wells and resigned Whitchurch Prebend. In 1413, he was consecrated Bishop of Norwich.

Courtenay was a close friend of King Henry V. On his accession in 1413, Henry made Richard *Treasurer of the Royal Household*. He went on diplomatic errands for the King who also employed him on public business at home.

1415 was the year of the famous Battle of Agincourt and Courtenay was with the King at the capture of Harfleur from the French but he succumbed to dysentery¹ and died.

Henry was distraught. He bathed Richard's body, ordering that it be buried alongside him in Westminster Abbey, rather than his wife. The story put about was that they buried Richard on the step beside Henry's tomb.



Henry V



In 1953, though, excavation revealed the grave of a six-foot tall man in Henry V's Chantry Chapel in Westminster Abbey. In the stone-lined grave was a crozier and gold ring set with an oval ruby. The ring is hinged to hold a small relic within. The excavation confirmed that Henry's order had been obeyed.

The closeness of the attachment has led to speculation, including from the current Earl, that Richard may have played a critical role in mentoring Henry to become a respected monarch and that his relationship with Henry may have been more than a friendship.