

A Royal Wedding in Ruislip

by Sylvia Ladyman

Reading an article in the *English Heritage magazine* of July 2015¹, I learnt that a new building is being constructed to protect a magnificent tiled floor in the Monks' refectory (Fig. 1) at Cleeve Abbey in Somerset. It was laid down about 1272 and bears the heraldic symbols of the Kings of England, and Earls of Cornwall and Gloucester (Fig. 2). The author Jeremy Ashbee suggests that the pavement celebrated the marriage of Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, to Margaret de Clare, the Earl of Gloucester's sister... 'which happened far away in Ruislip'.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Questions flooded into my mind. Who were they? Why did they marry in Ruislip? Where in Ruislip did they marry? Who officiated? Why did Jeremy Ashbee say 'the marriage was a disaster'?

It was the 6 October 1272 when Edmund, 2nd Earl of Cornwall (1249-1300/01) married Margaret de Clare (1250-1312) in a chapel in Ruislip. Edmund of Almaine (of Germany), as he called himself, was the nephew of Henry III, as his father, Richard, was Henry's brother, and his mother, Sanchia, was the Queen's sister.

Edmund was born at Berkhamsted Castle on the 26 December 1249. The castle had been given to his father, Richard, in 1217, and by 1249 had been developed into a palatial residence. Edmund was baptised by his mother's uncle, Boniface of Savoy, Archbishop of Canterbury, and named Edmund in honour of St Edmund of Abingdon (Boniface's predecessor as Archbishop). He spent some childhood time in Germany in 1257 and 1259. Edmund had an older brother, Henry, 14 years his senior, who was expected to inherit the title. However, Henry was killed by his cousins, Simon and Guy de Montfort, sons of Simon de Montfort (1205-65) while attending mass in Viterbo, Italy, in March 1271².

In 1264 his father was captured at the Battle of Lewes and, as a result, he and his father were imprisoned at Kenilworth Castle, being released in 1265. He returned to Germany in 1268 when, it is said, he obtained a sample of Christ's blood which belonged to Charlemagne. It is believed he gave samples of the blood to Hailes Abbey, which had been founded by his father in 1246, and to Ashridge Abbey which he himself founded in 1283.

His bride was Margaret de Clare³, the daughter of Richard de Clare, 6th Earl of Gloucester, and 5th Earl of Hertford, and Maud, daughter of John de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln. Richard had no children with his first wife, but with Maud he had seven. Margaret was the fifth child. Richard died in 1262 and so his widow Maud arranged marriages for all her children, as was customary. Children had no choice, often the bride and groom met for the first time at the ceremony. Marriages were important for the future of land, property and wealth – love was not considered. Margaret was aged 22 and Edmund 23 when they married, older than many couples at the time.

Edmund was certainly a financial asset to the Gloucesters. He was the richest man in England at that time. He had inherited vast wealth from his father, chiefly from the tin mines and ports of Cornwall. He made large loans to Edward I and other members of the Court. In 1299 the Crown debt to Edmund was £6,500 and, shortly after, Edward I borrowed a further £2,000.

So where did this marriage take place? St Martin's Church had been rebuilt in the mid-13th century and must have been a handsome building in 1272. However, the Abbey of Bec's Priory which was on the site of the present Manor Farm House probably had a **chapel** by that date. An inventory⁴ made in 1294 mentions a **chapel** there. Another⁵ in 1435 lists a hall, chamber, counting house and **chapel**, as well as a bake-house, prior's chamber, lord's chamber, forester's chamber and scullery. Who officiated? It was probably the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Edmund was made a knight by Henry III in Westminster Abbey soon after his wedding on the 13 October 1272. A month later Henry died and Edmund had to inform his cousin, Edward, that he was now Edward I, as he held a post in the Government Council.

I was still puzzled - why was Ruislip chosen as a venue for the marriage? Edmund was so rich he could have married anywhere. However, the Clare family was associated with the Manor of neighbouring Harefield in the late 11th and 12th century, although not as late as the date of the wedding⁶. Members of the Clare family were patrons of the Abbey of Bec⁷. It was an unhappy marriage. They were not blessed with children. It is said that, in January 1286, the Bishop of

Winchester excused himself from a meeting as he wanted to be present at the delivery of the Duchess of Cornwall, but no birth has been recorded. The marriage deteriorated, possibly because Edmund travelled with Edward I to Wales in 1279, and later in the same year, was appointed to the Regency Council when Edward I and his bride, Eleanor of Castile, travelled in France. Indeed, he represented Edward on several occasions.

Margaret accused him of neglect and cruelty⁸, and he refused to live with her. In 1290 John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury, excommunicated him. They were separated in 1294. He granted her money and property to support herself, as long as she remained chaste.

Edmund died on the 25 September 1300 aged 50 at Ashridge Abbey in Hertfordshire. His heart and flesh were buried there, while his bones were buried at Hailes Abbey in Gloucestershire, where his mother and father had been buried. The King's son, Edward (aged 16, the future Edward II) attended the funeral⁹. He left money for 100 knights to fight the infidels, to Hailes Abbey, Bewley Abbey near Oxford, Ashridge Abbey, and several priories and hermitages. However, much of his money and property went to the Crown.

Margaret died on the 16 September 1312, and was buried at Chertsey Abbey.

As Jeremy Ashbee says, 'why this occasion (which happened far away in Ruislip) was marked particularly at Cleeve is a mystery'. Why the couple chose Ruislip is another. Nevertheless, it would be well worth a visit to see the tiled floor in its new protective building if you are in Somerset.

Note

Michael Ray, *A Forgotten Hero, Edmund of Almain Earl of Cornwall* - an unpublished outline of the chapters of his forthcoming biography found on the internet. He mentions Mary Midgley's 1930 MA Thesis Manchester University, *Edmund Earl of Cornwall and his place in history*, Unpublished.

¹ *English Heritage Members' magazine*, July 2015, p.25, article 'Step Back In Time' by J. Ashbee

² Information in this and the following paragraph from Wikipedia

³ *Complete British Peerage*, Vol. 3

⁴ *VCH Middlesex*, Vol. 1 1969, The Priory of Ruislip, p202-4

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *VCH Middlesex*, Vol. 3, 1962, p240

⁷ Morgan, Marjorie *English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, 1946 p11

⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

⁹ Wikipedia