

# FROM THE BLACK PRINCE TO THE BLACK DEATH

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Last week we looked at how Edward II's favourite (some say 'lover'), Piers de Gaveston, was made Duke of Cornwall and given the Manor of Byfleet. This week I want to move on to Edward III's reign and his son Edward, Duke of Cornwall, known to many as 'The Black Prince'.



We know quite a bit about the Manor of Byfleet during this period as the registers of the Black Prince contain many references to the area between September 1346 and November 1348, and then again from March 1351 to May 1365.

It was during the first of these periods that the Manor House at Byfleet appears to have had quite a face-lift.

In January 1347 the Earl of Surrey was asked 'to aid the Prince with as much timber as he will – as the Prince has to build at his Manor of Byflete – a kitchen and other houses, and is not provided with as much timber as he needs'. This lack of funds (or at least building materials) seems to have been a perpetual problem for Byfleet. Fortunately, on this occasion, it appears that the Earl was forthcoming with some of the timber, as in April 1347, William Bynorth, the 'bailiff of Byflete' was given the order 'to repair the Kitchen in the said Manor and the other defects there, as in roofs, walls and other things'.

The work appears to have been started by a man called Benet Dyker, as in October 1347 there was an order to 'pay Benet Dyker, in the presence of Sir Richard, parson of the church of Byflet, Controller of the Works there, what is due him for making the foundation of the Prince's Kitchen at Byflet'.

Work was also needed in the park, where on

the 8th November 1347 Bynorth, was ordered 'with all haste to enclose by ditch and hedge – all the lands that - adjoin the park as they extend along the old ditch adjoining the common.'

That may have been one of the last acts for some time by Bynorth in Byfleet as two weeks later the accounts list various payments by Sir Nicholas Pynnok, the prince's clerk, to 'William Bynorth, late bailiff of Byflete'. It is not until 1361 that he reappears in the records.

But at least he did reappear; unlike many local people who didn't survive that long, succumbing to the dreaded Black Death that first entered this country in the summer of 1348.

Unfortunately records for the Woking area from that period are scarce but at Farnham, where the Bishop of Winchester's people kept meticulous accounts, it appears that it struck North-West Surrey in the autumn of 1348 (having first entered the country from Bristol). During 1347-8 three properties had to pay heriots (a sort of medieval inheritance tax) to their landlord's at Winchester – in the year 1348-9 there were 133 inheritance payments made!

We don't know what the population was of the manor at that time, but as the 133 heirs represented only the heads of the household, it has been estimated that the total killed by the

One of the payments in the Black Prince's accounts (in February 1352), referred to a house in Byfleet called 'la boverie' that had been destroyed by fire. The account included reference to the 'plough-horse, wools, skins and other things which were burnt therein'. Where



Whilst there are no records of anyone dying from the Black Death in Woking in the late 1340's, there are from Farnham, and it would be foolish to think that our area would have been saved whilst others nearby lost up to a third of their population. Like Byfleet, work on Farnham Castle stopped during the worst excesses of the plague.

Black Death could be as much as a third of the manor's population!

As I say there is no evidence of what affect the Black Death had on the population of Woking, but on the other hand there is no evidence that

# BYFLEET - A LITTLE CORNER OF CORNWALL

It appears from official papers that Edward III, often stayed with his son at Byfleet as documents signed (or at least sealed) by the King from Byfleet are dated September 1338; from November 1338 to April 1339; September 1339; February 1340; February & March 1343 and May 1345.

Even after the death of the Black Prince (shown here on his tomb in Canterbury), Byfleet continued to be part of the Duchy of Cornwall, with Geoffrey Chaucer being appointed Clerk of the Works at Byfleet in 1389. Soon after, however, it appears that Richard II had tired of the manor as he granted it first to the Earl of Northumberland and then, in 1391 for a period of ten years, to his Treasurer, the Bishop of Salisbury – ‘for his easement and abode whenever he chooses to thither’. Whether the Bishop ever did ‘thither’ is not certain as within a couple of years the Manor was granted to William, the Duke of Gueldres (nominally for six years) and then to Roger Walden, Dean of York (who was the new Treasurer of England). The Dean also did not hold Byfleet for long. With the deposition of Richard in August 1399, Henry IV brought Byfleet back from the cold so to speak and granted the manor and park to his young son, Henry, Duke of Cornwall.

More repairs appear to have been carried out at Byfleet during the time of Henry IV as in 1411 ‘stone-cutters, carpenters and other workmen and labourers, were commissioned ‘for the repair of the manor’. This work appears to have continued after the Prince of Wales became King in 1413, but there are few references to the Manor House at Byfleet during Henry V’s reign or indeed the reign of his son, Henry VI.

According to Maurice Beresford in his ‘English Medieval Boroughs: a revised handlist in 1981 – ‘There is some evidence that Byfleet was a borough prior to 1431. In that year there was a petition for tax relief when it was claimed that William Randolph once had lands in the borough, but these were later enclosed in the King’s park’.

The park is mentioned in 1447 when there is a record of £64.7s.4d. being paid out of the Exchequer to John Penycok ‘for repairs done in Byflet park and to a certain bridge within the said park; also for repairing a certain lodge there to keep rabbits within the said park’.

It appear that the bridge was one of the predecessors of the present footbridge by the Manor House.

Henry VI was deposed in 1461 and a few weeks later the new King, Edward IV, was at Byfleet – a document being signed by him here. But that appears to have been his one and only visit to the Manor.

The keeper of the park at Byfleet – John Penycok – had obviously supported Henry VI as his name appears on a list of those held for high treason for aiding the French and Scots at the battle of Tawton, near York, on the 29th March 1461. Later that year William Pault was made keeper of the Park of Byfleet, although how much the park was used during the subsequent ‘War of the Roses’ is uncertain.



The low window at east end of north Nave wall of St Peter's Church in Old Woking could possibly be for those who could not attend church such as carriers of the Black Death!



we would have been spared any more than our poor neighbours in Farnham.

Perhaps it is significant that work on Byfleet Manor stopped almost as soon as the Black Death struck (as it did on Farnham Castle at that time), but with the number of deaths receding in the 1350's work once more took place at Byfleet and the Black Prince returned. In June 1351 he wrote from London to William de Frammesworth (keeper of the King's stud at Guildford) informing him that he and his brother, the Earl of Richmond, 'plan to stay a great deal at the manor of Biflete'.

In the same year John de Alveton was steward of the Manor, and Simon, son of Simon of Biflete and William de Cranford were appointed Keepers of the Prince's swans 'in the water of Thamise and elsewhere in the streams adjacent thereto.' Simon de Biflete appears in the records in the same capacity in 1357, 1358 and 1359 though his partner had changed to Nicholas de Medeford.

From May 1354 there are letters signed by the Black Prince from Byfleet Manor and in June 1361 it is known that the King stayed with his son here. He returned again between July and September 1375, but the following year (1376) the Black Prince died and the manor passed to his young son, Richard – soon to be crowned Richard II.

# THE PLAGUED FAIR OF ST. CATHERINE'S



**D**eath from plague did not end in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There is evidence of plague in Guildford in 1563 when the inhabitants petitioned the Mayor to issue an order 'to restrain people from having recourse

to the hill of St Catherine's for the annual fair' (seen here in an 18<sup>th</sup> century painting), 'in consideration of the prevailing pestilence'.

There is another record from October 1578 stating that the fair of 11<sup>th</sup> November that year

should not be held 'owing to the prevalence of the plague in an around London' from 'whence so many usually attend', but as I say, records from the Woking area at that time are scarce and we cannot be certain how many (if any) died of the disease here.

