

# WOKING & THE START OF THE WAR OF THE ROSES

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A few weeks ago we left Woking in the hands of the Despenser family, and last week looked at the Black Prince and his Manor at Byfleet. This week I want to bring the story of both places more up to date and show how Woking played a part in what became known as 'The War of the Roses'.



The Black Prince's father, Edward III came to the throne in 1326 when Edward II was deposed following his close friendship with Piers Gaveston and the political meddling of Hugh Despenser the Younger. One of the people involved in the coup was Edward II's half-brother, Edmund Woodstock, the 1st Earl of Kent.

With the death of the both Hugh Despensers (Elder & Younger), Edmund was given the Manor of Woking, but unfortunately he wasn't to enjoy the title for long as Roger Mortimer saw him as a threat to his power and apparently tricked the Earl into thinking that the deposed Edward II was still alive. Woodstock became involved in a plot to rescue the late king with the result that in 1330 he was arrested, tried and executed for treason. Apparently there was so much public hostility to the execution at Winchester that 'he had to wait five hours for an executioner, because nobody wanted to do it'. In the end a convicted murderer was offered a pardon in exchange for taking on the task of executioner.

The Manor of Woking was then granted to Roger Mortimer, but justice appears to have been done, as Mortimer was himself hanged and drawn before the year was out and Edmund

During the War of the Roses the Woking area was on the side of the Red Roses of Lancaster, not the White Rose of York. The name of the farm (and the lane) is actually a corruption of 'White Trees' – as in the Silver Birches that grow profusely in this area.

Woodstock's son (also called Edmund), was restored to the Manor of Woking. From him it passed to Joan of Kent who inherited Woking in 1353.

In 1340, at the age of twelve, Joan had apparently secretly married Thomas Holland, but the following year (whilst Thomas was abroad) her family forced her to marry William Montague, the 2nd Earl of Salisbury. Obviously when Holland returned from his crusade he was not too pleased with the situation and appealed to the Pope for Joan's second, illegal marriage to be annulled.

Between then (1349) and Thomas' death in 1360 they had four children - Thomas; John (1st Duke of Exeter); Joan (whose second husband was Edmund, Duke of York) and Maud.

With the death of Thomas Holland, Joan - known to history as the 'Fair Maid of Kent' - was still a very attractive woman with her 'perfect features, auburn hair that reached to her waist,

and dark eyes', so it was perhaps no surprise that within a year she should remarry. Her second husband (or should that be third) was none other than Edward, the Black Prince – Lord of the neighbouring manor of Byfleet!

Unfortunately, as we learned last week, the Black Prince died in 1376, but the following year their son, Richard, became king upon the death of his grandfather, Edward III.

Richard II made his half brother - Sir Thomas Holland - the Earl of Kent in 1381 and although Joan apparently named Richard II as her heir, it was Sir Thomas who gained Woking upon her death in 1386.

Unfortunately Thomas, as a supporter of Richard II, got caught up in the fight with John of Gaunt that resulted in Richard being forced to abdicate (in favour of Gaunt's son, Henry IV) and Thomas being captured and taken prisoner at Cirencester. An angry mob overpowered his captors and beheaded him in the streets of the town - before Henry IV could try him for treason! Woking was again forfeited to the Crown.

Henry IV did not keep Woking for himself. However, he returned the manor, in dower, to Thomas' wife, Alice the dowager Countess of

King Richard II, son of the Black Prince (Lord of the Manor of Byfleet) and Joan, 'the Fair Maid of Kent' (who inherited Woking in 1353).



Kent. She enjoyed the right to remain at Woking until her death in 1416, when the Manor (and the title Earl of Kent) passed to her second son, Edmund.

It was during this Edmund's time that Woking was granted a charter by Henry VI to hold an annual fair on the Tuesday following the feast of Pentecost.

In the last century the fair was revived by the local Village Association with a fete held on the Saturday nearest the feast of Pentecost (seven weeks after Easter) in the garden of the White Hart public house in the village centre. The pub was an ideal location for the fair - being named after the symbol of Richard II.

As Edmund had no legitimate children (his daughter Eleanor was the result of an affair

with Constance of York) the manor passed to his sister, Margaret in 1407-8.

Margaret Holland married John Beaufort, the 1st Earl of Somerset. He was the first son of John of Gaunt by his mistress - later his second wife - Katherine Swynford.

Although born illegitimate, John of Gaunt persuaded his nephew, Richard II, to declare the Beaufort children legitimate in 1390 with the proviso that they were barred from the succession to the throne. Despite this all four children and their families were to play an important and ultimately decisive part in the outcome of what came to be known as the 'War of the Roses' - indeed it could be said that they started them!



Now boarded up awaiting conversion into 'apartments' the former White Hart public house in Old Woking was once the ideal location for the annual 'Pentecostal Fair', with the garden hosting a number of stalls from local groups and organisations. Unfortunately it's unique place in the history of Old Woking couldn't stop it from succumbing to the greed of developers.



## THE BATTLING BEAUFORT'S - PART TWO



The last of the line of Beaufort's – Lady Margaret – is commemorated in the name of many places in this area including Beaufort Road and Close, but the family connection goes back to the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Margaret Holland married John Beaufort, the son of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford.

John Beaufort's brother was Bishop Henry Beaufort, Chancellor of England to Henry IV when he deposed Richard II (a position he also held under Henry V), whilst his other brother, Thomas, was created Duke of Exeter after the battle of Agincourt. Their sister, Joan, married Ralph Neville, 1st Earl of Westmoreland. Their daughter Cecily married Richard, 3rd Duke of York and gave birth to the future kings Edward VI and Richard III.

Margaret Holland had six children by John Beaufort - Henry (2nd Earl of Somerset), John (1st Duke of Somerset), Thomas (Earl of Perche, who died in 1432), Joan (who married James I of Scotland), Edmund (who succeeded his brother John as 2nd Duke of Somerset) and Margaret (Countess of Devon).

John Beaufort died in 1410 and Margaret then married Thomas Plantagenet, Duke of Clarence (second son of Henry IV), the following year, but he died ten years later and they never had any children.

Henry Beaufort (2nd Earl of Somerset) never married and died in 1418 childless, so when Margaret Holland died in 1429 the Manor of Woking passed to her second son, John Beaufort.

Unfortunately at the time he was unable to enjoy his new estate as in 1421 he had been captured at the Battle of Baugé in Anjou and was not ransomed until 1438! The following year he married Margaret Beauchamp of Bletso.

They had only one child, a daughter christened Margaret, whose birthday was the 31st May (although whether she was born in 1441 or 1443 seems to be a matter for debate)!

Whatever year Margaret was born, 1443 was a decisive year for her father. As well as being created Duke of Somerset and Earl of Kendal, he was also made a Knight of the Garter, and

appointed "Captain-General of all France and Guienne" - a move that infuriated Richard, Duke of York, who was supposed to be chief of the forces in France. The two men were supposed to work together, but it is clear that they did not (or could not) with the result that poor John Beaufort returned home in the spring of 1444 a disappointed and discredited man. He died in May that year. It has been said that he was to be accused of treason and forbidden to see the king, and as a result committed suicide.

With Thomas (the third brother) also dead, the Manor passed to the youngest brother, Edmund, who appears to have been quite a character. At the age of 21 he had an affair with Henry V's widow, Queen Katherine of France (causing a political storm), and some time between 1431 and 1435 he had managed to marry Eleanor Beauchamp, daughter of the 13th Earl of Warwick, without a licence!

With his uncle, Bishop Henry, he had been one of the chief advisors to Henry V and a close ally of Henry VI - being killed at the first battle of St. Albans in May 1455 when Richard, Duke of York, captured Henry VI and made himself Constable of England. Apparently York's ally,

Richard, Duke of Warwick (an arch enemy of the Beaufort's), caught Edmund by surprise and killed him outside the Castle Inn in the town.

Edmund's son Henry succeeded his father as Lord of the Manor of Woking, but the wars were to cut short his life too when he died from injuries obtained at the Battle of Hexham in May 1464.

By this stage, of course, Henry VI was no longer king having been usurped by Richard of York's son, Edward VI and forced to flee to Scotland.

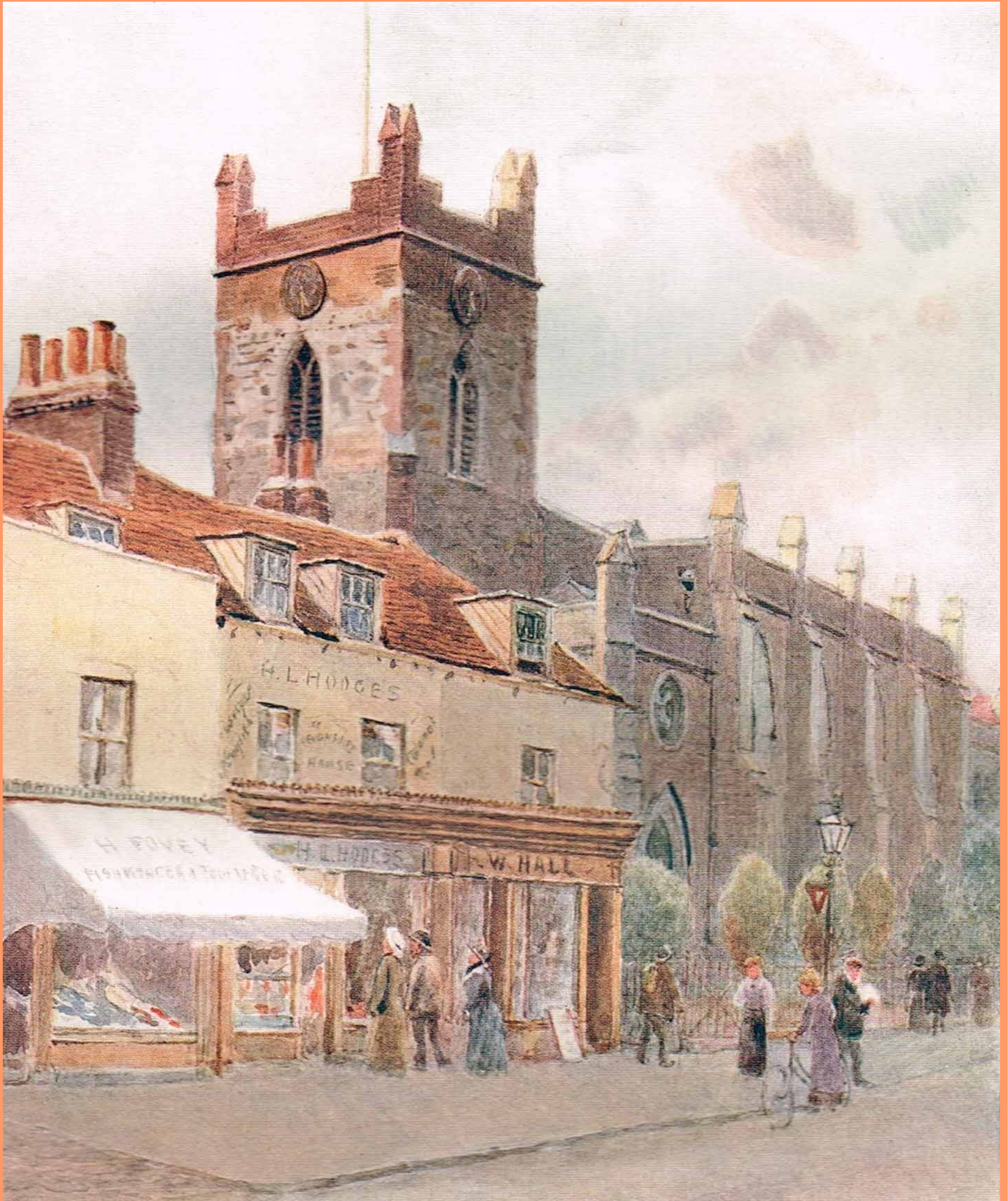
So as you can see the family were quite influential and pivotal in what became known as 'The War of the Roses'.

Woking reverted to the Crown with Edward VI granting the Manor to John Beaufort's daughter, Lady Margaret Beaufort in 1466.

Lady Margaret Beaufort was extremely well educated for a lady in her time, so it is also perhaps appropriate that the school on Goldsworth Park should bear her name (although the buildings are not quite as grand as the colleges she founded at Cambridge)!



## ON A PILGRIMAGE TO CHERTSEY ABBEY



Perhaps the most famous moment in Chertsey Abbey's history during this period came in 1471 when Henry VI died in the Tower of London soon after the Battle of Tewkesbury. To avoid riots in London, Edward VI decided to have Henry buried away from the capital. The body was taken up the Thames by barge and buried quietly in the Lady Chapel at Chertsey Abbey.

It was not long before Henry was seen as a Martyr, and within a few months pilgrims were making their way to Chertsey to see the tomb. For a dozen years it must have been quite a money-spinner for both Abbey and town, and one can only guess at the level of disappointment in the area when Richard III decided to remove the body to St George's Chapel at Windsor in 1484. In 1498 Chertsey

put in a bid to have him re-buried at the Abbey, but the bid failed. William Shakespeare records the event in *Richard III* (act one, scene two).

Perhaps Runnymede Borough Council should consider putting in a fresh bid to bring his bones back to the town. A few pilgrims might help boost local trade once more.