

## **Who's who at the medieval Palace?**

By Tricia Kern, Fulham Palace volunteer

Delve into the lives of four big names in the medieval period, and discover their links to Fulham Palace.

### **Queen Joan of England – The medieval Imelda Marcos? c.1370 – 1437**



*Source: Queens Regnant - Joan I of Navarre - History of Royal Women*

Although Jean was from Navarre in modern day Spain (in fact, she was a Princess there), she spent many of her early years in high society in France, until her father was made to return to Navarre. This explains Jean's **first marriage**, to Duke Jean V of Brittany. Following his death in 1399, when Joan was just 29, Joan became Regent for her young son, Jean VI, until he reached the age of 12.

In 1396 Henry of Bolingbroke, a fugitive and widower from England, visited Calais for the celebrations of the marriage of his cousin, King Richard II's, eldest daughter, to King Charles VI of France. Due to his fugitive status, Henry stayed often at the Breton Court and also **attended the celebrations of Joan's son, Jean VI**, when he was installed as Duke of Brittany once he reached the age of 12. Henry and Joan formed a connection, which encouraged Joan to consider remarrying.

She applied for a dispensation for marriage from the Pope, as the couple were third cousins. This process was more complicated than you might imagine - there were two Popes at the time, Pope Benedict of Avignon (who is now regarded as an anti-Pope) and Pope Boniface of Rome. To complicate things even further, Joan supported Pope Benedict and Henry, Pope Boniface. Anyway, with the documentation agreed, the couple started marriage negotiations with each other and the marriage by proxy took place in April 1402, meaning Joan was recognised Queen of England on her arrival in January 1403. A marriage service was held at Winchester Cathedral in early 1403 and Joan was crowned in Westminster Abbey later in the same year. Queen Joan visited Robert Braybrooke, Bishop of London, at Fulham Palace within her first year in England.



Joan, in a rather expensive hat. *Source: Wikipedia*

Both King Henry IV and Queen Joan had children with their previous spouses but didn't have any together, leading some to suspect Joan of "sorcery".

Queen Joan lived in England during the latter stages of the "Hundred Years War" with France – a very expensive war. Given this fact, Henry was extremely(!) generous to his wife, granting Joan roughly a ninth of the yearly exchequer income. Often Joan was not paid what had been agreed because the country couldn't afford it. With her dower from Brittany and England, Joan was very wealthy and this led to accusations of greed. As an individual, Joan was popular with her family, step-family and nobility but less so with the Parliamentarians who respected her – she was firmly disliked by the commoners of England. The latter group considered Joan to be French rather than from Navarre (not a good thing, since the French were the enemy). However, she was trusted by Henry IV and her

step-son, Henry V after his father died in 1413; both of whom made Joan Regent of England during their military campaigns.

However, things seemed to go a bit sour with Henry V. Sometime after 1417 Joan was arrested under his orders following a charge made against her by her confessor, John Randolph. The charge was witchcraft which usually carried a death sentence, but when brought before the Council, Randolph instead accused Joan of wanting to kill Henry V. Randolph was sent to the Tower of London, where he died after a fight with a warder in 1429. Few of the people who knew Joan believed that she was a witch but the country was having trouble paying for her as well as for the war... so accusations of avarice (one of the Seven Deadly Sins) relating to witchcraft, was a convenient reason for withholding her money. During her incarceration, Joan lived at the castles of Leeds and Pevensey. She was allowed visitors so many step-family members, clerics and nobility went to visit, so she lived in relative comfort for the three years of her imprisonment.

**In July 1422, Joan was released and her assets were returned to her on Henry V's** orders, issued from France, where he was dying of dysentery. At nine months old Henry VI became king, undertaking audiences whilst sitting on his mother's lap. After her release from imprisonment, Joan retired to a life away from the Court and intrigue, until her death in Havering atte Bower. Henry VI made sure his step-grandmother received a suitable funeral and interment to join her husband at Canterbury Cathedral.



Joan's tomb at Canterbury Cathedral – source Was Joanna of Navarre a Witch? | Anne Obrien - International writer of historical novels ([anneobrienbooks.com](http://anneobrienbooks.com))

## King Henry VI

(1421 – 1471)



Source – Wikipedia

King Henry VI was hosted by **Bishop Robert Gilbert** when he visited Fulham Palace in 1439/40 for four days. It is said it took servants a further four days to clear up after the event. This seems rather at odds with reports about Henry's personality from the time, he is believed to have been studious, pious, reclusive and ill-prepared for the governmental work of medieval kingship. **Henry VI's** mother was Catherine of France (1401-1437), and upon the death of his maternal grandfather King Charles VI of France, Henry was also proclaimed King of France and was crowned in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris in 1431. Henry VI is the only monarch of England to have been crowned King of France too, although other English kings had claimed to be.

As I mentioned in Queen Jean's section, Henry VI started his rule at the age of 9 months. **Such was the turmoil of his reign, the King's minority** rule was never declared over! Henry VI was crowned at Westminster Abbey in 1429 when he was almost eight. Many family members jostled for control of Henry (and through him the crown), the frontrunner of these family members was Richard Plantagenet, 3rd Duke of York who declared that he was a closer descendant to Henry III (200 years previously) and that because Henry IV had taken the throne from Richard he had a stronger claim to the throne. Others who jostled for power included Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick and Cardinal Henry

Beaufort, each of whom won victories against each other in their search for power.

A 14 year old Henry married Margaret of Anjou in 1445. By this time much of the French territory gained by England in the hundred years war was lost and by 1453 Calais was the sole remains of the English venture. Henry VI suffered bouts of mental illness, possibly inherited through his mother from Charles VI of France. During these episodes, the Duke of York (Richard Plantagenet) was called Protector and a magnate council was formed - and the country was ruled well. This drew attention to the fact that Henry VI was not a strong ruler for when he was declared sane again. There was much unrest amongst those jostling for power, Richard was dismissed and Edmund Beaufort, second Duke of Somerset became powerful and was allied Henry's wife, Queen Margaret. Margaret was very supportive of her husband during his first illness and after eight years of marriage, she gave birth to **the couple's only child**, Edward, Prince of Wales (1453-1471). There were rumours that Prince Edward might be illegitimate, which were firmly denied by the Queen. When Henry VI had another episode of illness, Queen Margaret had someone else to fight for, her son. This was the start of the War of The Roses, a civil war between descendants of King Henry III.



Margaret of Anjou - source - Wikipedia

Queen Margaret was a powerful woman, and behaved like a regent even when her husband was well. She got Henry VI to close Parliament and muster an army to

take on the Yorkist faction. However, this plan failed and King, Queen and Prince went into exile, first in Scotland and later France. Edward Plantagenet (son of Richard) took over and was crowned Edward IV with the help of the Earl of Warwick. Years later this relationship soured and Queen Margaret and the Earl reconciled, it was agreed that Henry would be reinstated as King of England. King Edward IV fled to Holland but was determined to regain his throne. So followed the Battle of Tewkesbury where the Prince of Wales was killed - or murdered. Henry VI was arrested and killed and Queen Margaret was sent to the Tower of London, then on to other castles as a prisoner. **Queen Margaret's father, King Rene,** worked tirelessly to have his daughter released and in 1475 she was allowed to return to France, where she died in poverty in 1482. Queen Margaret's life was one of many victories on behalf of her husband during the civil war but her personal losses were great.

Henry VI and Queen Margaret's **names live on, Henry** introduced two scholastic foundations in England - **Eton College, Berkshire and Kings' College,** Cambridge, whilst Queen Margaret created Queens College, Cambridge.

## Bishop Robert Gilbert



Window depicting Bishop Robert Gilbert at St Etheldreda's church in Oxfordshire; *source: Alamy*

Bishop Robert Gilbert (who welcomed King Henry VI for that four day stay which required four days for cleaning afterwards!) is presumed to have come from more modest means than many others who held the role during the medieval period. We have few details about his family, only that he had a brother, and his dates of birth and death are not confirmed.

Robert must have been a very able man then, as his background did not stop him from attending Merton College from 1398, followed by Exeter and Oriel Colleges. He **obtained a master's degree, followed by a** doctorate in theology. By this time, he had been involved several times in trials of heresy; later to be asked to examine the **"heretical" works of John Wycliffe (Wyclif)**, John Clayton and the Lollards. Over 34 years, Robert Gilbert secured ecclesiastical roles, starting in a Cheshire rectory, moving to important ecclesiastical offices, including the Council of Constance, where he spoke about undertaking reform of the Church. On his return from the Council of Constance, Gilbert was appointed Warden of Merton College. In November 1417 he attended the Canterbury Convocation and made a notable speech in support of benefices for university graduates.

By this time King Henry V had noticed Gilbert and appointed him Dean of the Chapel Royal. Gilbert accompanied the **King's army to Normandy** and he witnessed battles. What he saw made him question his conscience over his support for the English troops. Following his return to England, further advantageous appointments followed, including the Archdeaconry of Durham. **After King Henry's** death in 1423, Gilbert continued to rise. He was appointed as one of the English ambassadors to the Council of Pavia, then to the Treasury of York in 1425, the deanship of York cathedral in 1426, and the deanship in 1430 of the Royal Free

Chapel of Tickhill. However, things went downhill in March 1432, when Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, (Lord Protector of Henry VI in his minority), had him replaced as Dean of the Chapel Royal. Robert Gilbert may have thought his career was slipping, so he accepted the Canonship of York. But things looked up again when one of Gilbert's **sponsors**, Cardinal Henry Beaufort (who was in opposition to the Duke of Gloucester) promoted him to the episcopal bench. When the See of London became vacant, Cardinal Beaufort used his influence to further promote Robert Gilbert – to Bishop of London! Unlike other Bishops, Gilbert was not known to have held any office of state or undertaken any diplomatic events whilst Bishop, instead he concentrated his time on meetings of parliament and great councils.

Bishop Gilbert's sponsor Henry Beaufort (who was in opposition to the Duke of Gloucester) may have thought his hard work to promote Gilbert had paid off when in 1441 Gilbert was named on the bench in the trial of Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester. She stood accused of witchcraft and was found guilty - she was effectively imprisoned for the rest of her life.

Gilbert was also appointed justice of the peace and was assigned to raise money for the King; indeed, he lent the King £383 6s. 8d of his own money! Bishop Gilbert spent some time every month of his 12 year episcopate in his diocese, Gilbert had the personal touch in his work, and didn't rely on other staff at Fulham Palace. Despite advancing years and illness he was a conscientious bishop for whom no task was too small, like the job of settling disputes between peripatetic and **residential canons at old St Paul's Cathedral over the distribution of bread and beer!**

Bishop Gilbert died in 1448 and his will made a modest number of cash bequests to friaries within the diocese of £40 to be shared with poorer churches (I wonder if the King ever paid him back the money he owed!). He left other personal belongings to his servants and his pontifical books and his mitre to St Paul's pastoral staff. He wished for his funeral to be modest but these wishes were overruled - **he was interred at old St Paul's Cathedral**. An additional memorial is a 15th century **stained glass window dedicated to Bishop Gilbert at St Etheldreda's Church, Horley, Oxfordshire**.



## Robert Braybrook (Braybrooke or Braybroke) – Bishop of London

Robert Braybrook was Dean of Salisbury Cathedral when he was nominated to be Bishop of London on 9 September 1381. Robert Braybrook was named Lord Chancellor, the second highest office of state in 1382 and held this position until July 1383.



Source – National Portrait Gallery

There is a Common Paper Mandate, dated 28 June 1391 where Bishop Braybrook wrote to the clergy of the Diocese complaining *“foreign men were holding open shop through lack of Wardens and of good rule”*. The Bishop went on to say,

*“With information from very many honest men and with reports being brought back, it has recently come to our ears that several of your parishioners in our jurisdiction of this said City, and particularly the barbers and scriveners, have made very little effort and make little effort [now] to observe Sundays and the principal feasts of this kind, as is lawfully sanctioned and to apply themselves to holy duties on festivals and the said days, but they continue to set about their craft and hold open shop with everyone attending on the said days just as on other days which are not holidays, by collecting their fees for their craft and service to the great danger of their own souls, as a wicked example to other crafts of the said City, and in open contempt of the life-giving mother church. We, wishing to prevent these matters as we are bound by the duty of our pastoral office, therefore instruct and command you, firmly enjoining you, together and individually, in the virtue of obedience, that you should caution and effectively persuade all those barbers and scriveners whosoever, throughout your parishes in our jurisdiction, and all their apprentices, attendants and servants whom we are advising by the meaning of these presents, and we wish those who have been carrying out these practices and have done it under the penalty of a greater*

*excommunication than if they had disobeyed your warnings—in fact they have scorned to obey ours—and are excelling in sloth, guile and guilt, to undergo the canon law with its warning prescribed in this matter and, afterwards, that on Sundays and festivals of this kind they may devoutly listen to mass and the divine offices in their parish churches just as other good Christians of other crafts of this said City have been accustomed to do, and do now, and that they should serve God and completely abstain on the said days from their craft and work (unless in some emergency) and with their shops closed they should completely desist and refrain from financial matters through which they are more readily trapped by the blindness of greed. If you should find any people at all refusing or contradicting or not effectively obeying your warnings in this matter, you should summon them immediately so they may appear before us, or our commissioners for this purpose, in the chapel of our manor of Stebenheth' [Stepney] on a certain convenient day chosen by you or one of yours, by chastising them with a view to the chaste correction of their souls, to make them answer to us dutifully and, further, to do and to accept what will be ordained and in accordance with reason.”*

I think it's safe to say that Bishop Braybrook would not have been keen on the current Sunday trading laws.

Robert Braybrook, Bishop of London, was in King Richard II's campaign to Ireland and was created Lord Chancellor of Ireland for six months in 1397. On the 1 May, 1404, Sir Gerard Braybroke (Braybrook), and others founded a chantry in St Paul's London, for the welfare of Robert, Bishop of London, and for his soul when he has departed this life, also for the soul of Master Nicholas Braybroke (Braybrook), late canon of St Paul's. Bishop Braybrook died on 28 August 1404, and was buried in St Paul's Cathedral. His tomb was smashed during the Great Fire of London in 1666, and his body was found inside - intact and mummified.