

# UNCROWNED QUEEN

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*Crown of Blood: The Deadly Inheritance of Lady Jane Grey*

# UNCROWNED QUEEN

The Life of  
MARGARET BEAUFORT,  
Mother of the Tudors

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NICOLA TALLIS

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*In the hope that they would be proud, this book is dedicated  
to the memory of my dearly loved grandparents,  
to whom—like Margaret—family meant everything.*

*Richard and Sylvia Howard*

*Brinley and Joyce Tallis*



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## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

*UNCROWNED QUEEN* FEATURES A GREAT number of personalities, all of whom had varying impacts on Margaret Beaufort's life. To help familiarize the reader, I include below a brief biographical sketch of some of the main characters in Margaret's story.

### **Beauchamp, Margaret, Duchess of Somerset (c. 1420–1482)**

Margaret's mother was the daughter of Sir John Beauchamp and Edith Stourton. She was married first to Sir Oliver St John, by whom she had seven children. Following her brief marriage to John Beaufort, which produced a single daughter, Margaret, she remarried in 1447. Her third husband was Lionel, or Leo, Lord Welles, by whom she had a son. Margaret Beauchamp died prior to 3 June 1482.

### **Beaufort, Edmund, Second Duke of Somerset (c. 1406/7–1455)**

The younger brother of Margaret's father, Edmund was granted the dukedom of Somerset in 1448. A favourite of both Henry VI and his queen, Edmund was unpopular with many of his fellow nobles—most significantly the Duke of York, who tried to have him imprisoned on several occasions. Edmund participated in the first battle of the Wars of the Roses at St Albans in 1455, where he was killed.

**Beaufort, John, First Duke of Somerset (1404–1444)**

Margaret's father was the grandson of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. Somerset spent much of his youth imprisoned in France as a result of his capture at the Battle of Baugé. He was ransomed in 1438, and in 1442 he married Margaret Beauchamp. In July 1443 he led a military campaign to France, but it ended in disaster. He returned six months later, in January 1444, and was met with disgrace. In May—just days before his infant daughter's first birthday—Somerset died, possibly by his own hand.

**Bray, Sir Reginald (c. 1440–1503)**

Margaret met the man who would become one of her most trusted servants and lifelong friends following her marriage to Henry Stafford. Bray acted as receiver general to the couple and managed Margaret's estates for around two decades. He served Margaret loyally and conspired on her son's behalf in the Buckingham Rebellion of 1483. Following Henry VII's accession in 1485, Bray was handsomely rewarded and became one of the king's most influential advisors. He died childless on 5 August 1503.

**Cecily of York (1469–1507)**

Margaret was extremely fond of the third of Edward IV's daughters, who she is likely to have come to know well during her time at the court of the Yorkist king. It was probably under Margaret's auspices that Cecily was married to John Welles, Margaret's half-brother, in 1487. Following Welles's death, Cecily wed Thomas Kyme without seeking Henry VII's consent. The king was outraged, but Margaret did her best to protect the former Yorkist princess, interceding on her behalf. Cecily lived out the remainder of her days quietly.

**Edward IV (1442–1483)**

The son and heir of Richard, Duke of York, following a victory at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross in February 1461, in March Edward declared himself king. His victory was consolidated after the bloody Battle of Towton

on 29 March. Edward secretly married Elizabeth Wydeville in 1464, and together the couple would produce ten children—eight of whom survived infancy. In 1470 Edward was briefly deposed and fled abroad, but he returned the following year to fight for his throne. After two successful victories at Barnet and Tewkesbury, he regained his crown. Edward died unexpectedly in 1483, the results of which led Margaret Beaufort to spy an opportunity for her son.

### **Elizabeth of York (1466–1503)**

The eldest daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Wydeville, Elizabeth was betrothed to the French dauphin in 1475 as part of her father's peace negotiations. The betrothal was broken off in 1482, and the following year Margaret plotted to marry Elizabeth to her son, Henry. Their marriage finally took place in January 1486, and in September Elizabeth gave birth to the first Tudor heir, Arthur. Together she and Henry sired seven children, four of whom survived infancy. Elizabeth died nine days after the birth of her final child, Katherine.

### **Fisher, John, Bishop of Rochester (c. 1469–1535)**

The son of a Yorkshire merchant, Fisher first met Margaret in 1494 when he was senior proctor at Cambridge. The two struck up an immediate friendship, and before long Fisher had assumed the role of Margaret's chaplain and confessor. In 1504 Fisher was created Bishop of Rochester and remained a close friend of Margaret for the rest of her life. So much so that he was one of the executors of her will, and it is from him that much of the information about her life stems—largely related by Margaret herself.

### **George, Duke of Clarence (1449–1478)**

A younger brother of Edward IV, it was to Clarence that Henry Tudor's title of Richmond was given in 1462. Clarence was treacherous and rebelled with the Earl of Warwick against his brother in 1469. He was later reconciled with Edward IV and became a recipient of the king's favour.

Married to Isabel Neville, the couple had two surviving children: Margaret, later married to Sir Richard Pole, and Edward, Earl of Warwick, executed in 1499. Following the death of his wife in 1476—probably as a result of childbirth—Clarence's behaviour became increasingly erratic. He was arrested and tried on charges of treason, of which he was found guilty. He was executed on 18 February 1478, reportedly by being drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine.

### **Henry VI (1421–1471)**

Margaret's kinsman was the only child of Henry V and Katherine of Valois. Gentle and pious by nature, Henry was completely unsuited to the task of ruling a country. Under his rule, the Wars of the Roses broke out in 1455. Henry was deposed in 1461 and spent the next nine years either in hiding or imprisoned. Though he was briefly reinstated in 1470, the following year he was deposed once more and murdered in the Tower of London on 21 May 1471.

### **Henry VII (1457–1509)**

Margaret's only son was born at Pembroke Castle two months after the death of her husband, Edmund Tudor. His birth was traumatic, but in spite of this Henry grew to be a healthy boy. Much of his early life was spent under the protection of his uncle, Jasper Tudor, but in 1462 Henry became the ward of William Herbert. He was treated kindly, and kept in contact with his mother, though he seems to have seen her but rarely. In 1471, at Margaret's urging, Henry fled abroad with Jasper Tudor, spending fourteen years in exile in Brittany and France. He returned at the head of an army in August 1485 and successfully defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. In January 1486, Henry married Elizabeth of York, thereby uniting the Houses of Lancaster and York. The couple had four children who survived infancy, chiefly his successor, Henry VIII. Henry died at Richmond Palace on 21 April 1509.

### **Henry VIII (1491–1547)**

Henry was the second of Margaret's grandsons and was raised with his sisters, primarily at Eltham Palace. As with all of her grandchildren, Margaret was fond of Henry, and her accounts show that she sometimes bought gifts for him. Following the death of his elder brother Arthur in 1502, Henry became Henry VII's sole surviving male heir. He succeeded his father as Henry VIII in April 1509 and married Katherine of Aragon soon after. At the time of his death in 1547, he had married six times and produced three legitimate children.

### **Herbert, William, Earl of Pembroke (c. 1423–1469)**

In 1462 William Herbert, a loyal supporter of Edward IV, became the guardian of Margaret's son, Henry Tudor. The boy was brought to live with Herbert and his family at Raglan Castle and was treated kindly by his guardian and his wife, Anne Devereux. Herbert eventually hoped to arrange for Henry's marriage to his daughter, Maud. In July 1469, Herbert partook in the Battle of Edgecote, taking young Henry with him. He was captured and executed the day after the battle.

### **Katherine of Aragon (1485–1536)**

The Spanish bride of Margaret's eldest grandson, Arthur, arrived in England in October 1501. The following month, Katherine and Arthur were married in a lavish ceremony in St Paul's Cathedral, but the marriage was cut short when Arthur died in April 1502. Katherine was then betrothed to Margaret's younger grandson, Henry, but he repudiated this in 1505. She nevertheless remained in England, despite being poorly treated by Henry VII and forced to endure a great deal of financial hardship. Shortly after his father's death, Henry VIII resolved to marry Katherine, and the couple were quietly married on 11 June 1509. In spite of numerous pregnancies, Katherine produced just one surviving child, a daughter named Mary. By 1526 her marriage to Henry had begun to fall apart, and she was later forced to endure a very public and painful separation from him.

In 1533 Katherine and Henry's marriage was declared invalid, and three years later she died a lonely death at Kimbolton Castle.

**Margaret of Anjou (1430–1482)**

Henry VI's French-born queen was the daughter of René of Anjou and Isabella, Duchess of Lorraine. Married to Henry VI in 1445, she rather than her husband came to be a dominant force in the Wars of the Roses. Following the Lancastrian defeat at Tewkesbury in 1471 that saw the death of Margaret's only child, Prince Edward, Margaret became Edward IV's prisoner. In 1475 she returned to France, having been ransomed to Louis XI, and died there in poverty on 25 August 1482.

**Morton, John (c. 1420–1500)**

Hailing from Dorset, Morton rose steadily to prominence under Henry VI and was appointed chancellor to his heir, Prince Edward, on 26 September 1456. Following the Lancastrian defeat at Towton, Morton was captured while attempting to flee to Scotland and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Incredibly, he managed to escape and hurried to join Margaret of Anjou in France. He remained there until Henry VI's readoption, but after his master's murder he reconciled with Edward IV and was pardoned in July 1471. He became one of Edward's most trusted advisors but was later imprisoned by Richard III. Morton supported Henry Tudor's claim and was a key conspirator in the Buckingham Rebellion. Following Henry VII's accession, Morton was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1486 and Lord Chancellor the following year.

**Neville, Richard, Earl of Warwick (1428–1471)**

The man who became known as the Kingmaker supported Edward IV during the first years of his reign. He became the most powerful noble in the realm but was incensed when he discovered that Edward had married Elizabeth Wydeville in 1464. Five years later, he rebelled against Edward and succeeded in capturing him, but an attempt to rule in Edward's name

failed. Though he and Edward were reconciled, it was short-lived, and in 1470 Warwick supported the readeption of Henry VI. When Edward IV returned to claim his throne the following year, his army met with that of Warwick at Barnet on 14 April. During the course of the battle, Warwick was killed.

### **Richard III (1452–1485)**

The younger brother of Edward IV, Richard—following the king's unexpected death in April 1483—moved quickly to take control of his nephew, Edward V, and eventually, the realm. He was proclaimed King of England on 26 June and crowned alongside his wife, Anne Neville, on 6 July, with Margaret in attendance. Three months later, Richard was forced to deal with the Buckingham Rebellion, of which Margaret was one of the leading conspirators. The rebellion was a failure, and Richard confiscated all of Margaret's goods. The remainder of his reign was plagued by unrest, and in the summer of 1485 Richard prepared to face Henry Tudor on the battlefield. He was killed in the battle, and his naked body slung over the back of a horse—several humiliation wounds were inflicted after his death. Richard's remains were discovered in 2012 and identified the following year. He was interred in Leicester Cathedral in 2015.

### **Stafford, Henry (c. 1425–1471)**

Margaret's third husband was the second son of Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. He and Margaret were married in January 1458, and they seem to have enjoyed a genuinely happy marriage. The couple spent a great deal of time together, but after thirteen years of marriage Stafford died in October 1471 as a result of injuries inflicted at the Battle of Barnet.

### **Stafford, Henry, Second Duke of Buckingham (1455–1483)**

As the grandson of Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, Henry was Margaret's nephew by marriage and also her cousin through his mother.

Following the death of Edward IV in 1483, Buckingham became the chief ally of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and fully supported his usurpation of the throne in June. Before long, though, Buckingham began plotting with Margaret for Richard's overthrow, and he planned a rebellion. When this failed, Buckingham was captured and executed on Richard III's orders on 2 November 1483.

**Stanley, Thomas, Earl of Derby (c. 1433–1504)**

Margaret married her fourth husband in June 1472, a match made—as with her other marriages—for political advantage rather than personal preference. Stanley was a man of dubious political allegiance, but following Henry VII's accession he was richly rewarded as the king's stepfather. Though Margaret was declared *femme sole* (a sole person) in 1485 and later took a vow of chastity, she and Stanley remained on good terms and continued to work together. Following his death on 29 July 1504, Stanley was laid to rest in Burscough Priory, Lancashire.

**Stanley, William (c. 1435–1495)**

The younger brother of Margaret's husband Thomas Stanley, William was instrumental in Henry Tudor's success at the Battle of Bosworth. He was rewarded for his good service, being appointed Chamberlain of the king's household and becoming immensely wealthy. At the beginning of 1495, however, Stanley was arrested on suspicion of supporting Perkin Warbeck. He was executed on 16 February.

**Tudor, Arthur (1486–1502)**

Margaret and her family had high hopes for the firstborn child and heir of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York—Margaret's grandson. In 1493 Arthur was sent to Ludlow Castle to continue his education and prepare for the task of kingship that awaited him. He rarely came to court, and thus Margaret saw little of her eldest grandson. On 14 November 1501, Arthur married the Spanish princess Katherine of Aragon, and soon afterwards



the newlyweds returned to Ludlow. Tragically, before long Arthur fell ill and died on 2 April 1502.

**Tudor, Edmund, Earl of Richmond (1428/30–1456)**

Through his mother, Katherine of Valois, Edmund was the half-brother of Henry VI. It was thanks to the king that Edmund was granted the earldom of Richmond, and it was under his auspices that Edmund's marriage to Margaret Beaufort was arranged in 1455. The newlyweds moved to Wales, but their marriage was short-lived; on 1 November 1456 Edmund died of plague at Carmarthen Castle, leaving Margaret pregnant at the age of thirteen.

**Tudor, Jasper, Earl of Pembroke and Duke of Bedford  
(c. 1431–1495)**

The younger brother of Edmund Tudor, Margaret's brother-in-law was a devoted and trusted figure in her life. Not only did he support Margaret throughout the trying days that followed Edmund's death in 1456—including offering her shelter at Pembroke Castle, where she gave birth to her son—he also guarded Henry Tudor and stayed by his side following their foreign exile in 1471. Jasper remained loyal to Henry following his accession to the throne in 1485 and was greatly loved by both his nephew and Margaret. He died childless in December 1495.

**Tudor, Margaret (1489–1541)**

Margaret always held an especial fondness for her eldest granddaughter and namesake, and showed great concern for her welfare. In 1503 Margaret left England and travelled to Scotland to marry James IV. Her husband was killed at the Battle of Flodden in 1513, leaving Margaret a pregnant widow with a small son—James V. She endured a turbulent marital history, marrying twice more—as a result of her marriage to Archibald Douglas, she had a daughter, also named Margaret. She died at Methven Castle, Perthshire, on 18 October 1541.

**Tudor, Mary (1496–1533)**

The youngest surviving daughter of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York joined Margaret to entertain Philip of Castile at Croydon in 1506. The following year she was betrothed to his son, Charles, but the negotiations never came to fruition. Instead, in October 1514 Mary married Louis XII of France, but he died after just three months of marriage. Shortly after—probably in February 1515—Mary clandestinely married Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. Their union produced two surviving daughters, Frances and Eleanor. Frances was the mother of Lady Jane Grey and her two sisters.

**Welles, Lionel or Leo (c. 1406–1461)**

Margaret's stepfather married her mother in 1447, having been previously married to Joan Waterton. He was a strong supporter of the House of Lancaster and served as Joint Deputy of Calais in the 1450s. Welles was created a Knight of the Garter in 1457 and fought for Henry VI at the Battle of Towton in 1461. It was there that he was killed, and later that year he was attainted by Parliament. Welles was buried alongside his first wife in St Oswald's Church, Methley.

**Wydeville, Elizabeth (c. 1437–1492)**

The first commoner to become Queen of England was married secretly to Edward IV in 1464. Though her union with Edward was successful, Elizabeth and her family managed to alienate many of her husband's nobles. The result was that, following Edward's death, the Wydeville family had little support in their attempts to secure power in the name of Elizabeth's son, Edward V. Elizabeth and her remaining children fled to sanctuary, where she plotted with Margaret to overthrow Richard III. Following Henry VII's accession and the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth of York, to the king, Elizabeth reappeared at court. However, in 1487 she removed to Bermondsey Abbey, and it was there that she died in 1492.

## TIMELINE

31 August 1422	Accession of Henry VI
31 May 1443	Margaret Beaufort is born at Bletsoe Castle
27 May 1444	John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, dies in Dorset
23 April 1445	Henry VI marries Margaret of Anjou
22 May 1455	First Battle of St Albans
June–August 1455?	Margaret marries Edmund Tudor
1 November 1456	Edmund Tudor dies at Carmarthen Castle
28 January 1457	Henry Tudor is born at Pembroke Castle
3 January 1458	Margaret marries Henry Stafford
10 July 1460	Battle of Northampton
2 February 1461	Battle of Mortimer's Cross
3 February 1461	Execution of Owen Tudor at Hereford
4 March 1461	Accession of Edward IV
29 March 1461	Battle of Towton
12 February 1462	Henry Tudor's wardship granted to William Herbert
11 February 1466	Birth of Elizabeth of York
26 July 1469	Battle of Edgecote
3 October 1470	Readeption of Henry VI
11 April 1471	Second reign of Edward IV begins
14 April 1471	Battle of Barnet
4 May 1471	Battle of Tewkesbury

## *Timeline*

<b>21 May 1471</b>	Henry VI is murdered at the Tower of London
<b>2 June 1471</b>	Henry Tudor flees abroad
<b>4 October 1471</b>	Henry Stafford dies at Woking
<b>June 1472</b>	Margaret marries Sir Thomas Stanley
<b>9 April 1483</b>	Edward IV dies at the Palace of Westminster
<b>26 June 1483</b>	Accession of Richard III
<b>6 July 1483</b>	Coronation of Richard III
<b>2 November 1483</b>	Execution of the Duke of Buckingham
<b>7 December 1484</b>	Henry Tudor denounced as a rebel
<b>22 August 1485</b>	Henry Tudor defeats Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth
<b>30 October 1485</b>	Coronation of Henry VII
<b>18 January 1486</b>	Henry VII marries Elizabeth of York
<b>20 September 1486</b>	Prince Arthur born at Winchester
<b>16 June 1487</b>	Battle of Stoke
<b>25 November 1487</b>	Coronation of Elizabeth of York
<b>28 November 1489</b>	Princess Margaret born at the Palace of Westminster
<b>28 June 1491</b>	Prince Henry born at Greenwich Palace
<b>2 July 1492</b>	Princess Elizabeth born at Sheen Palace
<b>16 February 1495</b>	Execution of Sir William Stanley
<b>18 March 1496</b>	Princess Mary born at Sheen Palace
<b>21 February 1499</b>	Prince Edmund born at Greenwich Palace
<b>23 November 1499</b>	Execution of Perkin Warbeck
<b>28 November 1499</b>	Execution of the Earl of Warwick
<b>14 November 1501</b>	Prince Arthur marries Katherine of Aragon
<b>January 1502?</b>	Margaret travels to Calais
<b>2 April 1502</b>	Prince Arthur dies at Ludlow
<b>2 February 1503</b>	Princess Katherine born at the Tower of London
<b>11 February 1503</b>	Elizabeth of York dies at the Tower of London
<b>29 July 1504</b>	Thomas Stanley dies
<b>1505</b>	Margaret founds Christ's College, Cambridge

### *Timeline*

- 21 April 1509** Henry VII dies at Richmond Palace
- 11 June 1509** Henry VIII marries Katherine of Aragon at Greenwich Palace
- 24 June 1509** Coronation of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon
- 29 June 1509** Margaret Beaufort dies at Westminster Abbey



## INTRODUCTION

Amid the modern-day bustle of Central London, the Palace of Westminster—the seat of government for centuries—dominates the scenery. Adjacent to the palace stands the imposing Westminster Abbey, the magnificent setting for the coronation of English monarchs since William of Normandy conquered England in 1066. Fifteen monarchs lie buried inside its ancient stone walls, alongside consorts, royal children, and others who have played pivotal roles in shaping England's history.

Prominent both within and without the abbey is the spectacular Lady Chapel, whose fan-vaulted ceiling and stained-glass windows provide a splendid example of late medieval architecture. Begun by Henry VII in 1503 as a permanent and tangible memorial to the Tudor dynasty, the chapel was described by the awestruck Tudor traveller John Leland as 'the wonder of the world'. It is also the final resting place of some of history's most illustrious figures, several of whom were a part of the famous Tudor family: Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I and the chapel's founder, Henry VII, who lies entombed with his wife, Elizabeth of York.

In the south aisle of the chapel, set apart from the grand, tourist-crowded monuments, stands a black marble tomb-chest. Atop the chest lies a skilfully crafted bronze effigy of a woman: she is dressed simply in a widow's wimple with a long mantle, her head resting on two intricately designed pillows that show a portcullis and a Tudor rose. A coronet—long since lost—once lay above her head in an indication of her noble status.

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Lines and wrinkles that hint at years of stress and anxiety are etched on to her face—probably moulded on a death mask—serving as a permanent and tangible reminder of the extraordinary and perilous events that shaped her life. Her small, delicately crafted hands, showing signs of age and the arthritis that plagued her towards the end of her life, are raised in prayer, and a mythical yale (a creature with the head of a goat with swivelling horns, body of an antelope, and tail of an elephant) that once boasted horns sits at her feet. The black marble tomb-chest contains sculpted bronze shields with arms that proudly proclaim the woman's heritage. Most prominent among them are the Royal Arms. Adorning the tomb is a Latin inscription composed by the celebrated Dutch humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus, which begins with a proclamation of the woman's defining legacy: 'Margaret of Richmond, mother of Henry VII, grandmother of Henry VIII'.

The regal Margaret of Richmond—better known as Margaret Beaufort—lies resplendent, her tomb embellished with symbols that emphasise the identity that she created. Few of the abbey's visitors recognise that the tomb of this small, simply garbed lady is that of the mother of Henry VII and grandmother of Henry VIII—the notorious Tudor king. In contrast to the awe-inspiring double tomb of her son and daughter-in-law that dominates the Lady Chapel, Margaret Beaufort's memorial attracts little interest.

Yet, following her son's accession to the throne until her death, Margaret's birthday was proudly celebrated in the abbey each year, in fitting recognition of a woman who was instrumental in founding England's most famous dynasty. Descended from a line of English kings, and the great-granddaughter of a royal duke, Margaret—against quite incredible odds—raised herself to become the mother of a king. Her life reads like an episode of a modern-day soap opera. War was a common theme. Born into the midst of the Hundred Years' War that raged between England and France, Margaret soon saw bloodshed spread to English soil. Political



tension spilled over into civil war, destroying families and tearing apart the country and those who sought to rule it.

Margaret would not have recognised the terms ‘the Cousins’ Wars’ or ‘the Wars of the Roses’ by which the conflict became known, for these are the products of a later age, but the bloody twists and turns of the struggle between her own house—that of Lancaster—and her enemy’s—York—dominated and shaped much of her life. It was a war in which most of the noble families of England would become hopelessly embroiled. In 1976, J. R. Lander suggested that by 1461 at least forty-nine out of sixty peerage families were involved in the wars—Margaret’s most of all.<sup>1</sup>

From the outset, her life was overset with obstacles, all of which she was forced to negotiate. A marital pawn since the earliest days of her childhood, she was just thirteen when she was widowed and gave birth to her only child. These circumstances forced Margaret to take an active role in seeking a protector both for herself and for her son, while ingratiating herself with kings from a rival house in order to safeguard her son’s and her own future. It was finally a scheme Margaret initiated that began to settle the conflict and brought the son of a Welshman born with no expectations of kingship to the throne of England, ushering in—at least in part—an era of peace.

‘Henry VII’s devout and rather awesome mother’ is the description the historian Neville Williams offers of Margaret Beaufort in his 1973 biography of the king.<sup>2</sup> Both adjectives in this statement are true, but neither do full justice to the woman who forms the subject of this book. Williams’s assessment does, however, accurately summarize the way in which Margaret has often been portrayed: a religious fanatic who was obsessively ambitious on her son’s behalf and who dominated his court, an image compounded by the effigy upon her tomb as well as the surviving portraits, which show her wearing widow’s weeds and a barbed wimple, on her knees in prayer. This is the image often conjured up when the name Margaret Beaufort is mentioned. Yet it is as two-dimensional as the paintings themselves, frequently used as a convenient shorthand when relating the tales of

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the period. Margaret's own story and her true character as a living, breathing woman are a far cry from such flat representations.

My first proper introduction to Margaret Beaufort came when I was researching the jewel collections of the queens of England in the period 1445 to 1548. Throughout my exploration, I was struck by how different the Margaret who was emerging from the pages of archival material was to the traditional figure. Her image has been through some revisions over the years since her death, but the popular one has rarely been accurate. Furthermore, in spite of the impact Margaret made on English history, she has often been little more than a footnote, overlooked and ignored. In recent years this has begun to change, and she is now starting to feature more prominently in the narratives that she helped to shape.

In the years following Margaret's death, though she was remembered and her memory revered by those whose lives she touched, she failed to attract the attention of poets, playwrights and artists. Given the impact she made on her son and his court, it is somewhat surprising that her story did not inspire William Shakespeare enough to consider her inclusion in any of his plays. She was referenced on brief occasions in *Richard III*, in which her husband Thomas Stanley was afforded a role. Considering the part that Margaret played in the events of Richard's reign, her exclusion as a character in her own right is curious. It can perhaps only be explained as a desire of the playwright not to offend Margaret's great-granddaughter, Elizabeth I, by highlighting the disgrace of her ancestress following Richard's discovery of her treasonous activities—chiefly, her plotting to overthrow the Plantagenet king and replace him with her own son, for which Richard placed her under house arrest.

It was not until the twentieth century that Margaret would re-emerge from the shadows into which she had been cast following her death. Since that time, she seems to have finally caught the attention of an array of novelists, writers and others. She has appeared regularly in popular culture, and today interest in Margaret persists. Curiously, she has been remembered in two very contrasting ways: sympathetically, as a pious and

cultured lady who ought to be celebrated for her achievements and as the mother of the Tudor dynasty, and in an altogether more sinister light, as the woman who may have been responsible for the disappearance of the Princes in the Tower—a theory that we shall put to bed once and for all in the pages of this book.

There have been other layers of obfuscation as well, as novels have toyed with the idea of Margaret as a romantic heroine, deeply in love with her second husband, Edmund (Margaret's experience of love was never so conventional), whereas TV series have predominantly chosen to focus on her ruthless ambition.<sup>3</sup> More recently, there has been a wave of enthusiasm and interest in Margaret's story, sparked by Philippa Gregory's series of novels in which she features heavily. Indeed, *The Red Queen* is told from Margaret's point of view. Her portrayal in the accompanying 2013 drama series *The White Queen* is as a fanatic, obsessed with the idea that God intended her son to rule and working tirelessly to ensure that he fulfils his destiny. The series also wove a love story and affair into her relationship with her brother-in-law, Jasper Tudor. By contrast, the 2017 adaptation of Gregory's *The White Princess* saw Margaret smother Jasper to death upon his discovery of her involvement in the murder of the Princes in the Tower, as well as being publicly humiliated by her son. The trend of casting Margaret in a variety of guises depending on the dramatic leanings of the author/producer seems set to continue.

But her true story is far richer than any of these fictions. My impressions while interrogating Margaret's jewel collection only grew as I broadened my investigation. Indeed, the privilege of writing Margaret's story—and it has absolutely been a privilege—has been enhanced by the opportunity to delve into the wealth of source material that is extant. It has been both extremely challenging and exceptionally rewarding. The overwhelming sensation of experiencing history as it happened envelops the reader handling this treasure trove of Margaret's papers, and it becomes easy to immerse oneself fully in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. A similar feeling occurs when studying the handful of Margaret's letters that survive,

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written in varying contexts to a number of recipients. These allow us to view different aspects of her character, for through these we can see how she conducted her business affairs, viewed her family and demonstrated her intense affection for her son.

I am not the first scholar drawn to Margaret, and neither will I be the last. The rich abundance of surviving primary source material, details of which can be found in *Notes on Sources*, has ensured that she has long attracted the fascination of biographers, and her prominent role in television series, such as those mentioned above, lends her considerable appeal among a wider audience. I must, however, take time to highlight the exceptional work of Michael Jones and Malcolm Underwood, whose 1992 joint study is considered—more than justifiably—to be the definitive work on Margaret's life. Following in their footsteps has not been easy. Other scholars have sought to highlight her educational and religious patronage, which, although covered in this book, are not the main focus. Instead, my aim is to dispel the many myths surrounding Margaret's life, and in their place offer a rounder, richer picture.

I have discovered a woman who started life playing by the rules: a marital pawn, defined by her wealth and bloodline. But, early on, the dangerous events that unfolded around her unleashed a new side of Margaret—one that sought a voice and independence. The fifteenth century was an extraordinary time for women and gave them hitherto unprecedented opportunities to make their voices heard, as Sarah Gristwood remarks in her exceptional work on the women of the Wars of the Roses: 'The second half of the fifteenth century is alive with female energy', and Margaret was one of its most potent forces.<sup>4</sup> Over time, Margaret pressed against the constraints imposed by her sex and society, slowly demanding more and more control over her life, until the crown on her son's head allowed her to make the unprecedented move for almost total independence: financially, physically and sexually. This is a woman who learned pragmatism very early on, who knew when to lay aside ego and finer loyalties for the sake of the long game—unlike so many of her male contemporaries. No doubt, the turning

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point was the birth of her son. His rights and very survival gave Margaret extraordinary energy and zeal, even when her own life was at stake.

Margaret's story is one of tragic lows and exceptional highs: it is a tale of war and peace told through the eyes of an extraordinary woman who played a leading role and became one of the most influential personalities of the late fifteenth century. Though in material terms she was privileged and never went without, emotionally she suffered heartache and loss, endured struggles and faced perils. Yet she survived; in time she thrived. In so doing she helped to lay the foundations for England's most famous dynasty. More importantly, though, she created a lasting legacy as an individual who ought to be remembered in her own right, thereby achieving more than she could ever have anticipated. Margaret's is, therefore, a life to be celebrated: it is the life of a woman who became a queen in all but name.

*Nicola Tallis, Westminster Abbey*



## PROLOGUE

*28 January 1457*

As the bitter weather swirled, inside the strong stone walls of Pembroke Castle a thirteen-year-old girl was undergoing the worst ordeal of her life. The war that would tear apart the country had not long begun, but here, in the mighty Norman stronghold, situated in the midst of southwest Wales, close to the river estuary that opens into the Celtic Sea, two lives hung in the balance.

Lady Margaret Beaufort—a wealthy heiress with royal connections to the House of Lancaster—was just twelve years old when she married Edmund Tudor, half-brother to the Lancastrian King Henry VI, but her painfully tender age did not prevent the eager bridegroom from consummating the match, and Margaret quickly conceived. Her condition was soon fraught with danger and uncertainty when her husband died of plague on 1 November 1456, leaving his young wife alone and terrified of contracting the same disease.

The heavily pregnant teenager was far from her family and forced to seek aid from her brother-in-law, Jasper Tudor. She fled to his fortress at Pembroke. It was there that the young Margaret faced a terrible labour. Her underdeveloped body struggled to endure the strain of childbirth, and it was thought that neither mother nor child would survive. Her confessor, Bishop John Fisher, would later declare: ‘It seemed a miracle that of so little a personage anyone should have been born at all.’

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Yet after many traumatic hours, Margaret gave birth to a son. She named him Henry in honour of his Lancastrian forebears. This was the moment when everything changed for Margaret—and ultimately for England. The healthy baby she brought into the world must have seemed a true miracle, and as she cared for him over the following days and weeks, a love grew in her like none she had felt before. That love would once again bring Margaret close to death before culminating in a dramatic twist at Bosworth in 1485. For in her arms she held the future King of England, a man who would seek to end the bloodshed and unite the rival Houses of Lancaster and York.

But as Margaret recovered, sheltered for the moment inside the thick walls of Pembroke Castle, she faced many more trials to overcome before she—and her son—would truly be safe.



# PART ONE



## NOBLE BLOOD

In the heart of the Bedfordshire village of Bletsoe, amid fragrant gardens, stood a castle surrounded by a moat. A comfortable three-story house with crenellations that were added in the fourteenth century, Bletsoe Castle was more of a fortified manor than a defensive structure. The castle had come into the hands of the Beauchamp family in 1359, and it was there that Margaret Beauchamp, Duchess of Somerset, spent much of her childhood.<sup>1</sup> With its warm family associations, it is little wonder that the duchess chose Bletsoe as the setting for the birth of her child in the spring of 1443. When her daughter arrived on 31 May, she chose to name her Margaret, perhaps after herself and in honour of the infant's paternal grandmother, Margaret Holland. The duchess carefully noted the arrival of baby Margaret—her only child by John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset—in her beautifully decorated Book of Hours, originally commissioned by her father-in-law. In time, her daughter, Lady Margaret Beaufort, would inherit and treasure this book, treating it as a family heirloom and using it to record the momentous events in her own family.<sup>2</sup>

'She came of noble blood lineally descending of King Edward III.'<sup>3</sup> This summary by John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, of the prestigious origins of the baby born at Bletsoe, to whom he became a close friend in later life, perhaps pinpoints the most significant detail of Margaret's beginnings. Indeed, to understand Margaret fully and, in particular, how her sense of identity matured and made its mark, it is vital to trace her ancestry back