The Endowments of Lady Eleanor Butler and Elizabeth Talbot, Duchess of Norfolk, at Corpus Christi College Cambridge

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Lady Eleanor Talbot is thought to have endowed a fellowship at Corpus Christi College Cambridge but no contemporary documents relating to her endowment survive. About thirty years later her sister, Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk, made new agreements with the Master and Fellows confirming and extending her late sister’s putative endowment and it is the duchess’s two indentures, preserved in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, which are transcribed, translated and analysed here. I am grateful to the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for permission to publish this material, and to Lesley Wynne-Davies and Livia Visser-Fuchs for their invaluable help with the Latin text of the earlier of the two indentures. Punctuation has been modernised throughout. Otherwise capitalisation has been retained as in the original.

Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Parket Library MS. XXX1.121

In translation

To all Christ’s faithful people to whom the present Indented letter shall come, Thomas Cosyn, Master or warden of the college or house of Corpus Christi and of the Blessed Mary, commonly called the College of St Benedict of Cambridge, and the fellows or scholars of the same college or house [give] eternal greetings in the Lord.

We the aforementioned master and fellows or scholars, in our chapter house assembled, with one accord after much previous discussion, namely on the twentieth day of the month of March in the year of the Lord one thousand four hundred and ninety five, taking into consideration the fervent love and unfailing devotion which, out of reverence for the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the most blessed Mary, his mother, and the special mindfulness, maintaining and increase of the faith of Jesus Christ, the renowned and devout Eleanor Butler, deceased, once the wife of Sir Thomas Butler (son and heir of Ralph Butler, Lord of Sudeley) and the daughter of John, late Earl of Shrewsbury and of Margaret, wife of the said earl (eldest daughter and one of the heirs of Richard Beauchamp, late Earl of Warwick) and once the wife of Sir Thomas Butler (son and heir of Ralph Butler, once Lord of Sudeley) our benefactress and close friend, demonstrably bore most sincerely towards us, zealous for the faith of Christ; and because the Lady Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk, sister of the said Eleanor and executrix of the will of the said Eleanor, also wishing well towards us the said master and fellows or scholars, and graciously bearing in mind our favour, has given to us the said master and fellows or scholars two hundred and twenty marcs in good coined money, from the goods of the said Eleanor and Duchess Elizabeth for the upkeep, repair and renewal of the fabric of our houses, messuages and tenements, at the present time in decay, which belong or pertain to us within the said town of Cambridge or elsewhere, —

taking all the aforesaid into consideration, we, the said master and fellows or scholars grant, promise and for ourselves and for our successors confirm by this our present written deed to the said Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk, that we must choose and establish a well-disposed priest, capable of study, having graduated in arts, as a fellow of the said college at the nomination of the said duchess; and after his first nomination aforesaid, the nomination and choice are to belong to the said master and fellows or scholars two hundred and twenty marcs in good coined money, from the goods of the said Eleanor and Duchess Elizabeth for the upkeep, repair and renewal of the fabric of our houses, messuages and tenements, at the present time in decay, which belong or pertain to us within the said town of Cambridge or elsewhere, —

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1 The Latin Deo dextra could mean simply ‘devout’, but it could also have the stronger and more specific meaning ‘vowed to God’, signifying that Eleanor had taken religious vows of some sort. Her known connection with the Carmelite priory in Norwich (where she was subsequently buried) together with other indirect evidence does suggest that she may well have been a ‘sister’ or oblate (conversa) of that priory. This does not mean that she was a nun. Carmelite nuns did not exist in the fifteenth century. Also the fact that Eleanor may well have considered herself married to Edward IV would probably have precluded her from taking vows as a nun. A conversa, however, could be married, and took only simple vows of obedience and stabilitas. The issue of the precise nature of Eleanor’s religious commitment was dealt with more fully in J Ashdown-Hill, ‘Further Reflections on Lady Eleanor Talbot’, Ricardian vol. 11, no. 144, March 1999, p. 465.
Christ. And he will say mass every day unless he is prevented by a good and worthy cause, praying and calling upon God for the souls of the said Thomas Butler and of Eleanor, [and] of Ralph Butler, father of the said Thomas, and for the good estate and the health of body and soul of the said duchess during her lifetime and for the soul of the said duchess when she shall depart from this light, and for the souls of John, Earl of Shrewsbury, and of Margaret his wife, and of all those for whom they were bound [to pray].

And that the said priest when elected a fellow of this house college or house shall say every day a litany with the intercession following; just as other fellows of the said college are bound to do for all the aforesaid souls.

And further we the said master [and] fellows or scholars grant and promise that we and our successors shall give to the said chosen fellow his stipend, wages and salary, namely eight marcs to be paid to him each year and taken with all other annual payments, emoluments and customary payments in manner and form just as the other fellows or scholars of the said college are accustomed to take.

And further we wish and grant that the said chosen fellow will be named and called the priest of the said Eleanor Butler and of the said duchess of Norfolk.

And further we grant and promise truly that as often as and whenever it shall happen that the place of the said chosen fellow becomes vacant by death, promotion, surrender, resignation or by any other means, that then we the said master and fellows or scholars must proceed to a new selection within the one or two months next following the said vacancy, and we must select and install another graduate priest in the aforesaid manner as a fellow and into the said place, so that he may do and observe all the foregoing which pertain to him, to the best of his power, in manner and form as is aforesaid.

And we the said Master and fellows or scholars and their successors shall do and observe all the foregoing which pertains to us in manner and form aforesaid on all future occasions. And moreover having considered the manifold gifts and benefits given to and conferred upon us by the said Eleanor and Duchess Elizabeth, we grant for ourselves and for our successors that we must select one scholar learned in grammar who must study in arts in the same way. And we the said master and fellows or scholars and our successors promise and grant to give to the same scholar forty shillings each year for his maintenance. And that this scholar, by the direction of us [the master] for the time being, or in his absence a deputy, shall read a Bible reading or another reading before our Dean or his deputy, the fellows of the said college being in hearing. And that this scholar, at the end of his reading thus read, shall say in Latin: ‘May the souls of Eleanor Butler and of Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk’ (when the duchess has departed from this light) ‘and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace’. And as often as and whenever it shall happen that the place of this scholar shall be vacant in any way, or the said scholar shall become a master of arts, that then we the said master and fellows or scholars must proceed within the one or two months next following to the selection of another scholar in the manner and form as said before, and thus from one to another when the occasion may require as is said before, on all future occasions.

Moreover, beyond the foregoing, by the unanimous agreement and likewise consent of us all, we wish and grant by this present deed that each and every one of the priests of our said college in saying and celebrating all their masses for evermore will pray for the souls of the said Eleanor and the said duchess (when she has departed from this light) and for the souls for whom he is bound [to pray], just as for the other founders and benefactors of the said college.

Likewise we each and every one of us by universal consent, grant and promise by this present deed that the anniversary day of the said Thomas Butler and of Eleanor, his wife, of Margaret, the mother of the said Eleanor, and of John, Duke of Norfolk and of the aforesaid Elizabeth, his wife, will be observed on the second day after the feast of St Barnabas the Apostle [13 June], by the said chosen fellow every...
year with funeral rites and a Requiem mass being said for the said souls for ever. And also we promise and grant that the anniversary day of John, Earl of Shrewsbury, and of John, Lord Lisle (son of the said John) and of Ralph Butler, Lord of Sudeley, and of his wife, and of the parents of the said Thomas Butler, will be observed by the said chosen fellow every year on the feast of St. Kenelm [17 July], with the funeral rites of the nine readings and a Requiem mass to be said for the said soul for ever.

And moreover we wish and grant that any said fellow chosen in the aforesaid form, will forever say on three other terms of each year, namely at the term of St. John the Baptist [24 June], at the term of St. Michael the Archangel [29 September] and at the term of the Nativity of the Lord [25 December], once at each aforesaid term, the funeral rites of the nine readings and a Requiem mass for all the above-mentioned souls, and for those for whom they are bound [to do so], and for the souls of all the faithful departed.

Moreover, having considered the manifold gifts given to us by the said Eleanor and duchess, we grant for ourselves and our successors that as often and whenever it shall happen that the said chosen fellow and priest preaches the word of God, at the end of his discourses he shall commend [to God] the souls of the said Eleanor and duchess (when she departs from this light) and the souls of all those for whom they are bound.

Therefore so that this our grant, agreement and arrangement may be commended to a more perfect remembrance for all time to come, we grant and promise that we and each one of us and our successors in full receipt and payment of the said two hundred and twenty marcs will keep our word given by a solemn oath that we shall observe faithfully and for ever each and every one of the foregoing arrangements set out in this grant, arrangement and agreement as far as concerns our individual or several persons without trickery, fraud or bad faith.

And further we grant and promise that each one who shall chance to be chosen as master or fellow or scholar of the said college in the future shall give his word by a solemn oath before he is admitted or instituted into the said college that he will stringently observe all the foregoing expressed in the said grant, arrangement or agreement.

And to observe each and every one of these arrangements very stringently, all fraud or trickery cast instead. In fact the duchess of Norfolk chooses both options, arranging for anniversary commemorations of groups of relatives both on the anniversaries of her parents' deaths and at three major religious festivals. Burgess also makes the point that because anniversary commemorations reflected the form and sequence of the funeral rites (which began with vespers of the dead on the afternoon or evening before the burial) they often commenced on the eve of the actual anniversary of the death, which is why 13 rather than 14 June is the date specified here by the duchess. She states that this particular commemoration was to be celebrated with 'funeral rites' (implying the whole office of the dead). It would thus have begun with vespers on the afternoon of 13 June.

The feast of St. Barnabas is 11 June. Clearly not all those commemorated here died on the same day, and in fact the duchess of Norfolk was still living at the time when this was written, so the date of her death was not then known. 13 June was undoubtedly selected for these commemorations as being the anniversary of the death of Lady Eleanor's mother, Margaret, Countess of Shrewsbury, who actually died on 14 June (but see below). Eleanor's own anniversary would have been 30 June, and the anniversary of John Mowbray, fourth Duke of Norfolk was 17 January. The date on which Sir Thomas Butler died is not known. C. Burgess, 'A service for the dead: the form and function of the anniversary in late medieval Bristol', in S.T. Blake and A. Saville, eds., Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæological Society for 1987, vol. 105, suggests (pp. 196-97) that 'when an anniversary was celebrated for a group … it would clearly have been invidious to select a date of significance to only one of the beneficiaries,' and that in such cases a notional 'anniversary' date, close to some significant religious festival, was usually chosen instead. In fact the duchess of Norfolk chooses both options, arranging for anniversary commemorations of groups of relatives both on the anniversaries of her parents' deaths and at three major religious festivals. Burgess also makes the point that because anniversary commemorations reflected the form and sequence of the funeral rites (which began with vespers of the dead on the afternoon or evening before the burial) they often commenced on the eve of the actual anniversary of the death, which is why 13 rather than 14 June is the date specified here by the duchess. She states that this particular commemoration was to be celebrated with 'funeral rites' (implying the whole office of the dead). It would thus have begun with vespers on the afternoon of 13 June.

17 July was the anniversary of the deaths of Lady Eleanor's father, the Earl of Shrewsbury and of her eldest brother, Lord Lisle, both killed in France at the battle of Châlons. In this case the actual death date is specified for the anniversary commemoration, rather than the preceding day as in note 4 (above). This is because in this instance the duchess requires the celebration of 'funeral rites of the nine readings and requiem mass' only. In other words this commemoration was to begin with matins of the dead. Vespers on the eve of the anniversary was to be omitted.

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Probably the reference is to the Feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, celebrated on 24 June. This is his major feast, although the anniversary of his martyrdom is also kept as a feast day in his name, on 29 August.
aside, we bind ourselves in our pure consciences before God and his angels and [we bind] our successors in their pure consciences forever as they will answer before God and his angels. And lest by the lapse of time (may it not happen) all the foregoing be consigned to oblivion, we wish and grant that this present indenture may be read forever clearly and openly in front of the said priest or fellow at his admission.

In witness of which the seals of the said Duchess Elizabeth and of the said college have been placed upon the present indentures the day and year aforesaid.

Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Parker Library MS. XXXI.122

This Indenture made the xviii day of Jule the xjth yere of Kynge Henry the vijth [1496] betwen Elizabeth, Duches of Norfolk, on the on partie and Mastyr Thomas Cosyn, Mastir or Kepar of the College or house of Corpus Christi and of Owr Lady, comunely called the College of Seint Benedict in Cambrigge, and the Felawis or scolars of the same College or house, by ther full concent, in ther Chapetur house, on the othyr partie, Witnessith that where in an Indenture made betwen the seid Duches and the forseid Mastir Thomas Cosyn and Felawis or scolars aforesaid, beryng Date the xxth day of May9 the yere of Owr Lord MCCCCxxxxv yt aperith, and in the same Indenture yt is rehearsed that the seid Duches hath content and payed to the forseid Mastir and scolars CCxx marks for certeyn suffrage and memoryallys by the seid Mastir and scolars to be had and doon, as in the seid Indenture pleynilly aperith. Where in trouth the seid CCxx marks ys not content and payed. Wherfore yt ys agreed betwen theforseid parties that theseid summe of CCxx marks shalbe payed in forme folowing: that ys to seye, xxv marks at the Fest of seynt Michell tharchangell next folowing, and at the Fest of Estir than next folowing, xxv marks, and so yerly at every of theseid Festis xxv marks to suche tyme as the summe of CCxx marks be fully content and paye. Yt ys also agreed between theseid parties that the forseid Mastir and scolars shall not be charged with ony of the suffrage and artiels comprised in the forseid Indenture to suche tyme as theseid summe of CCxx marks and every parell thereof be fully content and payed, and aftir the full payment of theseid summe of CCxx marks than theseid Mastir and scolars shall Immediatly aftir theseid payement wele and trewly aferme and kepe all the covenants, articles and agréments comprised in the forseid Indenture: Also yt ys covenanted and agreed betwen theseid parties that if theseid Duches decease before the full payement of theseid CCxx marks, yt than the executors of theseid Duches paye the residew of theseid CCxx marks to theseid Mastir and scolars, by theseid Duches in hir liff not payed, than theseid Mastir and scolars shall Immediatly aftir theseid payement truly observe and kepe all the articles and covenants comprised in the forseid Indenture. And if the executors of theseid Duches paye not suche residue as shall fortune to be behinde, and not payed, of theseid CCxx marks, than shall the seid Mastir and scolars be charged with any covenant or article comprised in the forseid Indenture. And than theseid Mastir and scolars graunt that they shall repaye to the executors of theseid Duches as meche as they have receyved of theseid summe of CCxx marks at suche Festis and leek [like] summes as theseid Duches content and payed to theseid Mastir and scolars, till the holl summe so receyved by theseid Mastir and scolars be fully repayed and content. In Witnesse wherof, to thys present Indenture the parties ab[o]veseaid Intrechangeably have sette ther seal the Day and yere aforesaid.

Commentary

Although no documentation relating to her original endowment survives, it is clear from MS. XXXI.121 that Lady Eleanor had been a benefactress of Corpus Christi College Cambridge and it is thought that she had endowed a fellowship at the college during her lifetime, probably in 1461 or 1462. In fact it is

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9 The date given in MS. XXXI.121 is actually 20 March 1495, as we have seen, and not 20 May. It is likely that MS. XXXI.121 is dated 'old style', by the year which began on Lady Day (25 March). If so then the date of MS. XXXI.121 in modern terms is 20 March 1496, in which case only four months elapsed between the two indentures, which seems more likely than the notion that the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College waited for sixteen months to find out what was happening about their money. The chronology seems to be that the first indenture was made in March 1496, and the first office for the dead and requiem mass should have been celebrated on 13 and 14 June following, but, having received no payment, the master and fellows made enquiries of the duchess of Norfolk, with the result that the second, ‘installment plan’ indenture was agreed in July. The fact that the indentures were preserved at Corpus Christi College is in itself an indication that the duchess did make full payment and that the agreement did come into force. In fact the final installment (of 20 marks) would have been paid by the duchess on Michaelmas day 1500. The duchess did not die until 1506, and in any case Master Thomas Cosyn was the chief of her executors. See the duchess’s will in J. Ashdown-Hill, ‘Norfolk Requiem’, Ricardian vol. 12, no. 152, pp. 212-215.
probable that Dr Thomas Cosyn (the master of the college at the time the agreement was made with the duchess) had been the first person to hold this fellowship, for his arrival at the college in 1462 increased the number of the college fellows by one, and Cosyn, who was certainly a protégé of the Talbot sisters, seems, from the moment of his arrival, to have been accorded extraordinary privileges and prominence. It is not clear whether Eleanor’s endowment had been maintained continuously until 1495/6, but despite the fact that Eleanor’s annual income from 1461 to 1468 seems to have been only about £30, Thomas Cosyn’s particular prominence in the Corpus Christi records in 1468 (the year of Lady Eleanor’s death) may indicate that he was then serving as her priest under the terms of her endowment. It is also possible, however, that the fellowship had lapsed between October 1487 and March 1495 (see below) and this may have been the reason why the duchess of Norfolk decided to regularise the situation in 1495.10

One thing which emerges very clearly from MS. XXXI.121 is the closeness of the relationship between the Talbot sisters. This is more surprising than might at first sight appear, because Eleanor and Elizabeth cannot have spent much of their childhood together. Eleanor was born probably towards the end of February 1436, and she married Sir Thomas Butler in 1449-50, when she was about fourteen years old. Elizabeth was probably born in 1443 (when Eleanor would have been already about seven) and by 1450 she was married to the son and heir of the third Mowbray duke of Norfolk, so that at most only her first six years of life can have been spent with Eleanor in their parents’ home. It is true that Eleanor lived most of the last seven years of her life not at her own manor of Burton Dassett in Warwickshire, but in East Anglia, in close proximity to her younger sister and probably in the latter’s dower house at Kenninghall. Nevertheless, the particular affection and regard in which Elizabeth seems to have held her argues that Eleanor must have made a strong impact on her baby sister during the latter’s infancy.

It seems certain that Thomas Cosyn, too, must have known Lady Eleanor well and have held her in particular esteem. She is described in great detail and in warm terms, and there is reference to her sincere religious faith11 and to the close and friendly relationship which had existed between her and the college. She is also described as ‘renowned’. It is difficult to see anything which would justify the application of this adjective to her during her lifetime, when she seems to have lived in relative poverty and obscurity and under the shadow of other and more powerful people, but this document was written in 1495 and may be looking back to 1483-84 when the Titulus regius of Richard III must have made Lady Eleanor’s name much more widely known, both in England and abroad, than it had ever been while she was alive.

It may also be the Titulus regius of Richard III, and its subsequent repeal and destruction by Henry VII which accounts for the extraordinary detail regarding Lady Eleanor’s identity and pedigree which is supplied in the first surviving indenture.12 The names of her parents, her first husband and her father-in-law are specified very precisely, with some redundant repetition, although this information is not relevant to the ostensible purpose of the document, and actually makes it rather difficult to read. Even one of Lady Eleanor’s grandparents — Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick — is named, establishing her descent from the house of Warwick, and since he is the only grandparent to be mentioned, it seems that the Warwick family connection was thought to be particularly important. At first sight it might be thought that the listing of family names was merely to ensure that their souls were prayed for, but a careful examination of the names mentioned in the indenture undermines this explanation. Thus, although Richard Beauchamp’s name is included, he was not one of the relatives whose commemoration at Corpus Christi College was to be perpetuated by this indenture. Conversely the name of Lady Eleanor’s mother-in-law, Elizabeth Norbury, Lady Sudeley, who was to be commemorated, is actually omitted from the text and she is referred to only as Sir Thomas Butler’s mother.

The real reason for describing Lady Eleanor’s family connections in such detail seems rather to relate to a world in which Lady Eleanor’s name had been brought briefly into the limelight and had then been deliberately obscured and even confused with the name of Elizabeth Lucy, but a world, nevertheless, in which some people still remembered that King Edward IV was said to have once been involved with a relative of the earl of Warwick. Polydore Vergil was certainly aware of such a report and a marginal note in ‘an early translation’ of his History notes that ‘Edward 4 is supposed to defloure some woman in the tone, says nothing whatsoever about anybody’s family and sticks firmly to the relevant financial arrangements.

10 For Eleanor’s income, see J. Ashdown-Hill, ‘The Inquisition Post Mortem of Eleanor Talbot, Lady Butler, 1468’, Ricardian vol.12, no. 159, December 2002, p. 571. On the career of Thomas Cosyn and his relationship with the Talbot sisters, see Ashdown-Hill, ‘Edward IV’s Uncrowned Queen’, Ricardian vol. 9, no. 139, December 1997, p. 189, note 44.
12 It is interesting to compare the styles of MS. XXXI.121 and MS. XXXI.122. The second indenture, much more laconic in tone, says nothing whatsoever about anybody’s family and sticks firmly to the relevant financial arrangements.
E[arl] of Warwickes house'.

One is left with the impression that the duchess of Norfolk, in addition to wishing to extend Eleanor's endowment in order to create a second scholarship, and to include prayers for herself and other members of the family, also had a desire to leave some record, however obliquely worded, of facts about her sister which could not easily be voiced in 1495 and which she knew were being deliberately confused and concealed elsewhere. In fact many historians, even until quite recently, were unsure of who the 'Eleanor Butler' mentioned in the Titulus regius of Richard III really was, not to say sceptical regarding the claims made there about her marriage with Edward IV. The duchess of Norfolk's agreement with Corpus Christi College has proved extremely valuable in providing clear and incontrovertible evidence of the identity of Eleanor's parents.

While, in this first indenture, the duchess of Norfolk makes careful provision for the maintenance of perpetual prayers for her sister's soul, she does not refer to Eleanor in her will of 1506. This is explained sufficiently, perhaps, by the fact that Eleanor was then long dead. Eleanor is mentioned, in common with all the children of his second marriage, in her father's will of 1452, but her name does not occur in the wills of her brothers John, Lord Lisle, (1452), Louis (1458) and Humphrey (1492), nor in the will of Humphrey's widow, Jane, although the later named Dr Thomas Cosyn and the duchess of Norfolk as her executors. It has not so far been possible to locate wills for other members of Eleanor's close family (and indeed, Eleanor's own will, which is known to have existed, cannot be found). It may have been thought rather unwise, after August 1485, to refer to Eleanor in a will, a document which inevitably would eventually become public.

As for the endowment of 1495 itself, it is a rather complex document, partly for the reasons mentioned above. The duchess of Norfolk's indenture implies firstly that Lady Eleanor had endowed a scholarship for a fellow of the college. This endowment the duchess confirms, donating 220 marks to the college. It is stipulated that she is initially to nominate the holder of this fellowship, which had probably fallen vacant about seven years earlier, in October 1487, when Thomas Cosyn had been promoted to the office of master of the college. Subsequently the fellows will be free to elect successors. The priest-fellow selected will be paid eight marks a year by the college, and will be known as the Talbot sisters' priest. He will offer daily mass for the repose of their souls. This daily mass would not, of course, be a requiem mass, but the equivalent of a chantry mass, that is to say the ordinary mass of the day, offered for the repose of the souls of Eleanor and her family, and celebrated without special solemnity.

In addition the duchess adds a further scholarship. This second scholar would be a student rather than a fellow and his stipend was set at the lower sum of forty shillings a year. In fact the duchess was mentioned above. The duchess of Norfolk's indenture implies firstly that Lady Eleanor had endowed a scholarship for a fellow of the college. This endowment the duchess confirms, donating 220 marks to the college. It is stipulated that she is initially to nominate the holder of this fellowship, which had probably fallen vacant about seven years earlier, in October 1487, when Thomas Cosyn had been promoted to the office of master of the college. Subsequently the fellows will be free to elect successors. The priest-fellow selected will be paid eight marks a year by the college, and will be known as the Talbot sisters' priest. He will offer daily mass for the repose of their souls. This daily mass would not, of course, be a requiem mass, but the equivalent of a chantry mass, that is to say the ordinary mass of the day, offered for the intention of the repose of the souls of Eleanor and her family, and celebrated without special solemnity.

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endowing a studentship, and evidently if and when the student graduated as a master of arts he would lose the endowment which would then pass to another student. It is also assumed that the holder of this studentship need not be a priest, for he is not required to celebrate mass, but only to give a daily reading, which he must end with the standard formula for prayers for the dead, on behalf of Eleanor, Elizabeth and all the faithful departed.

In addition to the two scholarships with their attendant obligations, the college itself undertakes to keep in perpetuity five solemn annual anniversary commemorations. The principal anniversary, consisting of the celebration of vespers and matins of the dead and requiem mass for Eleanor and her family every year on 13 and 14 June, marks the actual anniversary of the death of Margaret, Countess of Shrewsbury. The second commemoration, on 17 July, marks the death of the earl of Shrewsbury. It was to be slightly lower key, repeating the celebration of matins of the dead and requiem mass, but omitting vespers. Similarly all the priests of the college undertake to pray for the repose of the souls of Eleanor and her family annually on the feasts of St John the Baptist and St Michael the Archangel, and also at Christmas, saying matins of the dead and requiem mass again for them on those days. Finally, taking account, perhaps, of the fact that Eleanor’s original endowment may have lapsed for a few years, the college undertakes to ensure that it will never be forgotten again, wherefore it is stipulated that the duchess’ indenture will be read aloud at the installation of each successive holder of the Talbot sisters’ fellowship.

In addition to the information which it provides about the dowager duchess of Norfolk’s financial position under Henry VII, the second indenture is of interest chiefly, perhaps, for the complete contrast which its style provides to that of the first. MS. XXXI.122 is what one might expect a business agreement to sound like. By comparison it can be seen that MS. XXXI.121 supplies details which are not directly relevant to its ostensible purpose and which were presumably included for other reasons, as suggested above.