Cathedral Deans of the Yorkist Age

A. COMPTON REEVES

When Richard III became king, he appointed a cathedral dean to be the keeper of his privy seal and in consequence one of the most important figures in the royal administration. This was John Gunthorpe, Dean of Wells Cathedral, who had served Edward IV in a variety of capacities.1 Gunthorpe (more about whom shortly) was a highly accomplished man, and curiosity about him and his contemporary deans is an avenue of inquiry into the Yorkist age. To examine cathedral deans is to look at a fairly small group of ecclesiastics with considerable influence in their localities. As the chief officer in their cathedral communities they were administrators with weighty responsibilities. In those cases where they became deans through royal patronage or influence, it is of interest to learn what training and experience these men had to attract the attention of the Yorkist kings. It will also be useful to learn if the Yorkist kings routinely used the office of dean to reward adherents or if they looked to the kingdom’s cathedral deans as a pool of governmental talent. There is, of course, the fact that these men are of inherent interest simply because they were cathedral deans.

A few words are necessary about cathedrals in the Yorkist age. England and Wales were organized ecclesiastically as the provinces of Canterbury and York, with an archbishop in charge of his own diocese as well as being supervisor of the other dioceses in his province. A cathedral held the *cathedra*, or seat, of a bishop, and was the mother church of a diocese. In all there were twenty-three cathedral churches in twenty-one dioceses, suggesting that two dioceses had two cathedrals rather than one, namely, the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield and that of Bath and Wells. Our sample of cathedral deans is restricted by the existence of two sorts of communities administering the cathedral churches: regular and secular. The regular communities, made up of men living ‘under a rule’ (*sub regula*), were monastic. Communities of Benedictine monks administered the cathedral churches of Durham, Bath, Canterbury, Coventry, Ely, Norwich, Rochester, Winchester, and Worcester, while Carlisle Cathedral was administered by a community of Augustinian canons. In these communities of cathedral clergy, the bishop was the nominal abbot, while the functioning head of the community was the bishop’s subordinate, called a prior. In every case in the Yorkist age the cathedral priors were drawn from among the community of monks or canons,2 and the careers of cathedral priors show no evidence of royal influence or desires at work. The cathedral priors were men who had gained administrative experience in their communities. Many of them had university training, and their rise to being prior was a function of their respective local reputations.

The cathedral clergy who administered secular cathedrals were clergy who worked ‘in the world’ (*in saeculo*) rather than living a cloistered life. The secular cathedral clergy were organized into communities headed by a dean, and the selection of a dean was on occasion influenced by the king. Dean Gunthorpe of Wells has been mentioned, and Wells is a suitable place to begin our survey. When Edward IV became king in 1461, the dean of Wells was Nicholas Carent, who at one time was secretary to Henry VI’s queen, Margaret of Anjou, died in 1467, and was succeeded as dean by William Witham, an Oxford-trained doctor of civil law who held many ecclesiastical benefices,3 and for whom the deanship of Wells was likely a source of income while he was engaged elsewhere. Witham’s record suggests that his sphere of activity was legal and ecclesiastical rather than royal. However, following Witham’s death in 1472, Edward IV was influential in the selection of John Gunthorpe as dean. By 1472 Gunthorpe had compiled a substantial record in the service of King Edward.4 Gunthorpe became a Cambridge Master of Arts in 1452, and remained at the University for several years before

---

going to Italy to pursue humanistic studies in Ferrara with Guarino da Verona. Guarino died in 1460, and Gunthorpe in time made his way to Rome where he entered papal service. When Gunthorpe returned to England in 1465 Edward IV was king, and the king soon brought the trained humanist into royal service. He became secretary and chaplain to Edward's queen, was sent on diplomatic missions to Castile, accompanied the king's sister, Margaret of York, to Burgundy for her 1468 marriage to Duke Charles, became king's almoner, chaplain to the king, and clerk of parliament. Gunthorpe's elevation to the deanship of Wells was undoubtedly brought about with royal influence, and Gunthorpe was an absentee dean filling various functions for the Yorkist kings until 1485, having served as the keeper of Richard III's privy seal for the entirety of Richard's reign. Thereafter, Gunthorpe took up residence at Wells where he remained until his death in 1498. The selection of Gunthorpe as dean of Wells by Edward IV is clearly an example of a deanship being used by a king to support a man in royal service.

Lying to the west of the diocese of Bath and Wells was the diocese of Exeter, and its cathedral church was a secular one. The dean of Exeter when Edward IV became king was Henry Webber, an Oxford-trained bachelor of canon law, who lived until 1477. Webber's successor as dean was, very briefly, Peter Courtenay, who in 1478 became bishop of Exeter and died as bishop of Winchester. Courtenay sprang from a younger branch of the family of the Courtenay earls of Devon, and was generously endowed with ecclesiastical benefices. He studied at Oxford, Cologne, and Padua, and held a doctorate in canon law. By 1462 Courtenay was back from his studies abroad, and in the service of Edward IV. Although Courtenay defected from Edward IV in the period of Henry VI's reademption of 1470-71, he returned to Edward's service and was a royal councillor when he became the absentee dean of Exeter. Courtenay was followed as dean by Lionel Woodville, brother of Edward IV's queen, Elizabeth. Woodville was born about 1454, and Edward IV was king by the time Woodville completed his canon law studies at Oxford. Among the ecclesiastical benefices that came his way while he was a student was the deanship of Exeter Cathedral. Woodville held the deanship, almost certainly as an absentee, until 1482 when he became bishop of Salisbury. Woodville kept primarily to Oxford, but he was involved in the politics of the kingdom. The dean of Exeter who took office next and continued beyond the era of the Yorkist kings was John Arundel, an Oxford-trained master of arts and bachelor of theology who was also a chaplain to Edward IV. Overall, it would seem that the hand of the king is in evidence at Exeter with the appointments of Courtenay, Woodville, and Arundel, as it had been at Wells with Gunthorpe.

Crossing the Bristol Channel to have a view of the four Welsh dioceses that were within the province of Canterbury, there is some evidence of Yorkist royal influence in the selection of deans. For the cathedral church of Llandaff, the surviving records are insufficient to indicate even if there was a dean at this time. The cathedral chapter at St David's did not have a dean until the nineteenth century, and before then the chapter was headed up by the precentor of the cathedral. The precentor at St David's before, during, and beyond the Yorkist age was Huw ab Owain (precentor 1437-86). The precentor of a cathedral normally dealt with music in the cathedral, even if Huw was also head of the chapter at St David's. His selection obviously was not influenced by Edward IV. At St Asaph Cathedral, the record is obscure for the beginning of Edward IV's reign. John Blodwell, who had been rector of a church in Wiltshire by 1411, attended the Council of Constance, and was awarded a doctorate in canon law by Oxford University by 1431, was dean of St Asaph in the course of his career. However, at his death in 1462 he had been blind for many years, and seems no longer to have been dean. With greater precision it can be said that John Tapton, a Cambridge master of arts and king's clerk was appointed dean of St Asaph by Edward IV in 1461, and Tapton held the benefice until his death in 1493. There is no reason

---


12 Le Neve, Welsh Dioceses, p. 56.


to suppose that Tapton took up residence as dean. Tapton was in royal service as head of the household of Edward IV’s younger brother, George, Duke of Clarence.\footnote{Anne Crawford, *The Yorkists*, London 2007, p. 91.} The circumstances of the deans of Bangor Cathedral are cast in shadows.\footnote{Le Neve, *Welsh Dioceses*, p. 6.} The name of Hugh Alcock is mentioned in a royal letter patent in 1464, but that is little indeed. Likewise, the Oxford bachelor of canon law, Huw Morgan is mentioned as dean in a royal letter patent of 1468.\footnote{Emden, *Oxford*, vol. 2, pp. 1310-11.} About 1480 Richard Kyffin became dean of Bangor, and remained such until his death in 1502.\footnote{T.J. Pierce, *Richard Kyffin*, *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940*, London 1959, p. 538; Williams, *Welsh Church*, pp. 321-22.} Kyffin, known as the Black Dean (*Deon Du*), was the personification of a local squire (achelwyry). He patronized building works at Bangor Cathedral, and he was also known for his prowess in hunting, for his fine oxen, and for his use of mineral resources to profit from the sale of millstones and slates. Kyffin built a fine house at Llanddwywyn, famed as a place of hospitality and conviviality, and the Black Dean enjoyed the company of poets and women. His gesture towards the Yorkist kings was to support Henry Tudor during the reign of Richard III.

The diocese of Hereford bordered on Wales, and Hereford Cathedral could boast of more decorous deans than Richard Kyffin.\footnote{John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1300-1541, II, Hereford Diocese*, compiled by J.M. Horn, London 1962, p. 5.} When Edward IV became king, the dean of Hereford was John Barowe, an Oxford-educated bachelor of canon and civil law, who seems to have been a resident dean from his appointment in 1446 until his death in 1462.\footnote{Ibid, vol. 1, p. 116.} Following Barowe’s death, a fractured election produced first James Goldwell and then John ap Richard as dean, but neither secured the position, and in 1463 the choice fell on Richard Pede, who held a doctorate in canon law from Oxford.\footnote{Ibid, vol. 3, pp. 1449-50.} There is no evidence that Pede was in royal service or that his selection as dean resulted from royal influence. Soon after Pede’s death in 1481, Thomas Chaundeler became dean of Hereford.\footnote{John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1300-1541, III, Salisbury Diocese*, compiled by J.M. Horn, London 1962, p. 4.} Chaundeler had been noted in 1472 as a chaplain to Edward IV, but his career was entirely an academic one at Oxford where he was a dominant figure in the promotion of humanist scholarship. He was an author and an influential teacher, and he did retire to Hereford at the end of his life, and was buried in the cathedral after his death in 1490.

James Goldwell, we have noted, appeared unsuccessfully as a candidate to be dean of Hereford, but he was more fortunate at Salisbury.\footnote{Emden, *Oxford*, vol. 2, pp. 1310-11.} When Edward IV became king the dean of Salisbury was the famous physician Gilbert Kymer, who in his career attended upon Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and King Henry VI.\footnote{Jeremy Catto, *Thomas Chaundeler*, *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940*, London 1959, p. 538; Williams, *Welsh Church*, pp. 321-22.} Following Kymer’s death in 1463 and burial in Salisbury Cathedral, the deanship passed to James Goldwell, who held a doctorate in canon and civil law from Oxford.\footnote{Ibid, vol. 1, p. 116.} Goldwell was affiliated with the house of York. Shortly after the Yorkist victory in the battle of Northampton in 1460, Goldwell was named secretary to the captive Henry VI, and he continued as king’s secretary into Edward IV’s reign. Soon Goldwell was drafted into diplomatic and other service by King Edward, and the deanship of Salisbury was one of his rewards. A still greater reward came in 1472 when Goldwell became bishop of Norwich, and he remained in royal service through the reign of Richard III. In later years Goldwell demonstrated himself to be a conscientious diocesan, and after his death in 1499 his body was laid to rest in a tomb that is still to be seen in Norwich Cathedral. In 1473, following Goldwell’s elevation to the episcopal bench, John Davyson became dean of Salisbury.\footnote{John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1300-1541, III, Salisbury Diocese*, compiled by J.M. Horn, London 1962, p. 4.} Davyson was probably an Oxford master of arts, and he was keeper of the hanaper in the royal chancery when he became dean, and thus a suspicion exists of royal influence in his selection since Davyson continued for some years in the chancery.

The chapter of Lichfield Cathedral in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield was served by one dean across the Yorkist era.\footnote{Emden, *Oxford*, vol. 2, pp. 1310-11.} This was Thomas Haywode, an Oxford-educated doctor of canon law who...
became dean of Lichfield in 1457, and remained in office until his death in 1492. Haywood appears never to have been brought into the service of the Yorkist kings, and the same is true of his long-lived contemporary as dean of the cathedral chapter at Lincoln, Robert Flemyng. Flemyng became dean of Lincoln in 1452, having become a master of arts at Oxford, and having studied at the universities of Cologne and Padua and, ahead of Dean Gunthorpe of Wells, having studied with Guarino da Verona in Ferrara. Flemyng was very active in the service of Henry VI as a chaplain and a diplomat, but was not employed by Edward IV, who died just a few months before Flemyng. In the autumn of 1483, after Richard III came to the throne, George FitzHugh became dean of Lincoln. FitzHugh’s maternal grandfather was Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, and FitzHugh was a master of arts at Cambridge when he became dean. He was a fairly young man in 1483, and never attracted the attention of Richard III. FitzHugh was granted numerous benefices, and held the deanship of Lincoln until his death in 1505, having become toward the end of his life a chaplain to Henry VII. The deans of Lichfield and Lincoln, then, do not seem to have been seen as potential associates in government by the Yorkist kings.

That evaluation holds true for the dean of the cathedral chapter at York when Edward IV became king. Richard Andrewe had become dean in 1452, and he held the office until he resigned in 1477. Andrewe had been very active in serving Henry VI as a king’s clerk, king’s secretary, and diplomat on frequent assignments. Even if Andrewe’s doctorate in civil law from Oxford gave him skills useful to a king, Edward IV did not call upon him. Andrewe’s successor as dean of York did not enter into royal service, but he did have an exciting encounter with Richard III. This was Robert Booth, who studied at Cambridge and held a doctorate in civil law. Booth’s great-uncle, Lawrence, was archbishop of York in 1477, and would be until his death in 1480, and Robert owed the archbishop for his appointment as dean. Another great-uncle, William, had died as archbishop of York in 1464, and in 1477 an uncle, John, was bishop of Exeter. Dean Booth was well connected by any measure, and Archbishop Lawrence had served Edward IV as keeper of the privy seal and chancellor of England. The exciting encounter for Robert Booth came when Richard III, his wife and son, came to York on the royal progress following Richard’s coronation as king in 1483. Dean Booth was the ranking ecclesiastic among those who greeted the new king, and he was witness to the investiture of young Edward of Middleham as Prince of Wales. Still, the meeting in York over several days did not result in Robert Booth being drawn into royal service.

Yet another ecclesiastical kinsman of Robert Booth, William Worsley, was Booth’s contemporary dean at St Paul’s, London. Worsley was not, however, dean when Edward IV became king. The dean of St Paul’s in 1461 was William Say, who had become dean in 1457. A native of London, Say held a doctorate in theology from Oxford, and he had served Henry VI in a variety of ways, including being dean of the king’s chapel, king’s chaplain, and as a diplomat. Say lived until 1468, and Edward IV retained him as dean of the chapel royal at least until 1467. From 1468 until his death in 1471, Roger Radcliff was dean of St Paul’s. He had a doctorate in civil law from Cambridge, and he was taken into royal service as the chancellor of Edward’s queen, Elizabeth Woodville. After Radcliff had been laid to rest in St Paul’s, another doctor of civil law, this one from Oxford, followed on as dean of St Paul’s in the person of Thomas Winterborne. Winterborne was a very talented administrator who energetically served Archbishop Thomas Bourchier of Canterbury as well as Edward IV. Winterborne was a member of the king’s council before he became dean of St Paul’s, and he was also a diplomat. The evidence suggests that it was service to Archbishop Bourchier that attracted benefices for Winterborne, and that seeing him about the archbishop’s business caught the eye of the king.

The last dean of St Paul’s during the Yorkist era was William Worsley, another doctor of civil law, with some canon law studies included, who studied both at Oxford and Cambridge, and perhaps also

---

30 Emden, Cambridge, pp. 231, 676.
outside of England. Worsley was the protégé of his two great-uncles who became archbishop of York, William Booth and Lawrence Booth. Both great-uncles had, in their time been canons of St Paul’s, and Lawrence had been dean (1456-57). Worsley’s first benefice, in 1449, was a canonry in Lichfield Cathedral with the attached prebend of Tachbrook, and William Booth was bishop of Coventry and Lichfield at the time. When Thomas Winterborne died in December 1478, Worsley had a career behind him that opened the election to his candidacy, and from January 1479 until his death in 1499 Worsley was an active and involved dean. He never had a place on the king’s council as had his predecessors Radcliff and Winterborne, and he held no high office in government like keeper of the privy seal or chancellor, but he was named to a few royal commissions. Worsley seems to have been much more focused on matters of ecclesiastical administration than upon royal government, although he did become unhappily involved in the Perkin Warbeck conspiracy in 1494.

Like the majority of cathedral deans of the Yorkist era we have investigated, the deans of the cathedral chapter of Chichester were lacking in links with the Yorkist kings. When Edward IV became king the dean at Chichester was John Waynflete, younger brother of Bishop William Waynflete of Winchester (d. 1486). John Waynflete trained at Oxford in both civil and canon law, and enjoyed the income from several ecclesiastical benefices, among them the deanship of Chichester, which he held from 1455 perhaps until his death in 1479. The dean of Chichester installed while a king from the house of York was on the throne was John Cloos, a doctor of civil law, who was dean from 1479 until his death in 1501. The evidence suggests that Cloos spent his career in ecclesiastical administration, both as dean of Chichester and also in the service of Edward Story, Bishop of Chichester. No links have come to light between Cloos and the Yorkist kings.

In looking at the cathedral deans of the Yorkist age certain impressions take shape. Most, we note, whether in office when Edward IV became king or selected during the reign of Edward or of his brother Richard III, were men of learning possessed of university degrees. Three, Gunthorpe of Wells, Chaundeler of Hereford, and Flemyn of Lincoln, were noteworthy for their humanistic scholarship. Of the seventeen men who became deans while a king from the house of York sat on the English throne, just over half were engaged in service to the royal government: Gunthorpe of Wells, Courtenay and Arundel of Exeter, Tapton of St Asaph, Goldwell and Davyson of Salisbury, and Radcliff, Winterborne, and Worsley of St Paul’s. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to argue too forcefully that the Yorkist kings saw cathedral deans as a potential pool of talent for governmental service. Many of the deans discussed above were not involved in royal service. It might be said that Woodville of Exeter and Kyffin of Bangor dabbled in politics, though not by way of giving governmental service. Note should also be made of the few cases where the royal will can be suspected of having a part in the selection of a dean: Gunthorpe of Wells, Woodville of Exeter, Tapton of St Asaph, and Goldwell and Davyson of Salisbury.

All in all, the attitude of Edward IV and Richard III towards cathedral deans was to respect the responsibilities of that group of educated and talented men to serve as the priest of the clergy at the cathedral to which they were summoned, to deal with jurisdictional matters within their particular cathedral precincts, to head up the cathedral chapter and give attention to the managing of its resources, and to carry out any other local pastoral or administrative tasks that might fall to them.