

The Yorkist Royal Family on the Bede Roll of the London Parish Clerks' Fraternity

NORMAN JAMES

Members of royal dynasties are frequently found among different membership lists generated by more significant late medieval fraternities. These guilds sought to add to their prestige by admitting such figures to their ranks whenever possible. Henry IV, Henry V (as Prince of Wales) and Henry VI were all admitted as members of the Trinity Guild at Coventry for instance, along with various brothers or half-brothers of Edward III, Richard II and Henry V, perhaps on the occasion of visits to the city.¹ In London, the register of the Skinners' guild of Corpus Christi included a continuous line of royal figures from Edward III onwards among the more illustrious members.² The records of the Merchant Taylors' guild of St John the Baptist in the capital note the admission of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and his brothers John, Duke of Bedford, and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. They are followed by Henry VI, Richard III (as Duke of Gloucester), and his brother, George, Duke of Clarence, and Henry VII.³ The Bede Roll of the London Parish Clerks' fraternity is however, unusual, in that the admissions of members noted during the year of reckoning beginning on Ascension Day 1460 include entries for the entire family of the new monarch Edward IV encompassing his parents, Richard and Cecily, Duke and Duchess of York, and all his siblings, living and deceased.⁴

The Parish Clerks had, when first compiling the Bede Roll in 1449, entered the name of Henry VI who had granted their first two charters in 1442 and 1449, by which they were obliged to pray for him. His queen, Margaret of An-

¹ M.D. Harris, *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St Mary, St John the Baptist and St Katherine of Coventry*, vol. 1, Dugdale Society 13, (1935), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

² Guildhall Library, London, MS 31693.

³ See C.M. Clode, *The Early History of the Guild of Merchant Taylors of the Fraternity of St John the Baptist*, London 1888, vol. 1, pp. 293-303, where Edward IV has been added to the list of members on slender evidence, and the more recent commentary of M Davies and A Saunders, *The History of the Merchant Taylors' Company* Leeds 2004, pp. 20-22.

⁴ Guildhall Library, London, MS 4889, now published as *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St Nicholas*, ed N.W. and V.A. James, London Record Society, 39 (2004). The entries for Edward's family are to be found in Part I, sections 61 and 67. They list the living children of Richard and Cecily, namely Edward, George, Richard, Anne, Elizabeth and Margaret, followed by the deceased Henry, Edmund, John, William, Thomas and Ursula. The deceased children are preceded by their father, killed on 30 December 1460.

jou, was nevertheless omitted although at the same time the names of his father Henry V, and uncles, the dukes of Bedford, Clarence and Gloucester were mentioned in the list of previously deceased members. Later, in 1480, Edward IV's queen, Elizabeth Woodville, was also admitted to the guild, but there was no attempt to capture the whole of the king's immediate family in the same way as in 1460. In the entries for this earlier year the compiler made a fulsome show of attachment to the new political order by adding the names of all the new monarch's immediate family, both living and dead. The intention of the Clerks was clearly to proclaim their loyalty to the new dynasty, which had been enthusiastically welcomed by most Londoners. The entry for Edward IV at the beginning of the list of brethren and sistern admitted during the year from 22 May 1460 refers to him as the '... heir of the distinguished prince Richard Duke of York true and just heir (*veri et iusti heredis*) of the kingdoms of England and France and of the lordship of the land of Ireland and of the noble princess his wife the Lady Cecily Duchess of York ...'. These names must have been written down at some stage after Edward IV's coronation on 29 June 1461, when his brother George was created Duke of Clarence, as he is given this title in the manuscript. Conversely, they were recorded before his other brother Richard was created Duke of Gloucester on 1 November that year since this title is omitted.⁵

Why however, were all the children of Richard and Cecily, the Duke and Duchess of York, including those who had died long before in infancy, mentioned in the Parish Clerks' prayers, not just the more prominent amongst them? The Fraternity of St Nicholas included not only parish clerks but also choir clerks: professional lay singers who served in the Chapel Royal, the household chapels of magnates and other ecclesiastical establishments. It is possible that these individuals were prayed for as a group in the context of the household chapel of someone like Cecily, who would have had the most reason to remember her deceased child Edmund, Earl of Rutland, killed with her husband in 1460, but also her dead sons Henry, John, William and Thomas and her daughter Ursula who were not significant in dynastic terms. Whatever the reason, the entries provide a distinctive commentary on the way in which one London guild expressed its adherence to the new political order by incorporating the house of York into its cycle of prayer and commemoration.

The Editor adds: *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St Nicholas*, edited N.W. and V.A. James is published in 2 parts as volume 39 of the London Record Society series for 2004. It is available from the Hon. Secretary of the London Record Society, c/o The Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, London WC1E 7HU, price £20 (including postage and packing).

⁵ James Christie, *Some Account of Parish Clerks* (privately printed, 1893), p. 34, for the calculation of the date when the text was actually added to the MS.