

Bishop Courtenay, Richard III and the Archdeaconry of Totnes¹

We do not know why Peter Courtenay bishop of Exeter rebelled against Richard III in the autumn of 1483.² A notable pluralist Courtenay had benefited from Yorkist rule acquiring further ecclesiastical preferment (among which was the see of Exeter) whilst becoming secretary and counsellor to Edward IV.³ It is possible that Courtenay was alienated from Richard by the latter's usurpation of the crown. The bishop may also have wanted to safeguard his future by supporting Henry Tudor's claim to the throne which many regarded as stronger than Richard's.⁴

Two years later Courtenay's judgement would be vindicated but in the short term his political calculations went awry. The rebellion led by the duke of Buckingham quickly foundered and the bishop and those other leaders who managed to escape Richard's clutches fled into exile in Brittany with Henry Tudor.⁵ This left Courtenay's vicar-general, John Combe, in charge at Exeter. Absentee bishops were commonplace in fifteenth century England. Many held offices of state or were employed as royal diplomats.⁶ But the situation facing Combe was by no means normal. Richard, so it was later alleged, bore a 'cruel and malicious disposition' towards Courtenay and 'to all that were his servants and well-wishers'.⁷ This was hardly surprising in the circumstances but it made Combe, an experienced civil lawyer who had served Courtenay since the start of the bishop's rule in 1478, fearful of displeasing the king.⁸

Combe no doubt came face to face with Richard when the latter entered Exeter at the head of an army and occupied the episcopal palace in November 1483.⁹ But Courtenay had given his deputy a means of survival. Before he left his diocese the bishop secretly revoked Combe's authority as vicar-general. Courtenay told Combe about this but no one else. Consequently anything that Combe did as vicar-general during the bishop's exile could be disregarded.¹⁰ This was clearly of importance to those who hoped to profit from Richard's reassertion of royal authority in the south-west.¹¹ Edmund Chaderton (or Chaterton), king's chaplain and a man 'greatly in [Richard's] favour' – he was royal councillor and treasurer of the chamber – had his eyes set on the archdeaconry of Totnes.¹² At the time of Courtenay's flight the post was occupied by William Wagott. But Wagott was evidently unwell because before he left Exeter Courtenay 'named unto [Combe] four persons which the said bishop willed to be promoted to the archdeaconry.....if it fortun'd to be void at any time before his coming home'.¹³

We do not know who these four were but we do know that Chaderton was not one of them. Wagott died between Michaelmas 1484 and Michaelmas 1485.¹⁴ Once the vacancy had arisen Combe immediately came under pressure from Richard to collate Chaderton which he duly did. But no sooner had Chaderton become archdeacon than he resigned the post in favour of Patrick Haliburton a Scottish cleric of noble descent who had come south with his patron James earl of Douglas some 30 years previously and who was currently rector of Lifton.¹⁵

Haliburton was status-conscious and had an interest in the finer things in life. His ancestral arms were displayed in the stained-glass windows of Lifton church and he later donated two expensive violet or purple sudaria to Exeter Cathedral which he had brought back from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The archdeaconry suited these tastes - Haliburton boldly wrote his name and title as archdeacon onto the back cover of one of his books - as did the cathedral canonry that he also gained at this time.¹⁶

Chaderton's resignation was part of an agreement that the two men had made. In return for getting the archdeaconry Haliburton undertook to pay Chaderton an annual pension of £40. Hartland Abbey was bound by obligation to ensure the pension's payment. If Haliburton were 'put and amoved' from the archdeaconry the pension would cease.¹⁷ But the agreement unravelled when Courtenay returned to England with Henry Tudor in August 1485. Following the battle of Bosworth and the death of Richard III, the bishop regained control of his see and ejected Haliburton from the archdeaconry. But Chaderton refused to give up the pension and so the abbot of Hartland was forced to bring an action against him in the court of chancery in the first year of Henry VII's reign.¹⁸ We do not know the outcome of the suit nor, importantly, what Chaderton had to say in his defence. But we do know that he quickly made his peace with the Tudor regime. In November 1485 he received a general pardon and soon afterwards became chancellor of Henry's queen, Elizabeth.¹⁹ Six years later in March 1491 he was (again) collated to the archdeaconry of Totnes this time by Courtenay's successor at Exeter, Richard Fox.²⁰ By now Chaderton was 60 and in poor health suffering from gout. The pope took pity and granted him a dispensation allowing him to conduct visitations of his archdeaconry by deputy.²¹

Fox's register is disappointingly silent about the circumstances of Chaderton's re-appointment. It neither names his predecessor nor gives the reason for the vacancy. This may have been deliberate. Chaderton's ties with Exeter were tenuous. An outsider, he never obtained a cathedral canonry as was customary with senior clergy nor was he presented to benefices in the diocese. The 1491 collation may therefore have been an attempt to remedy the defects or uncertainties of his original appointment which would mean that he had been *de facto* archdeacon since Haliburton's expulsion. The last we hear of him as archdeacon is in June 1492 when Archbishop Morton's commissaries made a visitation of Exeter cathedral. Unsurprisingly given his age and interests elsewhere, Chaderton attended by proxy.²² Although he lived on for a further seven years we do not know if he was still archdeacon at the time of his death.²³ His will makes no mention of Totnes whilst his successor, Ralph Heathcott whose date of collation has not survived, died just a few months after him.²⁴

The abbot of Hartland's chancery bill transcribed below (see Appendix 1) has formed the basis of this note. It is a valuable document because it not only enables us to amend the list of archdeacons of Totnes in Joyce Horn's modern edition of *Le Neve's Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (see Appendix 2 below) but it also casts a welcome light on a generally dark period in church government at Exeter. Much of Courtenay's episcopal register is missing whilst the registers of

his immediate predecessors and successors are often lacking in detail and reliability. Scribal standards in the bishop's registry were falling. Under Courtenay letters of ordination were reported to have been burnt or left unrecorded.²⁵ The political turbulence of the period impacted on the routine of church government at Exeter as a succession of bishops and their deputies struggled to establish stable administrations.²⁶

Appendix 1

The National Archives, Early Chancery Proceedings, C1/77/47²⁷

To the right reverend father in God the bishop of Worcester and chancellor of England.²⁸ Meekly showeth unto your good and gracious lordship your continual orator John abbot of Hartland that where Peter bishop of Exeter being with the king our sovereign lord in parties beyond the sea before his departing out of England had ordained and deputed John Combe clerk his vicary general within the diocese of Exeter. And furthermore named unto the said John Combe clerk four persons which the said bishop willed to be promoted to the archdeaconry of Totnes within the said diocese of Exeter if it fortuneth to be void at any time before his coming home into England whereof Edmund Chaterton clerk and chaplain to Richard in deed and not in right king of England the third was none. After which deputation and ordinance the said bishop understanding and knowing the cruel and malicious disposition which the said Richard late in deed, not of right king of England the third owed unto the said bishop and to all that were his servants and well-wishers and also perceiving the fearfulness of the said John Combe to be in the displeasure of the said late king, discharged the same John Combe clerk of all authority and power of vicary general unto the said bishop and also the authority of the same John Combe given the said bishop by his letters under his seal revoked which letters of revocation were showed unto the said John Combe in any wise durst not be known for fear and jeopardy of his life. After which discharge, revocation and letters shown, one William Wagot clerk one of the canons of the cathedral church of St Peter of Exeter deceased by whose death the archdeaconry of Totnes aforesaid voided the collation whereof to the said bishop belonged after which voidance and letters shown in discharging of the said John Combe in form aforesaid rehearsed, the foresaid late in deed and not of right King Richard the third by his fearful commandment given to the said John Combe which he durst not disobey caused the same John Combe to make collation unto the said Edmund Chaterton of the archdeaconry aforesaid the said Edmund Chaterton then being chaplain to the said late king and greatly in his favour. After which collation of the said Edmund Chaterton into the said archdeaconry it was condescended and agreed between the said Edmund Chaterton and Patrick Halyburton canon of the said cathedral church by composition between them had that the said Patrick by resignation of the said Edmund should have the said archdeaconry paying and contenting to the said Edmund Chaterton yearly a pension of £40 and to cause a house of religion to be bounden for the contentation of the same pension the said Edmund Chaterton seeing and affirming that the said Patrick should have a sure and sufficient possession of the said archdeaconry during his life. And furthermore said and granted that if the said Patrick were put and amoved from the said archdeaconry that therefore the house of religion bounden for the said pension should be discharged in trust whereof your said orator at the desire and request of the said Patrick and his friends granted a pension of £40 unto the said Edmund Chaterton for the time of his life. And after the said Patrick was amoved and put from the said archdeaconry by the said Peter now bishop of Exeter by cause that the said Edmund Chaterton was none of the said four persons named to the said vicary general and also the power and authority of the said

vicary general was revoked by the said bishop before the said collation made to the said Edmund Chaterton of the said archdeaconry whereby the grant of the pension granted by the said abbot in conscience ought to be void and the said abbot discharged..... [the abbot requests that the Lord Chancellor subpoena Chaterton to appear in court to answer the bill]

Appendix 2

Archdeacons of Totnes in the late 15th century²⁹

Owen Lloyd 1478

collated 15 Feb 1478; dead by 30 Oct 1478³⁰

William Wagott 1478 - 1484x1485

occurs 9 Oct 1479 to 23 Dec 1482; still archdeacon at time of death Michaelmas 1484 x Michaelmas 1485³¹

Edmund Chaderton 1484x1485

collated following death of Wagott and before return from exile of Bishop Courtenay late summer/autumn 1485; resigned almost immediately in favour of Patrick Haliburton³²

Patrick Haliburton 1484x1485 - ?Nov 1485

collated following Chaderton's resignation and before return from exile of Bishop Courtenay; deprived by Courtenay late 1485, probably after 7 Nov when parliament reversed the act of attainder that had been passed against the bishop in Jan 1484 following his participation in Buckingham's rebellion³³

Edmund Chaderton ?Nov 1485 - ?Feb 1493

collated 26 Mar 1491 but probably *de facto* archdeacon since Haliburton's deprivation; occurs 1 Jun 1492; may have resigned archdeaconry on becoming archdeacon of Chester in Feb 1493; died between 6 Apr and 22 Aug 1499³⁴

Ralph Heathcott ?1493 - 1499

perhaps collated 1493; still archdeacon at time of death which occurred shortly before 25 Nov 1499 the date that his will was proved³⁵

John Fulford 1500-1515

collated 15 Mar 1500; resigned archdeaconry when collated to archdeaconry of Cornwall 18 Apr 1515³⁶

¹ This article first appeared in *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* in 2016.

² This is the conclusion of J A F Thomson, 'The Courtenay Family in the Yorkist Period', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol xlv (1972), pp. 230-46, at p 242.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁴ C Ross, *Richard III* (London, 1990), pp. 112-15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶ R L Storey, *Diocesan Administration in the Fifteenth Century* (St Anthony's Hall Publications, xvi, York, 1958), p. 1.

⁷ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), C1/77/47. There may well be an element of exaggeration here: the abbot of Hartland who made these comments had good reason to be hostile towards Richard and his followers (see below). It should also be noted that

the king pardoned John Arundel dean of Exeter and Thomas Elyot Courtenay's registrar in the aftermath of the rebellion. Unfortunately their indiscretions are not recorded (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1476-1485* (London, 1901), pp. 374, 458).

⁸ A B Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD1500* (hereafter *BRUO*), 3 vols., (Oxford, 1957-59), i. 473; Devon Heritage Centre (hereafter DHC), Chanter 12(ii) fo 84v. Combe went on to become treasurer and precentor of Exeter cathedral.

⁹ J Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third* (Cambridge, 1898), pp. 142-43.

¹⁰ TNA, C1/77/47.

¹¹ Richard's strategy was to grant lands and offices in Devon and Cornwall to his supporters from the north of England (Ross, *Richard III*, pp. 120-21.).

¹² TNA, C1/77/47; Ross, *Richard III*, pp. 172, 176. Chaderton had also just (or was about to) become archdeacon of Salisbury (*BRUO*, i. 382).

¹³ TNA, C1/77/47.

¹⁴ D Lepine and N Orme, *Death and Memory in Medieval Exeter* (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new series, vol. 47), p. 114. This revises *BRUO*, iii. 1954 which has 1486 as the year of Wagott's demise.

¹⁵ TNA, C1/77/47; Revd J. Hunwicke, 'Status and Display in Early Tudor Devon', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 139 (2007), pp. 199-237, at p. 202.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-05; John le Neve: *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541:IX Exeter Diocese* (hereafter *FEA*), comp. J M Horn (London, 1964), p. 58. Sudaria were silk cloths used to handle the paten or plate for the bread in the Eucharist.

¹⁷ TNA, C1/77/47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; see note 27 below for the dating of the action.

¹⁹ *BRUO*, i. 387.

²⁰ DHC, Chanter 12(i) fo 121r.

²¹ *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Vol XV 1484-1492*, ed. M J Haren (Dublin, 1978), p. 379.

²² *The Register of John Morton Archbishop of Canterbury 1486-1500 Volume II*, ed C Harper-Bill (Canterbury and York Society, 1991), p. 74.

²³ *FEA*, p. 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; TNA, PROB11/11/697.

²⁵ DHC, Chanter 12(ii), second foliation, fo 25v.

²⁶ Seven bishops served the diocese between 1456 and 1504.

²⁷ Crown copyright. Punctuation and spelling have been modernised.

²⁸ Chancery bills of this period are invariably undated. A clue to their date may be obtained from the biographical details of the Lord Chancellors who presided over the court. Here the chancellor is John Alcock bishop of Worcester who was appointed chancellor on 7 Oct 1485 and who was translated to the see of Ely on 6 Oct 1486 (*Handbook of British Chronology 3rd edition*, eds. E B Fryde, D E Greenway, S Porter and I Roy (Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks no 2, 1986), pp. 88, 280). The date of the abbot's bill is therefore 7 Oct 1485 x 6 Oct 1486.

²⁹ This revises *FEA*, p19.

³⁰ DHC, Chanter 12(ii) fo 44v; *Registrum Thome Bourghier, Cantuariensis archiepiscopi, 1454-1486*, ed F R H Du Boulay (Canterbury and York Society, liv, 1957), p. 333. It is likely that Lloyd died during the vacancy of the see of Exeter from Apr to Oct 1478.

³¹ DHC, Chanter 12(ii) insert between fos 131-2; Exeter Cathedral Archives, DC620; TNA C1/77/47; Lepine and Orme, *Death and Memory*, p. 114.

³² TNA, C1/77/47.

³³ *Ibid.*; 'Henry VII: November 1485, Part 1', in *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, eds. C Given-Wilson, P Brand, S Phillips, M Ormrod, G Martin, A Curry and R Horrox (Woodbridge, 2005), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/november1485-pt-1> [accessed 25 October 2015]; S B Chrimes, *Henry VII* (London, 1972), p. 328.

³⁴ DHC, Chanter 12(ii) fo 121r; John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541: X Coventry and Lichfield Diocese*, comp. B Jones (London, 1964), p. 14; As Chaderton and

his successor, Heathcott, were both prebendaries of Lichfield cathedral it is possible that an agreement was made leading to Chaderton's resignation and Heathcott's appointment. Chaderton continued to hold the archdeaconry of Salisbury until his death.

³⁵ DHC, Chanter 12(ii), second foliation, fo 14v; TNA, PROB11/11/727.

³⁶ DHC, Chanter 12(ii), second foliation, fo 14v; Chanter 13, fo 60r.