

# Margaret Styward and the Curious Case of the 1398 Elmington Declarations<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The survival of medieval documents is subject to some curious quirks and perhaps among the more curious is that of two documents concerning the Gloucestershire manor of Elmington.<sup>2</sup> These are closely linked but have been separated and may now be found in different archives: Somerset Archives and Bristol Record Office. They are attested records of declarations made by two clergymen within six weeks of each other in late 1398 concerning the terms upon which they were entrusted as feoffees with Elmington by the Gloucester burgess Thomas Styward. The circumstances in which these declarations came to be made bear investigation and this reveals the potential power of women in the transmission of land in the later Middle Ages and the ease with which frauds might be perpetrated.

The investigation revolves around Margaret Styward, who was daughter and heir of Thomas Styward (d. 1376?) and wife first of Edmund Blount (d. 1381) and then of Sir Laurence Sebrook (d. 1394). She had sons William and John by Blount and another, Lionel, by Sebrook, but she survived William and Lionel and was still living in 1429. Although she was married to Blount at a young age by her father, Blount's early death allowed her to marry again to Sebrook who, although knighted, was landless. It appears likely that she may have fraudulently altered her father's intentions with regard to Elmington to the end that she was able to settle the manor on her son Lionel. She may also have acquired an illicit interest in two of Blount's manors and she was certainly a close associate of three of the county's most notorious villains at the time. This paper will look in turn at Margaret's father Thomas Styward and his acquisition of Elmington, and at her two husbands, and finally make an attempt to disentangle the complications of their lands and settlements.

## Thomas Styward and the Manor of Elmington

Thomas Styward was a burgess of Gloucester who evidently enjoyed a successful career. He was bailiff of the town 1368–70 and 1372–3, and represented the borough in parliament in 1360,

1. I am glad to acknowledge the generosity of Mrs Vera Austin, which has enabled me to carry out the research for this paper.
2. Elmington is now represented by Elmington Manor Farm between Compton Greenfield and Berwick in the parish of Almondsbury. In addition to those cited below, several charters concerning the manor of a date before 1368 survive: Bristol Record Office [BRO], AC/D/1–20; Somerset Archives [SA], DD\ WHb/2497–9; B. Wells-Furby (ed.), *A Catalogue of the Medieval Muniments at Berkeley Castle* (Glos. Rec. Series 17–18, 2004) [*Berkeley Castle Mun.*], E1/4/1–4.

1368, 1369, 1372, and 1373.<sup>3</sup> On the last two occasions his colleague was William Heyberer, 'the most prominent figure in the town during this period', who represented the borough eight times between 1361 and 1390 but rose to represent the county as well in 1380, 1384 (twice), 1385, and 1388.<sup>4</sup> Styward and Heyberer were obviously friends as well as colleagues. In 1364 they jointly, with William Keyberer, had licence to establish a chantry in St Michael's church, Gloucester.<sup>5</sup> Heyberer was to act as a feoffee for Styward and his daughter Margaret three times between 1376 and 1381 and was one of Margaret's son's 'closest friends' in 1381, while Keyberer was godfather to Margaret's son.<sup>6</sup> Between 1369 and 1375 Styward also made an appearance in county affairs, mainperning for the prior and keeper of two local alien priories in 1369 and 1373, and was also appointed in 1371 to commissions to enquire into the indebted state of St Augustine's abbey in Bristol.<sup>7</sup> In 1375 he had a brief but busy spell in county government, being associated with a commission of oyer and terminer in February and appointed to another in July and to a commission of arrest in October, and also to the commissions of the peace in July and December.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that, like his friend Heyberer, he would have risen to represent the county in parliament if he had not died soon after, especially as he had acquired for himself a landed interest in the county.

Like some (but by no means all) successful townsmen, Styward looked to convert his gains into a landed position. His efforts were to culminate in his acquisition of Elmington in 1368, but prior to this he had dabbled in the wardships market. In November 1362 he bought the custody of the Gloucestershire lands of John, son and heir of the late Henry de Pembridge, for 5 marks a year, and the marriage of the heir for 10 marks, but this he quickly sold on.<sup>9</sup> In the following year he acquired the wardship of the lands of the young Edmund Blount, son of Hugh and grandson and heir of Edmund Blount (d. 1361) which was a far more substantial and significant inheritance.<sup>10</sup>

In 1368 he was to make his only known permanent acquisition in the manor of Elmington. This was a valuable little property which was evidently worth at least 20 marks (£13 6s. 8d.) a year,<sup>11</sup> but Styward's acquisition was not straightforward. It was held at this time in jointure by Elizabeth, widow of Gilbert de Alne, and the heir was her grandson William, son of her son Drogo.<sup>12</sup> She granted her estate in the manor to Styward in 1368 in exchange for an annuity for her life of 20 marks and a robe annually.<sup>13</sup> In the first instance this would give him only the remainder of Elizabeth's life interest but he also obtained quitclaims of the reversion of the manor from William de Alne. There survive no fewer than three quitclaims by Alne, two undated ones and another

3. *Calendar of Patent Rolls* [*Cal. Pat.*] 1350–4, 513, W.R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the County of Gloucester, 1213–1898* (privately printed, 1898), 181–2. He appears as a witness to numerous Gloucester charters between 1359 and March 1376: W.H. Stevenson, *Calendar of the Records of the Corporation of Gloucester* (Gloucester, 1893), 970–1, 987–98.

4. There is a biography of Heyberer in J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* (Stroud, 1993), III, 370–2.

5. *Cal. Pat.* 1361–4, 459.

6. The author of the *History of Parliament* entry believes that William Keyberer and William Heyberer were the same man. The names are indeed curiously similar, but the licence issued to William Heyberer, Thomas Styward and William Keyberer appears to be conclusive evidence that they were different men.

7. *Calendar of Fine Rolls* [*Cal. Fine*] 1368–77, 13, 24, 227; *Cal. Pat.* 1370–4, 177; *Calendar of Close Rolls* [*Cal. Close*] 1369–74, 259.

8. *Cal. Pat.* 1374–7, 136, 138, 142, 159, 221.

9. *Cal. Fine* 1356–68, 237; *Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem* [*Cal. Inq. p.m.*] XIII, 138.

10. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XIV, 69.

11. BRO, AC/D/6/22, *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 303.

12. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/4/3–4.

13. BRO, AC/D/6/22.

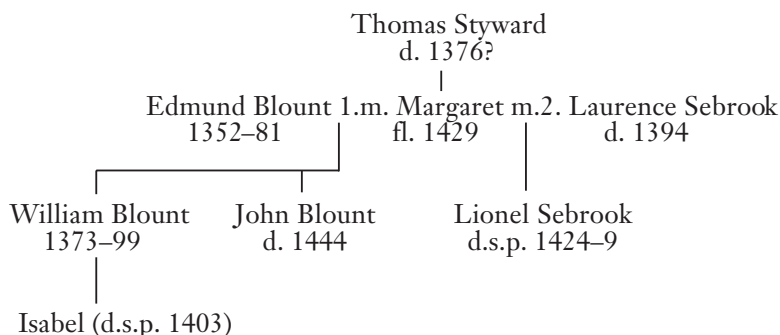


Fig. 1. Pedigree of Margaret Styward's family.

dated 19 March 1372 which may have been after Elizabeth's death.<sup>14</sup> Styward's title was disputed and he and his feoffees twice had to resort to lawsuits to recover possession, in April 1376 and May 1377. In the second it was said that, prior to Elizabeth's grant to Styward, William de Alne had granted the reversion of the manor after Elizabeth's death to Nicholas Mattock the elder and his heirs. Styward was making a lease of land in the manor in April 1374, but by April 1376 he had been dispossessed of the manor by William de Alne, Nicholas Mattock the elder, Nicholas Mattock the younger, and others.<sup>15</sup> His plea was heard at Gloucester on 16 April 1376 and the jury found that Styward had been dispossessed 'by force and arms'. Soon afterwards Styward granted the manor to four feoffees but on 30 May 1377 the feoffees were obliged to bring another plea of novel disseisin against the two Nicholas Mattocks and John Mattock.<sup>16</sup> The Mattocks explained their case and even claimed that Elizabeth had attorned to the elder Nicholas, i.e. she had acknowledged that she held the manor of him, but the jury confirmed the feoffees' claim that there had been no feoffment and no attornment to Mattock. The Mattocks did not gain possession of the manor but their claim was still a danger in 1393 and 1394 and even as late as 1439.<sup>17</sup>

The truth of the matter remains unclear. William de Alne may have fraudulently sold the reversion of the manor twice, once to the Mattocks and again to Styward. Alternatively, Styward may have been guilty of sharp practice in retaining the manor after Elizabeth de Alne's death. The survival of three quitclaims by William de Alne does not help to elucidate the mystery, although they strengthen the suspicion that some wrongdoing was done by someone.

However it was achieved, Styward had acquired a landed position, but he was not destined to found a significant county family as his only surviving child was a daughter, Margaret. Styward left a widow, Christine, who was still alive in 1381 when she was in receipt of an annuity of 20 marks

14. Ibid. AC/D/6/23-25.

15. Ibid. AC/D/26-8. It was then described as a messuage, a carucate of land, 60 acres of meadow, 6 acres of pasture and 60 acres of wood in Elmington.

16. Ibid. AC/D/31. This case was dated by the cataloguer to 1378, but it was heard during the Trinity term, which was always regarded as occurring at the beginning of Richard II's regnal years. It concerned a messuage, two carucates of land, 80 acres of meadow, 60 acres of wood and 20 acres of pasture in Elmington.

17. Quitclaims were had in 1393 from William Redynges and Morgan Leyson of the manor, which they had by grant of the younger Nicholas Mattock and his brother John, in October 1394 from John Mattock and in 1439 from John's son Robert Mattock: *ibid.* AC/D/36, 37a, 48.

from Elmington;<sup>18</sup> she may have been growing elderly, as Styward seems to have given up hope of a son by 1376. Although there is no evidence that Styward had also obtained the marriage of Edmund Blount when he acquired custody of his lands, the young Edmund, who was 11 in 1363, was married to Margaret. Their elder son William was born in the town of Gloucester in 1373 and was baptized in St Michael's church.<sup>19</sup> Edmund belatedly proved his age on 4 May 1376, some two and a half years after he had reached the age of 21.<sup>20</sup> It seems likely that Styward knew at this time that he had not long to live<sup>21</sup> because one of his last known acts was to grant his manor of Elmington to William Heyberer, John Risby and two clergymen, Nicholas Adams, vicar of Old Sodbury, and Thomas Fraunceys, vicar of Bitton, by a charter dated 14 June 1376 (if this charter is genuine).<sup>22</sup> Edmund's own manor of Bitton was granted to feoffees at around the same time. The date is not known, but it occurred after 4 May 1376 when, having proved his age, Edmund officially had possession of the manor, and within a short period, as one of the feoffees was Styward who died soon after.<sup>23</sup> The other feoffees were William Heyberer, another Gloucester burgess Cradoc Phellippes, a local landholder Ralph Waleys and Hugh Man, Richard Scotard, Richard Cook and a chaplain William Willecotes; most of these men, if not all, were Styward's friends.<sup>24</sup>

It seems likely that the two enfeoffments were linked and, in an arrangement which was far from uncommon, Styward arranged for his manor to be settled on Edmund and Margaret while, in return, Bitton was also to be settled on them both, thus giving Margaret a life interest in exchange for the inheritance of Elmington. Styward's precise intentions with regard to Elmington were, however, later in dispute.

### Margaret's Two Husbands

Margaret's marriage to Blount was clearly arranged by her father and she was probably quite young at the time. She was presumably at least 14 in 1373, when her eldest son was born and was still living 56 years later in 1429. In worldly terms, it was a good match for the Gloucester burgess's daughter as the Blounts were a well-established family of Gloucestershire gentry and had held the manors of Bitton and Mangotsfield and other lands since the mid 13th century.<sup>25</sup> The two Blount manors were worth around £40 a year c.1400.<sup>26</sup> The earlier Blounts had made few or no additions to their patrimony, but Edmund was to acquire not only Elmington by his

18. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV. 303.

19. *Ibid.* XVII, 578. William was born in either Jan. or Nov. 1373. In his father's inquisition *post mortem* of early 1381 he was said to be aged seven at the feast of All Saints (1 Nov.) last, but in his proof of age in 1394 he was said to have been born on 13 Jan. 1373: *ibid.* XV, 303; XVII, 578.

20. *Ibid.* XIV, 69. Edmund was born on 1 Oct. 1352.

21. He was still alive in Dec. 1376, when he leased a property in Gloucester, but is not heard of later: Stevenson, *Cal. Rec. Corp. Glouc.* no. 999.

22. There is no doubt that these four were enfeoffed of the manor by Styward as they brought the suit against the Mattocks in 1377. For further discussion of the genuineness or otherwise of this deed, see below.

23. It may further be speculated that, if Styward was aware of his approaching death, it was in order that Edmund was able to make this enfeoffment that he so belatedly proved his age in May.

24. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 303–5; *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/15–18; *Cal. Pat.* 1377–81, 625. Heyberer, Cradoc, Waleys and Cooke all appear in the Filton account of 1381 acting on behalf of Margaret: *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/5/1.

25. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* p. 835.

26. The dower third of Bitton was worth £8 a year 1401–4 and Mangotsfield an average of £15 5s. 0d. a year between 1386 and 1422: *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/55–8; E1/7/6–12.

marriage but also the manors of Filton and Harry Stoke, which lay between Mangotsfield and Elmington.

These manors had been held earlier by Elias de Filton, who occurs between 1306 and 1359.<sup>27</sup> A 1306 charter between Elias and his mother Joan, concerning a holding in Dorset but dated at Filton, was witnessed by his neighbour Sir John de Acton of Iron Acton, and in 1314 he witnessed a Slimbridge charter for Sir John's brother Odo de Acton.<sup>28</sup> He also witnessed two local King's Weston charters for Maurice, Lord Berkeley in 1317 and 1318 and two less localized ones for Thomas, Lord Berkeley in 1328 and 1329.<sup>29</sup> In 1341 he was to be replaced as coroner of Gloucestershire because of infirmity, but there are subsequent references to an Elias serving as knight of the shire for the county in 1346, as tax-collector in 1352 and 1354 and as a tenant of John Mautravers at Sherrington (Wilts.) in 1359.<sup>30</sup> In 1342 he presented another Elias de Filton to the church of Filton and in 1345 he and his wife Emma had licence for a private oratory.<sup>31</sup> Edmund Blount was closely related to this family and it seems likely that his otherwise unknown mother was a Filton. Edmund was born at Filton, a strong suggestion that this was his mother's natal home as prospective mothers often went to their father's home to give birth; John de Filton, who was brought the news of his birth in 1352, was his uncle and Edmund de Filton one of his godfathers.<sup>32</sup> By 1380, however, the male line of Filtons had evidently died out and moieties of the manors of Filton and Harry Stoke and the advowson of Filton had passed to Margery, wife of Sir Thomas Fitznichol of Hill and Nympsfield. By a fine of June 1380 the Fitznichols granted their moieties to Edmund to hold at a rent of 18 marks (£12) a year.<sup>33</sup> Edmund and his successors, however, evidently held the whole manors and, given that John de Filton was Edmund's uncle, it becomes likely that Edmund had himself inherited the other moieties. The Filton-with-Harry Stoke account of 1390–1 shows that in this year it was worth £28, of which £12 was paid to the Fitznichols, leaving a net £16 a year.<sup>34</sup>

Having (almost inadvertently) overseen this dramatic expansion of the family's estate through the addition of three manors by marriage, inheritance, and family arrangement worth together probably £30 a year, Edmund did not live long to enjoy it. He died aged only 28 on 7 February

27. There may have been two men of the same name, one succeeding the other. He occurs as lord of Filton in 1324 and of Harry Stoke in 1330: The National Archives [TNA], SC 8/263/13144; SA, DD\WHb/2542. He also occurs as lord of Newnham, in Stallbridge (Dorset). On 3 May 1306 his mother Joan granted to him the rent and service there of John le Vatte, which she held in dower, and on 11 June Elias granted the rents and services of five named tenants, including Vatte, to Roger de Staplebridge: SA, DD\WHb/364–6.

28. SA, DD\WHb/364; *Berkeley Castle Mun.* A1/43/49.

29. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* A1/49/1, 4; A2/53/8, 90/3.

30. *Cal. Close* 1341–3, 69; *Cal. Fine* 1347–56, 335, 415; N. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), 143; TNA, CP 25/1/288/47, no. 636. Filton and Harry Stoke were also held of John Mautravers and subsequently of his granddaughter and heir Eleanor: *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 304.

31. R.M. Haines (ed.), *Calendar of the Register of Wolstan de Bransford, Bishop of Worcester, 1339–49* (Worcs. Hist. Soc. n.s. 4, 1966), 123, 372.

32. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XIV, 69.

33. TNA, CP 25/1/78/78, no. 25. That the moieties were held by the Fitznichols in Margery's right is clear from the fact that the rent was to be paid to them and the heirs of Margery. The fine does not specify that it was moieties of the manors which she held, but this is clear from subsequent references: *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/5/1–2; TNA, C 143/402/20; *Cal. Close* 1419–22, 158–9; *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 303. The fine may not have specified moieties because the manors had not been formally partitioned before an arrangement was made settling them on Edmund and retaining the rent for Margery.

34. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/5/2.

1381 leaving two sons: William, then aged six or seven, and John. His own manor of Bitton was still in the hands of the feoffees.<sup>35</sup> The jurors returned that Bitton had been granted to the feoffees without royal licence, but that seven named tenants, owing rents of 33s. 7½d. and 2 lb of cumin, had not attorned to them; there was also another smaller holding of a messuage and half-virgate which Edmund had held in fee.<sup>36</sup> On 10 May 1381 the surviving Bitton feoffees received the royal pardon for acquiring the manor without licence and licence to hold it until the young William Blount reached full age.<sup>37</sup> Although the enfeoffment had probably been intended to create a jointure in the manor for Margaret, she had only a dower third.<sup>38</sup> The smaller holding and the rents were divided, Margaret having a dower third and wardship of the other two-thirds for an annual payment of 24s. and 1½ lb of cumin; she was also granted William's marriage for £20.<sup>39</sup> William proved his age in November 1394.<sup>40</sup> He gained possession of two-thirds of Bitton and married one Joan, but died on 28 April 1399.<sup>41</sup> According to his inquisition *post mortem*, his heir was his brother John, then said to be 22, and on 15 August 1399 Roger Marmion quitclaimed Bitton to John,<sup>42</sup> but William had a daughter Isabel, who may have been posthumous. She died, however, on 22 August 1403, and her uncle John was the heir.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the widowed Margaret was swiftly married again to Laurence Sebrook. Sebrook's antecedents are unknown, but he rose from this obscure background through military service.<sup>44</sup> He was closely associated with the celebrated Sir James Audley (d. 1369) as in 1363 he was keeper of Gloucester castle under Audley, the constable,<sup>45</sup> and is also likely to have served with Sir John Chandos (d. 1370), Audley's equally famous brother-in-arms and colleague both as a founder Garter Knight and retainer of the Black Prince. Sebrook himself may have been a member of the household of the Black Prince and the name of his son, Lionel, suggests that he had also been close to the Prince's brother Lionel of Clarence (d. 1368). After the early deaths of these patrons, he continued his military career and appears to have attached himself to another leading captain, Sir John de Arundel (d. 1379), from whom he acquired a life interest in the manor of Stonehouse. In 1377 Sebrook is described as being 'of Hampshire' but he was 'of Gloucestershire' by May 1381, when he was holding Stonehouse.<sup>46</sup> This manor had passed to Arundel in 1375 through

35. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 303; *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/15.

36. TNA, C 136/12, no. 4.

37. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/15; *Cal. Pat.* 1377–81, 625.

38. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/17.

39. *Ibid.* E1/1/13–14. The young heir's 'nearest friends', in the presence of whom dower was assigned to Margaret, were William Heyberer, Roger Marmion, Robert Kyngton and William Broun: *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 305.

40. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XVII, 578. He had quitclaims from Bitton feoffees on 12 Nov. 1395 (Cradoc Phelipes), June 1396 (Hugh Man) and Nov. 1396 (Richard Scotard): *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/16–18. The feoffees Heyberer and Waleys were dead by then.

41. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XVII, 1121. By May 1421 William's widow Joan was married to John ap Gwilliam of Monmouth and they quitclaimed her dower rights in Bitton to John: *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/20–22.

42. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/11.

43. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XVIII, 703–4.

44. In 1374 he was leading a large retinue of 39 men-at-arms and 40 archers on naval service. There is a biography of Sebrook in Roskell *et al.*, *Hist. Parl. Commons 1386–1421*, IV, 328–9, from which all biographical details are taken except where otherwise stated.

45. Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 197–8; TNA, E 101/463/27, and the biography of Audley by Michael Jones in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB].

46. *Cal. Close* 1374–7, 524; 1377–81, 515. Eight oxen from Filton were delivered to Sebrook at Stonehouse between 4 March and 29 Sept. 1381: *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/5/1.

his marriage to the Mautravers heiress; in different inquisitions, it was said to be worth £20 and £30 a year.<sup>47</sup> After Arundel's death he is found in the company of Sir John Beauchamp and in May 1381 entered into a recognizance jointly with Beauchamp.<sup>48</sup> The latter is not identified as either Beauchamp of Holt or Beauchamp of Powick, but both were close to the court. Beauchamp of Holt was notoriously close to Richard II before his execution by the Appellants in 1388 and Beauchamp of Powick was a knight of the king's chamber in 1376–7 and, significantly, constable of Gloucester castle from 1376 until his death in 1389.<sup>49</sup>

Sebrook and Margaret were close very soon after Blount's death; he was one of Margaret's mainpernors when she was granted the wardship of the Bitton holding on 29 May 1381 and stock was moved between Stonehouse and Filton during the month of May.<sup>50</sup> Although Margaret was said to be a widow on 29 May, it is likely that they were married either by then or very soon after. After his marriage Sebrook gained his knighthood and became prominent in the local politics of Gloucestershire, serving as knight of the shire in 1382, 1388, and 1390, as sheriff 1388–9, and on the commissions of the peace of 1389 and 1390. He also adopted some of the local contacts of his wife as he was an executor of William Heyberer (d. 1390–1) and jointly granted land in Maisemore to St Peter's abbey, Gloucester, with him in 1388–9.<sup>51</sup> He did not lose his court contacts, however, as in 1385 he was instructed along with a dozen others, including Sir Lewis Clifford and others of the Black Prince's former retainers, to attend particularly upon the king's dying mother. Margaret, having stepped into the county gentry by her first marriage, was now moving in even more exalted circles, but her second marriage lasted little longer than her first. Sebrook died in 1394 before 29 November.<sup>52</sup>

The circumstances behind Margaret's second marriage are naturally of some interest. It was not arranged by her father as he was dead and the king's interest in the remarriage of the widow of a tenant-in-chief was resolved when the escheator of Gloucestershire was ordered to assign dower to her in May 1381 after receiving her oath not to marry without the king's licence.<sup>53</sup> To all intents and purposes, Margaret was free to make her own choice and in this context the evidence of very close relations between her and Sebrook within three months of Blount's death, and the speed with which they were married, is suggestive. She may well have known Sebrook for some time, given his connection with the county from as early as 1363, and the speed of the remarriage may suggest that she had been fond of Sebrook before Edmund's death. Alternatively, it may have been the result of rough wooing from a landless but determined adventurer.<sup>54</sup> Her determination that

47. *VCH Glos.* X, 273; E. Stokes (ed.), *Gloucestershire Inquisitions Post Mortem VI, 1359–1413* (Brit. Rec. Soc. 47, 1914), pp. 111, 157–8, 232, 241–2. The manor is not mentioned in Arundel's inquisition *post mortem* of 1380, but was held by Sebrook in 1389 and had reverted to Eleanor by 1403.

48. *Cal. Close* 1377–81, 515 (15 May 1381).

49. For Beauchamp of Holt, see *The Complete Peerage*, II, 45–6, and for Beauchamp of Powick, see the article on his son William in Roskell *et al.*, *Hist. Parl. Commons 1386–1421*, and *Cal. Pat.* 1374–7, 368. The author of the Sebrook entry in *History of Parliament* assumed this to be Beauchamp of Holt.

50. Three bullocks and a heifer were brought from Stonehouse to Filton during May 1381 and other stock was moved between the manors between then and Michaelmas. This account also shows that between March and September Sebrook also received cash for his 'expenses' at Filton and Thornbury (Mangotsfield was held of the Staffords of Thornbury), while the Bitton account of the same period shows that cash from that manor was delivered to him: *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/54; E1/5/1. The other mainpernor was Richard Waleys.

51. *Cal. Pat.* 1388–92, 407; TNA, C 143/407/39.

52. According to the *History of Parliament* entry, Sebrook died between 1394 and 1402, but he was dead by 29 Nov. 1394 when Margaret was his widow: BRO, AC/D/6/38; SA, DD\WHb/2498.

53. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 305.

54. The question of the remarriage of widows is one which the author hopes to address in another paper.

her manor of Elmington should pass to her son by Sebrook may have been the result of her love for her second husband, but equally might have been the result of love for her youngest son who was heir to nothing.

### Margaret's Settlement of Elmington

Surviving charters appear to track the passage of the manor of Elmington in precise detail. In 1376 Styward granted the manor to William Heyberer, John Risby, Nicholas Adams and Thomas Fraunceys. In March 1378 Heyberer and Risby quitclaimed it to Adams and Fraunceys and in January 1380 Adams and Fraunceys granted it to Edmund and Margaret Blount.<sup>55</sup> In May 1381, after Edmund's death, Margaret granted it to another set of feoffees, namely Sir Lewis Clifford, Sir Nicholas de Sarnesfield, Sir Maurice Wyther, Ralph Waleys, Thomas Catewy and William Heyberer.<sup>56</sup> By late November 1394, and shortly after Sebrook's death, only Clifford survived and it was probably the very recent deaths of two of the other feoffees since 2 October which prompted Margaret to recover the manor from Clifford in late November 1394.<sup>57</sup> In February 1395, she granted the manor to yet another set of feoffees: James Clifford, Anselm Guise, Walter Thoky, Thomas Mursley, Robert Goderington and Thomas Thorpe, chaplain.<sup>58</sup> In 1402 the others quitclaimed to Mursley and Goderington and by a fine of 1411 these two settled the manor on Margaret for life with remainder to her son Lionel Sebrook and his issue and Margaret's right heirs.<sup>59</sup> Despite her retention of a life interest, Lionel was 'lord of Elmington' in 1417.<sup>60</sup>

Margaret had chosen to give her manor to her younger son by her second husband, disinheriting her elder sons by her first husband. The crucial transaction was the 1380 re-grant by the feoffees Fraunceys and Adams to Edmund and Margaret and the heirs of Margaret, as this established both that Margaret had possession at Edmund's death and that she was free to dispose of it as she wished. The 1380 grant was apparently confirmed by the jurors of Edmund's inquisition *post mortem*, who stated that Elmington was held in jointure by Edmund and Margaret to them and the heirs of Margaret. This version of events was contradicted by the statements made by the feoffees, Adams and Fraunceys, in November 1398. Both declared that it had been Styward's intention that the manor was settled on Edmund and Margaret and their issue. In these circumstances it is necessary to look closely at the feoffees' statements and their possible motives in making them, at the deeds which support the other side and at the returns to the inquisitions *post mortem*. From this, it seems at least possible, and probably likely, that the feoffees were telling the truth.

Nicholas Adams, by then vicar of St Nicholas's church, Bristol, made his declaration on 1 November 1398 at Bristol before the mayor, John Cannings, and the sheriff, Robert Baxter, five named burgesses, Robert Poyntz esquire and 'many others'. He stated that Styward had enfeoffed

55. BRO, AC/D/6/30, 32.

56. Ibid. AC/D/6/34.

57. Wyther died in 1383, Heyberer in 1390–1 and Catewy by 23 July 1393, as on that date and on 2 Oct. 1394 it was Clifford, Sarnesfield and Waleys alone who received quitclaims of the Mattock interest in Elmington: *ibid.* AC/D/6/36–37a. Sarnesfield was dead by Apr. 1395 and Waleys by Oct. 1395, but both had probably died by late Nov. 1394, as only Clifford surrendered the manor to Margaret at that time: *ibid.* AC/D/6/39. Clifford's grant does not survive, only his appointment of an attorney to deliver seisin of the manor to her on 29 Nov. and his quitclaim of a few days later: *ibid.* AC/D/6/38; SA, DD\WHb/2498.

58. BRO, AC/D/6/39. In 1401 these feoffees received a quitclaim of a 20s. rent in Elmington: C.R. Elrington (ed.), *Abstracts of Feet of Fines relating to Gloucestershire, 1360–1508* (Glos. Rec. Series 27, 2013), 352.

59. BRO, AC/D/6/41–2, Elrington, *Glos. Fines 1360–1508*, 412.

60. BRO, AC/D/6/43–4.

the manor to himself, Thomas Fraunceys, John Risby, and William Heyberer to perform his (Styward's) will.<sup>61</sup> Fraunceys, Risby and Heyberer then quitclaimed the manor to him (Adams) and afterwards he went to Styward and asked his will. Styward stated that, after his death, the manor was to be enfeoffed to Edmund and Margaret and their issue, with remainder to the right heirs of Styward. Adams stated 'expressly' that he had not enfeoffed anyone contrary to the said will and asked that his statement be enrolled and recorded in the 'Gillialde' of Bristol. On 14 December Thomas Fraunceys, then rector of Lamyatt (Som.), swore on the Holy Gospels before Richard, Lord Seymour of Castle Cary (Som.), Prior John Corsham of Bruton (Som.) and others, in the church at Bruton, that Styward had enfeoffed him (Fraunceys) with Adams and others in the manor of Elmington on the condition that the feoffees should re-enfeoff him (Styward) of the manor to hold for his life with remainder to Edmund Blount and his wife Margaret and their issue and Thomas's right heirs.<sup>62</sup> Fraunceys further stated that, since Styward had granted the manor to him, he had not made any charter granting the manor to any person, nor had delivered seisin to anyone, nor authenticated any writing touching the manor by impression of his seal, and if any such charter should be found or shown it was a fabrication and false.

The principal point of both statements is that it was Styward's intention that the manor should be settled on Edmund and Margaret and their issue. There is therefore little doubt that Margaret's wish to settle the manor on her son Lionel was known by 1398 and that the making of these declarations was instigated by William Blount in an attempt to prevent his mother doing so. In other respects, however, the two statements differ. Fraunceys states that the feoffees were to re-enfeoff Styward to hold the manor for his life with reversion to the Blounts, while Adams states that he was to grant the manor to the Blounts after Styward's death. Fraunceys's statement also has an internal contradiction that although they were to grant the manor to Styward he (Fraunceys) was still in possession. Both of these may perhaps be explained by Styward's death soon after the enfeoffment, as he may have intended the manor to be re-granted to himself, but died before this could be done. This would clarify Fraunceys's statement, while such an event may have led Adams to omit the detail of the re-grant to Styward. A more important difference between the statements is that, according to Fraunceys, he had not relinquished possession of the manor while, according to Adams, Fraunceys and the other two feoffees had quitclaimed to him. Fraunceys implies that the manor had not been re-enfeoffed, while the statement by Adams that he had not made any enfeoffment contrary to Styward's will leaves open the question of whether it had been re-enfeoffed.

It is difficult to know what to make of this, but the differences and contradictions render the statements suspicious. They cannot both have been telling the whole truth and Adams's statement that the three other feoffees had quitclaimed to him leaving only him in possession is contradicted by the surviving charters and by the evidence given at Edmund's inquisition post mortem that the manor was left in the hands of two feoffees. *Prima facie*, it seems unlikely that men entrusted with the important role of feoffees would be confused about whether they still held it or not. Nevertheless, the statements are strong evidence in favour of William Blount's position. It was presumably a powerful motive which induced the two clergymen to make their public oaths and to involve such eminent local characters as Richard, Lord Seymour, the prior of Bruton and the mayor and sheriff of Bristol, on behalf of Blount. It is possible that they had been bribed by Blount, but if this was the case he would surely have made certain that they told the same story. It

61. SA, DD\WHb/2499. The record was made five days later on 6 Nov. This is wrongly dated in the catalogue to the 20th year of Richard II, instead of the 22nd.

62. BRO, AC/D/6/40. Lamyatt is near both Castle Cary and Bruton. The advowson of Lamyatt belonged to Godstow nunnery.

is also highly significant that Fraunceys, who was more strident in support of Blount, swore to his statement on the gospels, while Adams, who was less committed, requested that his statement be enrolled in the Bristol records. It is questionable whether either would have risked their present reputation or their soul's future for the sake of such a bribe as the young Blount may have been able to offer. It is certain that their testimony cannot be taken entirely at face value, but it is not improbable that, being fully aware of Styward's intention, they wished to do what they could to prevent an injustice. Moreover, it is not unlikely that Fraunceys's tale was true and that the manor had not been re-enfeoffed, given that Edmund's own manor of Bitton remained in the hands of the feoffees at his death which, as he was only 28, may have been unexpected. This is not in any way certain proof that Elmington had not been re-granted successfully, but it is suggestive.

The second area which requires investigation is the surviving deeds. There are two surviving enfeoffments of Elmington by Styward to his four feoffees.<sup>63</sup> One is dated 14 June 1376 and the other is undated. One of these is undoubtedly genuine, as is proved by the lawsuit brought by the four feoffees in May 1377, and superficially it would seem likely that it was the dated one, as undated charters are rare by this date and especially so for one of this importance.<sup>64</sup> It was the undated one, however, that was evidently put forward as evidence for Margaret's side, as it was associated with the quitclaim by Heyberer and Risby to Adams and Fraunceys in 1378 and, more importantly, the grant in January 1380 by Adams and Fraunceys to Edmund and Margaret Blount. Copies of these two charters, along with the undated feoffment by Styward and the appointment by Adams and Fraunceys of Roger Marmion as their attorney to deliver seisin to Edmund and Margaret, were made on one sheet.<sup>65</sup> This was evidently drawn up in connection with Margaret's case, as the four together were 'proof' that, after Blount's death, Margaret was both in possession of the manor and able to dispose of it as she wished.

If the statements by Adams and Fraunceys (and particularly the latter) were true, then the three surviving charters of these four documents are forgeries. Inspection of the three charters gives no overt indication of forgery, but the witness lists are suggestive.<sup>66</sup> The three suspect charters, i.e. the undated enfeoffment by Styward, the 1378 quitclaim by two feoffees to Adams and Fraunceys and the 1380 enfeoffment by Adams and Fraunceys to the Blounts, are linked by their witness lists, which have much in common but are quite different to the witnesses of Styward's dated enfeoffment. There is nothing suspicious about the witnesses of the dated charter, as these were Edmund Blount himself, Thomas Fitznichol, Ralph Waleys, John Joye, Walter Brouning, John Wykwyk, Richard Cooke, John Weston the younger and John Kent. Fitznichol was probably a kinsman of Edmund, Waleys and Cooke were feoffees of Bitton and Joye, Wykwyk, Weston and Kent had all witnessed earlier Elmington charters at least once.<sup>67</sup>

63. Ibid. AC/D/6/28–9. The dated one granted all his lands in Elmington and elsewhere within the hundred of Henbury, and the other all his manor of Elmington.

64. The undated quitclaims by William de Alne confirm this impression given the dubious circumstances of Styward's acquisition of the manor.

65. BRO, AC/D/6/30, 32–3. The three surviving documents are endorsed with the numbers i, ii and iii.

66. The seals attached to the dated and undated feoffments by Styward are badly damaged. Both contain shields of arms, but the arms appear to be different. That on the dated charter contains a chevron, while that on the undated charter almost certainly does not, but as the name on both is obliterated this is inconclusive.

67. It seems likely that Ralph Waleys was related to Fitznichol's wife Margery, the Filton coheir, as in Oct. 1395, after Ralph's death, his feoffees settled lands on his widow for her life, with remainder to his brother Reginald and his issue, and then to Margery, wife of Thomas Fitznichol, and her issue, and then Ralph's right heirs: BRO, AC/D/3/5a–b. John Joye served as coroner and was fined in 1387 for trespasses and extortions: Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 200.

The witnesses to the undated enfeoffment were Waleys again but also Sir John Tracy, Sir Edmund de Breadstone, Sir John de Thorpe and Hugh Clivedon. Breadstone and Thorpe also appear on the 1378 and 1380 charters, Clivedon also on the 1378 charter and Waleys also on the 1380 charter. The names of John Weston the younger and John Croke appear on the 1378 and 1380 charters. Only Waleys and Weston appear on both these and the dated enfeoffment, and only Croke and Weston had witnessed earlier charters. Tracy, Thorpe and Clivedon appear on no other and Breadstone only again on Margaret's grant to her feoffees in 1381. Fitznichol was also to witness this 1381 charter along with John Weston, John Stanshawe and John Sergeant. The similarity of the witnesses to the three associated charters, their different complexion to those on the dated enfeoffment and the fact that so many appear only on this group, while many of those on the dated grant had appeared earlier, combine to throw suspicion on these three charters and thus the grant to Edmund and Margaret and her heirs and assigns. If these were forgeries it is perhaps relevant that Tracy, Thorpe, Breadstone and Waleys, the most eminent of the witnesses, were all dead by 1395.

Margaret's choice of associates also throws some doubt on her integrity. Her two leading feoffees in 1395 were James Clifford and Anselm Guise, who were notorious criminals and partners in crime. Clifford was a thug whose career, which was distinguished by violence, wrongful indictments, corruption of the courts and the employment of enfeoffments to protect his illicit acquisitions of land, was 'without parallel in the annals of crime in 14th-century Gloucestershire'.<sup>68</sup> John Poleyn, who was Lewis Clifford's attorney to deliver seisin of the manor to her in 1394 and witnessed her grant to the 1395 feoffees and several others between 1393 and 1429, was another of the same type, notorious for organized violence in the county in the late 1380s.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, there is Edmund's inquisition *post mortem*, and there is no doubt that this was a highly controversial affair. It is particularly unfortunate that the first part of the surviving return is very badly damaged, but there appear to have been at least two, and probably three, inquisitions. Edmund had died on 7 February 1381 and the manors of Filton and Bitton were in Margaret's hands from 4 March.<sup>70</sup> This implies that an inquisition had been held in the interim, but there is no trace of it. A writ *mandamus* was issued on 1 April to Sir John Beauchamp, John Joce and the justice John Cassey, and there are surviving returns to an inquisition before the escheator Hugh de Bisley on 18 April, which is largely illegible, and another before Beauchamp and Cassey on 25 April, which is fully legible. Beauchamp is again not identified as being either of Holt or of Powick, but Sebrook was in close contact with one of them in May 1381.<sup>71</sup> If the Beauchamp before whom the 25 April inquisition was held was a friend of Sebrook's, this may be significant as it was this return which was eventually allowed to stand. This was only after further intervention by the escheator, as both Elmington and Filton were evidently taken back into the king's hands, orders being given to the escheator to deliver them to Margaret on 22 November 1383.<sup>72</sup> It is clear that that there was some considerable doubt about the veracity of the return.

Jurors of inquisitions *post mortem* were composed of local men who, it was supposed, would be able to give an accurate return because of their local knowledge. This task had become more

68. Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 89, 90, 173, 176–7, 178n., 184–6, 289. For James Clifford, see Roskell *et al.*, *Hist. Parl. Commons 1386–1421*, II, 588–90.

69. BRO, AC/D/6/36–9, 43–5; Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 166, 176–7, 180, 202, 249, 291.

70. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/54, 5/1.

71. As John Beauchamp of Powick was constable of Gloucester castle at this time, it was probably he who was appointed to this enquiry.

72. *Cal. Close* 1381–5, 345.

complicated with the rise of the grant/re-grant settlement and the use by means of feoffees, as jurors did not necessarily know of, or know accurate details of, such arrangements; although this weakness might be addressed by interested parties showing them documents of title, such as fines and deeds. At his death Edmund held the manors of Bitton, Mangotsfield, Elmington and Filton with Harry Stoke, and the first curious point about the inquisition is that Mangotsfield is not mentioned at all. The surviving accounts show that between 1386 and 1422 it was in the hands of the widow Margaret, but her title remains obscure. With respect to Bitton, the jurors confirmed that the manor remained in the hands of the feoffees. As has been seen, the enfeoffment had probably been intended to create a jointure in the manor for Margaret, but, as Edmund had died before the manor had been re-enfeoffed, she retained only a dower third.

The jurors made serious errors with respect to Filton with Harry Stoke and its advowson. In the first instance, only the moiety obtained from the Fitznichols is mentioned, although Edmund had probably inherited the other moiety. The fine of 1380 by which Edmund acquired the Fitznichol moiety was made to him and his heirs at a rent of 18 marks a year. According to the jurors, the moiety had been granted to Edmund and Margaret, the rent was 16 marks not 18 marks and the rent was to be paid only during the lives of Edmund and Margaret.<sup>73</sup> It is clear that they were not quoting from the fine, which is reinforced by their accuracy in stating that it was a moiety which had been granted, as the fine did not specify this. The details of the rent were comparatively minor, but the error over Margaret's interest was much more significant, as by it she retained a life interest in the whole manor rather than simply a dower third.

It is with this background (of the complete omission of Mangotsfield, an accurate return regarding Bitton and an inaccurate return regarding Filton) that the jury's statement that Elmington had been granted to Edmund and Margaret and the heirs of Margaret must be viewed. The statement is severely compromised by the fact that there is a discrepancy in accounts. According to the 18 April inquisition the feoffees were Fraunceys and Adams, but that of 25 April gave the feoffees as Heyberer and Adams.<sup>74</sup> In this instance, the jurors of the 25 April inquisition were certainly well-placed to know the full details because they were not only local but included John Weston, John Kent, Walter Brouning and John Wykwyk, whose names appear as witnesses to Styward's dated enfeoffment. John Weston's name also appears as a witness on the 1378 and 1380 charters, so, if these charters are genuine, he at least should have known that Heyberer was not one of the remaining feoffees. The inquisition's return in general, and regarding Elmington in particular, is not trustworthy. It cannot be held as strong evidence that the statements made by the two clergymen in 1398 were untrue and on balance, given also the suspect nature of the witnesses to the group of charters which appear to confirm that jury's statement, it would seem likely that Elmington had not been re-enfeoffed to Edmund and Margaret and her heirs and probably not re-enfeoffed at all before Edmund's death.

According to what appears to have been the intentions of Margaret's husband and father, after Edmund's death she should have had the whole of the manors of Elmington and Bitton in jointure and dower thirds of Mangotsfield and Filton. As Bitton (and probably Elmington) had not been re-enfeoffed before Edmund's death, she would have had only dower thirds of the four manors, but after the inquisitions Margaret held Elmington, Mangotsfield, Filton and a third of Bitton. The three different scenarios would have given her an income of approximately £48, £23 and £53 respectively from the whole estate, worth around £70 a year. Margaret had done very well out of the inquisition, but the inaccuracy of the returns implies that the jurors were either intimidated, bribed, or honestly misled to give a wrongful return. Evidence of the bribery and intimidation of

73. *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XV, 303–4.

74. *Ibid.* The order of Nov. 1383 names the feoffees as Fraunceys and Adams: *Cal. Close* 1381–5, 345.

inquisition juries is not far to seek. After the death of Margaret's granddaughter Isabel in 1403, she paid out 5s. 2d. to various of her servants and the 12 jurors of the inquisition *post mortem* at Thornbury.<sup>75</sup> The inquisition *post mortem* of Thomas, Lord Berkeley in 1417 was accompanied by bribes distributed to the juries of the Devon and Cornwall inquisitions and to the escheators of Gloucestershire and Somerset, the under-sheriff of Gloucestershire and their clerks.<sup>76</sup> The routine nature of such bribery of jurors and officials is found also in the sums paid out by the bailiff of Bedminster hundred in the years 1357–9 to the jurors, escheators and sheriffs involved in a number of inquisitions in which Thomas, Lord Berkeley was involved.<sup>77</sup> One of the 25 April jurors was John Poleyn, Margaret's friend of such dubious reputation, and his presence suggests the possibility of intimidation. The presence of John Weston, who had the best of reasons to know the truth if the charters of 1378 and 1380 were genuine, suggests a deliberate fraud. Nevertheless, in the absence of any firm evidence to the contrary, the third option, that the jurors were honestly misled, is just as likely.

Margaret may have been entirely innocent of any wrongful intention with regard to the inquisition, but, however dubious its findings, the return had been sworn to by the jurors and, as a consequence, the escheator was obliged to hand over possession of the manors to Margaret. It was upon this basis that she was able to act in the future and she was quick to see the opportunity it gave her and to seize it by granting Elmington to her own feoffees on 1 May, a week after the third inquisition on 25 April. Her six feoffees were an interesting group, as Clifford, Sarnesfield and Wyther were soldiers of fortune like Sebrook, while the other three were civilians but also 'new men'. Sir Lewis Clifford (d. 1404) and Sir Nicholas de Sarnesfield (d. 1394) had risen from obscurity to wealth and prominence in the service of the Black Prince;<sup>78</sup> Sir Maurice Wyther (d. 1383) had done the same in the service of the earl of Pembroke.<sup>79</sup> One of the civilians was William Heyberer, the Gloucester burgess who was a good friend of Margaret's father and who is known to have later become close to Sebrook. Another was Ralph Waleys, another Bitton feoffee, who had made his considerable fortune in the service of the lords of Berkeley.<sup>80</sup> Thomas Catewy was another Gloucester man, although he hailed from Berkshire and acquired land there; in 1382–4 he was steward of the Lisle lands based on Kingston Lisle (Berks.), which had just passed to Thomas, Lord Berkeley, and in 1378 he was Beauchamp's deputy constable of Gloucester castle when he was accused of intimidating members of an inquest jury.<sup>81</sup> The six feoffees were not

75. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* E1/1/57.

76. *Ibid.* GC4112; A. Sinclair, 'The Great Berkeley Law-Suit Revisited 1417–39', *Southern Hist.* 9 (1987), 37, 39.

77. BRO, AC/M/1/43. I am grateful for the assistance of Dave Grove in supplying images of this document.

78. See the biography of Clifford by Peter Fleming in *ODNB*. For Sarnesfield's service to the Black Prince and subsequently Richard II, whom he served as standard-bearer, see *Cal. Pat.* 1377–81, 136, 163; 1381–5, 277, 316, 339; 1385–9, 17–8, 279, 348; 1388–92, 121–2; 1391–6, 4, 11, 51, 245. He was dead by 5 Apr. 1395: *ibid.* 1392–6, 563, 601.

79. *VCH Hants.* II, 128; N.H. Nicolas (ed.), *Testamenta Vetusta* (London, 1826), I, 91; *Cal. Close* 1377–81, 106, 221, 356; 1381–5, 107; *Cal. Fine* 1377–83, 229; *Cal. Pat.* 1377–81, 599; 1381–5, 81.

80. The author hopes to publish a note about Ralph Waleys.

81. *Cat. Anc. Deeds* (online resource at British History Online), C984, C1614, C984, C994, C1614, C2934, C1970, C4970; TNA, C 146/335; C 148/4; *VCH Berks.* IV, 512–7; *Cal. Close* 1369–74, 391–2; 1374–7, 216–7; 1381–5, 453, 539; *Cal. Pat.* 1370–4, 178; 1374–7, 155; 1377–81, 65, 90; 1377–81, 92; 1381–5, 251, 346, 587, 599; *Berkeley Castle Mun.* GAR331–2; Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 200–1. John Beauchamp of Powick was constable at this time and Catewy was presumably his deputy: *Cal. Pat.* 1374–7, 368; *Cal. Close* 1388–92, 7.

members of well-established county families and not Blount connections, but they were heavily connected with Margaret and Sebrook. Sebrook probably knew Clifford and Sarnesfield (who have no known connection with Gloucestershire) through the Black Prince and he was certainly a friend of Wyther's as he was one of Wyther's executors two years after the enfeoffment.<sup>82</sup> He probably also knew Catewy through Beauchamp, if it was this Beauchamp with whom Sebrook was connected in May 1381, and Margaret probably also knew him through the Gloucester connection. Heyberer was a close friend of Margaret and her father and Waleys was acting on her behalf at Filton in 1381. Her choice of feoffees is therefore more evidence of her intimacy with Sebrook as early as 1 May 1381. Whether her enfeoffment was intended merely to reinforce the jury's finding of her possession of the manor, or whether she intended as early as this to allow the possibility of diverting it from her Blount sons, is unclear.

The truth of the matter will never be known for certain, but it seems likely that there was some wrongdoing somewhere. It is probable that Elmington had not been re-enfeoffed to Edmund and Margaret before his death, but, if this was the case, it is not clear whether the erroneous return to his inquisition *post mortem* was a deliberate fraud perpetrated by bribery or intimidation or an honest mistake. Whichever it was, Margaret was quick to capitalize on it by granting the manor to a group of feoffees who were largely the friends of herself and of the man who was shortly to become her husband. If the statement made by Fraunceys in 1398 was true and the manor had not been re-enfeoffed before Edmund's death, then it was probably after Sebrook's death that she contemplated the forgery of a 'parchment trail' to substantiate the inquisition's finding. It is significant that it was at this time that she recovered possession of the manor and then granted it to yet another, and far more dubious, set of feoffees.

Margaret's son John Blount did eventually gain possession of Elmington, but only, it would seem, because his half-brother Lionel died without issue, sometime after September 1424. Lionel had joined the service of Thomas (IV), Lord Berkeley; he was steward of the household at Christmas 1416 and witnessed a charter for him in June 1417, shortly before Thomas's death.<sup>83</sup> He took the part of Thomas's daughter Elizabeth, Countess of Warwick in the Great Dispute between Elizabeth and her cousin James Berkeley, and in June 1418 made a declaration in her favour. He continued in Warwick's service after Elizabeth's death, as in September 1424 he was feodary of the honor of Gloucester, which had come to Beauchamp with his second wife.<sup>84</sup> He presumably died soon after this as his elderly mother Margaret at last granted Elmington to her son John Blount in 1429, when she was probably at least 70.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

The curious survival of the two declarations of 1398 in separate archives is but one aspect of the interesting circumstances in which those declarations came to be made. The history of the manor of Elmington reveals very clearly how easily the advent of settlements on conditional terms by grant and re-grant could allow fraud to flourish. One aspect of this was that the task of jurors was much more difficult as, while under the old rules the heir or heirs to land was reasonably straightforward, they were not necessarily fully conversant with the details of such settlements. Even if the jurors of Edmund Blount's inquisition *post mortem* were honest and their account of

82. F.W. Weaver (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills* (Somerset Rec. Soc. 16, 19, 21, 1901–5.), 288–9. Sebrook and Clifford were to be associated in the service of the king's mother in 1385.

83. *Berkeley Castle Mun.* A1/1/44, 50/109.

84. SA, T\PH\pls/1/16.

85. BRO, AC/D/6/45–6.

Elmington was indeed true, they made serious errors in respect of Filton. In either case, this inquisition is a clear example of the weakness of inquisitions *post mortem* as evidence. Finally, the case shows how women might seize their opportunities to do as they wished. Margaret Styward probably chose her own second husband and subsequently, after his death, chose to settle her own manor on her son by him. It seems likely, although it cannot be proved, that in doing so she was perverting her father's intentions and carried out a successful fraud.

