

WOKING - A PALACE FIT FOR A KING

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The King was Henry VII and the person who is often credited with turning the manor house at Woking into a Palace is his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort.



For a long time it was thought that the old 'barn' at Woking Palace was once the Great Hall or even the King's Privy Hall, but now some think that it may have been a Real Tennis Court, built for Henry VIII.

Margaret Beaufort was born in about 1443, the daughter of John Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset (and Lord of the Manor of Woking). Unfortunately he died very soon after and so she was made a ward of William de la Pole, the Earl (later Duke) of Suffolk (although she continued to live with her mother at Bletso in Bedfordshire).

She was obviously well educated - not just to be a good house-keeper and skilled at needlework - but she was also taught French and Latin and was considered by many to be 'one of the best letter writers of her time'.

When de la Pole died in 1450, Henry VI then appointed his half brothers Edmund and Jasper Tudor as joint guardians of Lady Margaret, but it wasn't long before it was clear that Edmund intended to be much more than just a guardian! Edmund was nineteen or twenty, Margaret no more than fourteen when they were married in 1455, but unfortunately they were not married for long as in the summer of 1456 Edmund was taken prisoner by the Yorkist Herbert family who imprisoned him in Carmarthen Castle where he apparently caught the plague and died in the November of that year.

Young Margaret, aged fifteen, was already pregnant and gave birth to their son, Henry Tudor on the 28th January 1457 at her brother-in-law, Jasper's, castle at Pembroke (although some say it was really at Lamphey Palace just up the road).

The 'War of the Roses' were well under way by this stage. Margaret's cousin, Edmund Beaufort had been killed at the First Battle of St. Albans

in 1455 and with Richard Duke of York effectively in control (with Henry VI suffering another bout of madness) it was not a time for Margaret to be on her own. In 1459 she married Henry, Lord Stafford, the younger son of the first Duke of Buckingham (a third cousin of hers).

Over the next few years things went from bad to worse for the Lancastrians with the victory of Edward IV at the Battle of Towton in March 1461 and the capture of Henry VI and imprisonment in the Tower of London in 1465. Lady Margaret tried to keep her head down at Woking and even managed to keep in favour with the new Yorkist King.

In December 1468 she and her husband entertained the Edward IV, at Brookwood. Stafford apparently rode to Guildford to meet

him and after hunting with the king in Woking Park, escorted him to Brookwood where 'a pewter dinner service and glass galoners were brought at London and servants carefully transported the five dozen dishes and four dozen saucers to Brookwood'. Edward IV, Lady Margaret and her husband 'dined under a magnificent canopy of purple' while music was provided by the royal minstrels.

Whether she was at Woking in October 1470 when Warwick liberated Henry VI and restored him to the throne, we do not know, but she cunningly kept out of the way the following year when the Lancastrians were defeated at the Battle of Tewkesbury, Henry VI was murdered and Edward of York was back on the throne. Indeed things got worse for poor Margaret as her second husband died in October that year,



The stone building has been re-roofed since this picture was taken (see bottom right on previous page), and the brick walls have been capped to prevent them from decaying any more.



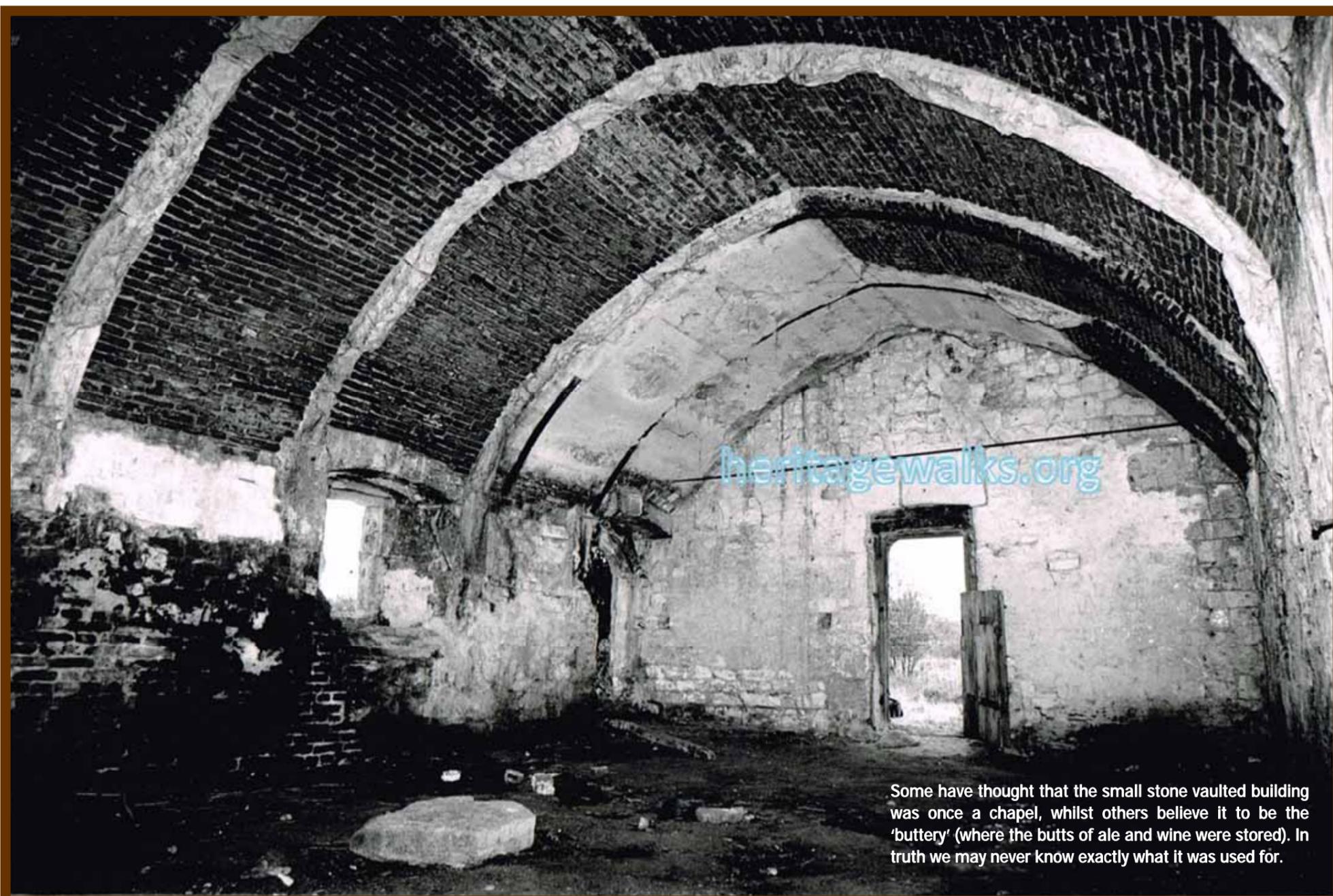
two days after making his will, witnessed by Richard Brigge, the Prior of Newark and Walter Baker the vicar of St. Peter's. In it he left ten shillings 'for tithes forgot' to Woking church and another twenty shillings for its repair.

By this time it was clear that her son was in imminent danger and so his uncle, Jasper Tudor, took the young Henry to exile in France.

Lady Margaret had lost both her husband and son within the space of a few months!

But she didn't hang about - she couldn't afford to - and in June 1472 Lady Margaret married, Thomas, Lord Stanley. This was probably the greatest move of all that she could have made at the time. Lord Stanley was a prominent Yorkist, giving Margaret (and therefore her son)

some security in uncertain times. Of course it could be said that, with hindsight, it was also to the advantage of Lord Stanley, but at the time that was not so clear. He nearly lost it all when Richard III took the crown, but for some reason Richard decided to trust Thomas and in doing so probably sealed his own fate. The rest, as they say, is history!



Some have thought that the small stone vaulted building was once a chapel, whilst others believe it to be the 'buttery' (where the butts of ale and wine were stored). In truth we may never know exactly what it was used for.

IN TRIBUTE TO LORD STANLEY

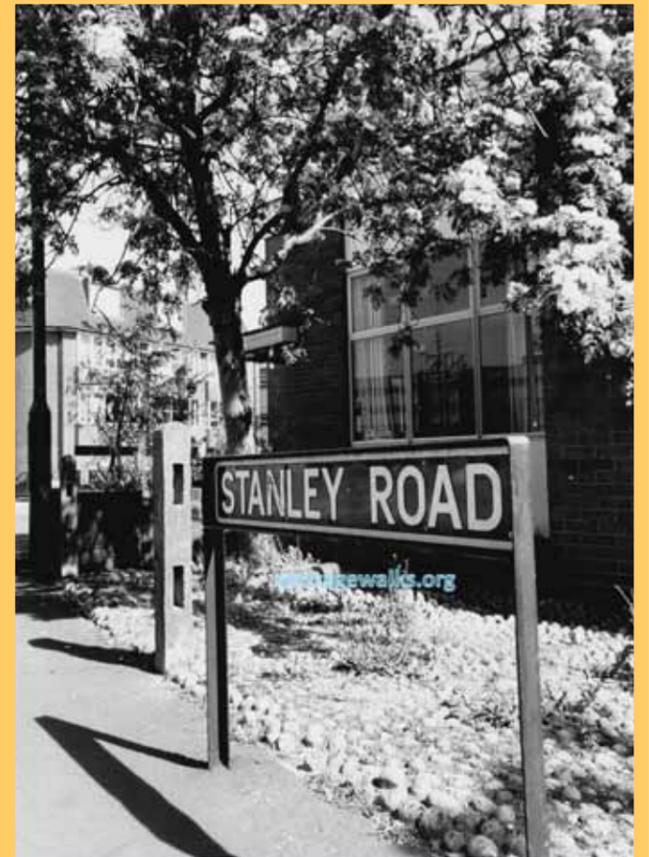
A couple of weeks ago I mentioned a number of places in Woking that commemorate Lady Margaret Beaufort (including the school at Goldsworth Park and the roads on the Maybury Estate).

Whether Stafford Lake at Knaphill has any connection to Henry Stafford (Lady Margaret

Beaufort's second husband) is not known, and it is likewise uncertain whether Stanley Road in Woking commemorates her third husband, but if it doesn't then surely it is about time that somewhere in the borough did.

It could be said that Richard III was making a huge mistake by putting so much faith in his

opponent's step-father, but Thomas Stanley had (until then) always been a great supporter of the Yorkist cause. Without his decisive switch of allegiance at the Battle of Bosworth Field, however, Woking Palace would probably never have been built – and the history of Woking would have been dramatically different.



MARKING WOLSEY'S PLACE IN HISTORY

Other people associated with Woking Palace have been honoured in Woking, with perhaps the best known (outside the Royal family) being Cardinal Wolsey – commemorated in the shopping centre that bears his name in the town centre.

Apparently it was whilst staying with Henry VIII at Woking that Wolsey received the letter from the Pope informing him that he had been made a Cardinal – hence the nickname for the local football team of 'The Cardinals' (often shortened, somewhat confusingly, to 'the cards'), and why the team's strip included 'Cardinal Red'.

But in the past other less well-known palace people have been remembered, such as Gilbert Gilpyn, whose brass memorial (now lost) once hung in St Peter's Church.

Gilpyn apparently originally came from Westmoreland but moved to Woking where he was a steward in Lady Margaret Beaufort's household. He died in December 1500 and was buried at Woking with the brass plate (recorded in the 18th century) featuring 'the figure of a man in a gown with wide sleeves' with a hound at his feet and 'a bugle horn about his neck'.

Gilpyn is now almost forgotten, but as for the Cardinal his fame (or infamy) continues on.

