

Was Worthing built upon the Wages of Sin?

Amazingly detailed records survive from 700 years ago to tell us of incredible goings on in our humble parish of Broadwater that clearly put 'Desperate Housewives' (this is apparently a TV programme, so my daughters have told me) into the shade. The records have survived amongst the Parliament Rolls (Edward I, 30, I-146 & I-147) and give an account of adulterous relationships that surfaced at the very highest court in the land, the King's Bench.

At this time John de Camoys was Lord of the Manor of Broadwater and of the Manor of Worthing. Ownership had been the same for both manors since the Domesday Book identified them in 1086. It is not clear whether the manors were actually administered separately at this time or were administered solely as the manor of Broadwater. John de Camoys inherited considerable estates from his father Ralph de Camoys and he married (the date is not clear but before 1275) Margaret the daughter and heir of Sir John de Gaidesden. Sir John de Gaidesden had held considerable estates in Sussex and when Sir John and later his wife Hawise died Margaret inherited amongst other estates the Manors of Broadwater and Worthing. It was Margaret then that through the marriage brought the manors of Broadwater and Worthing to John de Camoys.

At the time Margaret who was obviously very strong-willed may have been obliged to marry John de Camoys as it was almost certainly something arranged by her family. What follows however suggests that she still retained a desire to be master of her own destiny. We can establish that she was born around 1245 (Complete Peerage) and that John de Camoys was older than 30 in 1276, so (depending on how you interpret older than 30) they may have been similar ages but I suspect John was older. We must surely assume that John and Margaret led some form of married life together but ultimately things clearly fell apart. Margaret walked out on her husband John de Camoys and set up home adulterously with a knight, Sir William Paynel. However there is a record that more than suggests she did this with the full consent of her husband! We know this to be true as John de Camoys had issued a deed now fully recorded within the Parliament Rolls as follows:-

To all Christ's faithful to whom the present deed will come, John de Camoys, the son and heir of lord Ralph de Camoys, greetings in the Lord. Know that I have given and demised of my own free will to lord William Paynel, knight, Margaret de Camoys, the daughter and heir of lord John of Gaddesden, my wife, and I have also given and granted to the same lord William, released and quitclaimed, all goods and chattels which the same Margaret has, or henceforth may have, and also whatever is mine of the aforesaid Margaret, her goods or her chattels with their appurtenances, so that neither I, nor anyone else in my name, can or may henceforth demand or claim anything in the aforesaid Margaret, or the goods or chattels of the same Margaret with their appurtenances. I will and grant, and by the present deed confirm, that the aforesaid Margaret is to live and remain with the aforesaid lord William at the will of the same William. In testimony of which thing I have put my seal to this present deed. With these witnesses, Thomas of Repeston, John of Ferring, William of Iccomb, Henry le Brunz, Stephen Chamberlain, Walter le Blund, Gilbert of Batecombe, Robert de Bosco, and others.

To take stock I believe from the above, John de Camoys is clearly reconciled to a situation whereby his wife is living adulterously with William Paynel. This was of course a time at which divorce was totally out of the question. John de Camoys may

have consented to the situation but the church, maintainers of morality could not stand by idly whilst blatant adultery was afoot else perhaps more deeds in the style of John's might appear. Both William Paynel and Margaret were separately called to appear before the church courts charged with adultery. However these were days when innocence could be bought in church courts. William and Margaret tried to clear themselves by compurgation. Now this I must admit sounds as though it should be one of those weight loss remedies like colonic irrigation, but in reality it has none of the discomforts. Compurgation, a process often referred to as the 'wager of law' involved getting at least 5 or 6 honest persons to swear your innocence. One can see the flaws in this process and it surprising that it was not abolished until 1641. However clearly the more pious or influential were your honest persons the more obvious it must be that you are innocent. William appeared before the Archbishop of Canterbury no-less and obviously provided the right calibre of honest persons as the following was issued: -

To all who see the present letters, brother J. by divine permission archbishop of Canterbury, primate of all England, greetings in Christ. Know all of you that lord William Paynel, knight, has legally purged himself before us of the crime of adultery of which he was accused, which was allegedly committed with lady Margaret, the wife of lord John de Camoys, knight, through trustworthy men, knights and others: and therefore we, pronouncing him free from this crime, restore him to his former good name, by decree, and we have had these our letters patent strengthened with the protection of our seal, made for him in testimony of the aforesaid. Given at Slindon on 3 March in the year of the Lord 1287.

Compurgation for Margaret came much later (not until 1295) before the bishop of Chichester: -

To all Christ's faithful who will see or hear the present letters, gilbert by divine mercy bishop of Chichester eternal greetings in the Lord. We make it known to all of you by the present letters that, whereas lady Margaret de Camoys had been accused of the crime of adultery, committed, as was said, with lord William Paynel, knight, and for reason had been called called before our official at our command on a certain day at a certain place, the aforesaid lady Margaret appearing in person before the aforesaid official in the cathedral church of Chichester, on the Saturday before the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin in the year of our Lord 1295 in the presence of lord William, the dean of the church of Chichester, master Robert, the treasurer of the said church, and other canons of the same place, and very many other clerks and lay persons, expressly denying the aforesaid crime of adultery of which she was accused, solemnly and canonically purged herself of it; namely through ladies Margaret Martel, Isabel de Montfort, the prioress of Easebourne, Hawise de Houtot, A. Corbet, and through many other married women and young maidens of the neighbourhood. We, having heard and learned of the aforesaid canonical purgation, approving it and considering the aforesaid lady Margaret de Camoys to be free from the aforesaid crime, as was just, restore her to her good name. In testimony of which thing we have had these letters patent, strengthened by our seal, made for the said lady. Given at Aldingbourne on the aforesaid day of the aforesaid year.

The important thing to note in this canonical purgation for Margaret is that one of her honest persons was the very influential Isabel de Montfort, the prioress of Easebourne. Important because lands once owned by Margaret and William, effectively representing the area of the Manor of Worthing came to be owned by Easebourne Priory. The wages of sin! Recorded dates indicate that the lands of Worthing Manor had passed to the priory before Margaret's compurgation, doubtless

as a gift of devotion. However when Isabel the prioress was called upon to speak on behalf of Margaret at the compurgation she would obviously have only good things to say about such a generous benefactor to the priory.

In 1298 Sir John de Camoys died and before 1300 Margaret had married William Paynel. If the story had stopped there we surely would never have come to hear of it but at this stage Margaret went one step too far. She had the bare-faced gall to claim dower (inheritance as wife) of estates belonging to her former husband John de Camoys. This claim found its way to the highest court in the land, the court of Edward I and that is how the story came to be recorded on the parliament rolls.

Edward I, whilst not hammering the Scots was keen to establish an appropriate moral standard and personally involved himself in the court as it travelled around the country. William and Margaret presented their claim at court together with the deed of John de Camoys above and the bishops' canonical purgations. In his judgement Edward clearly asserted himself over the church by dismissing the canonical purgations "because they have no great relevance to this judgement, nor are judgements to be given in the king's court on the basis of the testimony of bishops, even though the bishops' letters have been produced in the king's court, unless the bishops are writing back to the same king at royal command." That certainly seems to put the bishops in their place. The court proceedings then make clear that one of the king's statutes (Statute of Westminster, 13 Edw. I, c. 34) was as follows: -

If a wife freely leaves her husband and goes to live with her adulterer, she is to lose in perpetuity her action for claiming her dower which might belong to her from her husband's tenements, if she is convicted of this, unless her husband is reconciled to her, freely and without ecclesiastical coercion, and allows her to live with him.

I find it interesting that such a statute existed as one is inclined to think this sort of thing was happening all too often. William and Margaret's only defence to this was that they had not lived adulterously but rather in the manner specified by the deed of John de Camoys. However the court took the following view which is a little long-winded as this was a court of law but probably worth reproducing in full: -

And because the same William and Margaret could not deny that the same Margaret, during the lifetime of the aforesaid John, her first husband, went and lived with the same William, completely abandoning her husband, namely the aforesaid John, and of her own accord, as is quite clear, since the same Margaret during the lifetime of the same John never objected to this, personally or through anyone else, in any detail or in any way, nor does she object to it now, but rather making clear her spontaneous will, and continuing affection which she had conceived for the same William during the lifetime of the aforesaid John, she allowed herself to be married to the same William after the death of the same John, and the same William and Margaret do not say or show anything through which the court can be shown that the aforesaid John, her first husband, was reconciled to her in any way during his lifetime, and it appears clearly from the aforesaid deed produced by the same William and Margaret that the same Margaret during the lifetime of the said John was allowed through his grant and delivery to remain with the said William in perpetuity, and it is not necessary in the king's court to hold an enquiry by the country on things which the party cannot deny and which appear clear to the court, or on things which are stated and granted by the party pleading, and it is more probable and more to be presumed, and more to be believed in the king's court and any other, that inasmuch as a man's wife, during her husband's lifetime, goes to live with some other man of her own accord, not objecting to or contradicting this in any way, she is living in adultery rather than in any other

proper or lawful manner, and especially where such a clarification of the spontaneous will of the same wife follows afterwards as a marriage taking place between them after the husband's death, and nor does it pertain to the king's court to hold an enquiry by the country into adultery, it seems to the court that it is not necessary to proceed to hold any enquiry by the country, in the form which the said William and Margaret offer, in the face of such great and manifest evidence, presumptions, proof and the admission of the aforesaid William and Margaret but rather that the aforesaid Margaret under the terms of the aforesaid statute ought not to be admitted or heard in her claim for her aforesaid dower, for the aforesaid reasons. And it is therefore adjudged that the aforesaid William and Margaret are to receive nothing from their aforesaid petition, but are to be amerced[fined] for the false claim etc.

Now trying to reflect upon this 700 years later (which I accept can never really be done without fully understanding the prevailing mind-set of the day) it is almost impossible to understand the position taken by the ecclesiastical courts. After all is said and done it is they who supposedly were custodians of the nation's morality and yet this episode seems to bring their own morality seriously into question. As mentioned earlier innocence could be bought (from the church at least). Margaret died before January 1311 and William married a second time. William is recorded as being blind in 1316 and about that time he gave the local Manor of Cokeham (mainly in Sompting/Lancing) to Hardham Priory. The Manor of Worthing continued happily in the hands of Easebourne Priory until the dissolution.

It is clear that the story of John de Camoys, Margaret and William Paynel was still seen to be topical even in Elizabethan times. In 1588 when William Camden(1551-1623) our first great antiquarian came to publish his topographical and historical survey of the islands of Great Britain and Ireland, *Britannia*, after ten years in the writing, he included much of their story under the entry for Broadwater. In fact it is the only story included for Broadwater.

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