

SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

For its February meeting the Society welcomed Howard Rudd to speak on 'Lady Margaret Beaufort – Mother of the Tudor Dynasty'

The story began a generation before Margaret, with the marriage of the dowager queen Catherine de Valois, widow of Henry the fifth, and Owain ap Maredudd who was to take the surname Tudor. Their sons, Jasper and Edmund, were thus half brothers to Henry the sixth. Both sons were given earldoms, Jasper became earl of Pembroke and Edmund earl of Richmond. Edmund married the young Margaret Beaufort, great granddaughter of John of Gaunt, and their only child was Henry Tudor, the later king. Sadly Edmund died before Henry's birth and Margaret was left a widow aged just thirteen.

Her son's advancement of nothing short of the crown was to become Margaret's life work and leaving the child Henry with his uncle at Pembroke she returned to court and soon married the eligible Sir Henry Stafford. Margaret's ambition for her son develops against the backdrop of the Wars of the Roses, a conflict that provided both dangers and opportunities. A natural sympathiser with the Lancastrian cause it often proved difficult for Margaret when the Yorkists were in the ascendency, and particularly after the battle of Towton in 1461 when Edward the fourth gained the throne. Stripped of his lands Jasper is forced to flee to France, the young Henry is in effect in protective custody at Raglan Castle and Margaret herself lost much of her own extensive estates. By 1471 the Yorkists were in full control: Henry the sixth is dead, Jasper once again has fled to France along with Henry Tudor after narrowly escaping through Tenby just ahead of an armed band sent to arrest them. They were to remain in France until 1485, and Margaret now needed to find favour with the Yorkist court.

Stafford died of wounds received at the battle of Barnet and the widowed Margaret next marries the wealthy and powerful Sir Thomas Stanley, a man close to though not trusted by the king, yet too strong to move against. Margaret also befriends the queen, Elizabeth Woodville, a connection which would years later lead to the dynastic marriage of Henry Tudor and Elizabeth's daughter, also Elizabeth. The country was stable for over a decade under Edward but he dies suddenly in 1483 and his brother, Richard, assumes briefly the role of protector to his young nephews, though within weeks he has them declared illegitimate and a biddable parliament names him king. Richard's usurpation alienated many Yorkists who began to support Henry who in turn appears to have developed an alternative court in waiting. Margaret feels the time for action has arrived; money and instructions flow to Henry. He lands at Dale in August 1485 where he is met by Rhys ap Thomas and thence begins the long journey to Bosworth Field.

There Richard's much larger force soon has its effect and Henry's army begins to give way, but there is a third army waiting on the sidelines – that of the Stanley brothers. They are expected to join the winning side but oddly, as Richard looks the likely victor, the Stanley forces attack his flank and turn the battle in Henry's favour. Some historians have suggested that as the Stanley soldiery was raised largely in north-east Wales they may have forced the issue themselves and joined battle in support of their fellow countrymen. Margaret had realised her lifelong ambition: her only child held the crown and she was the mother of a king.

Our speaker was warmly thanked for a lively and entertaining lecture by the Society's chair, Mrs Mary Cavell. The next lecture, on 15 March at 7.30 in the Regency Hall, will be about 'The History of the Sealed Knot Society.'

The Society is planning a visit to Aberglasni Gardens and House on May 17 and members wishing to come along are asked to give their names on the night.