

Harrogate Heritage

Looking back on history of Duchy of Lancaster and links with Harrogate

Malcolm Neesam
news@harrogateadvertiser.co.uk
@HgateAdvertiser

Readers who have been following the BBC series of Shakespeare history plays, The Hollow Crown, will probably not need reminding that the downfall of King Richard II was brought about with the return of the exiled Bolingbroke, heir to the Dukedom of Lancaster.

Personally, I have found the BBC's productions to have been both convincing and enjoyable, and they gave me the idea of writing this article on the Duchy of Lancaster, which for centuries has had a very close relationship with Harrogate.

Although the history of the Duchy's "core" lands can be traced back well before 1267, it was in that year that King Henry II granted the County, Honour and Castle of Lancaster to his son, Edmund Plantagenet, along with the impressive title of 1st Earl of Lancaster. The Duchy arms may be seen in Harrogate on the ceiling of the Royal Hall.

Unfortunately, Edmund's son, Thomas, the Second Earl of Lancaster, quarrelled with King Edward II, and was beheaded in 1322 at Pontefract Castle, the Earldom of Lancaster reverting to the King. However, when Edward II died in 1327, the beheaded Earl's brother, Henry, petitioned the new King Edward III, and was successfully re-instated as Earl of Lancaster, receiving back the Lancaster estates. When Henry, Earl of Lancaster, died in 1345, he was succeeded by his son, Henry Grosmont, who was elevated to the status of 1st Duke of Lancaster in 1351.

For almost twenty years from 1995, the eminent local historian Malcolm Neesam contributed a series of remarkable articles to the Advertiser, initially under the headline 'Bygone Harrogate' and later using the title 'Our Heritage'. In association with Harrogate Civic Society, we are proud to republish a selection from the series. The views expressed were those of the late Mr Neesam at the time of writing and do not necessarily reflect the current view of the Advertiser or Harrogate Civic Society.

The Grosmont line seemed secure for the future, but fate had other ideas, and when the 1st Duke of Lancaster died without male heirs, his estates, including the Duchy of Lancaster, reverted to the King, who held on to them until 1362, when he decided to create his second son, John of Ghent [usually known as John of Gaunt], 2nd Duke of Lancaster.

This entitled John of Gaunt to the lands and estates of the Duchy of Lancaster, which then included the Honour of Richmond, which John had possessed before his marriage, and which he administered with the Lancaster inheritance.

At this point, international politics intervened

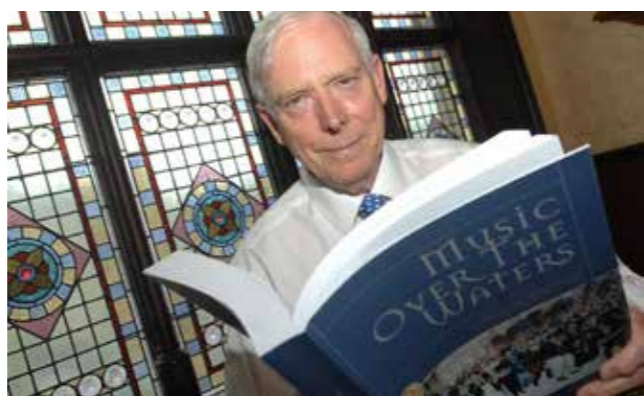
Politics intervened in a way that was to have a profound effect on what is now the Harrogate District

In a way that was to have a profound effect on what is now the Harrogate District. In 1372, the allegiance of John de Montfort, Duke of Brittany, was wavering, which might have weakened England's power, so King Edward III considered it politic to bribe him to remain loyal by granting him the Honour and Earldom of Richmond, which John of Gaunt surrendered like a loyal son.

John's compliance with his father's desire did not go unrewarded, and in compensation for the loss of Richmond, John was granted the castles and honours of Tickhill and Knaresborough, Pevensey and High Peak, along with many other manors.

The honour of Knaresborough took its name from the great castle, and included the Liberty of Knaresborough to the north of the river Nidd; and, the Forest, to the south of the Nidd, which included Bilton-with-Harrogate, Pannal, Plumpton, and all the other townships, villages and hamlets of the Royal Forest.

After several eventful years, John of Gaunt lived to see his son, Henry of Bolingbroke, banished by King Richard II for a term of ten years, which for the 68-year-old Duke of Lan-



The late Malcolm Neesam.

caster must have seemed an eternity, and he died at Leicester on February 3, 1399 without having seen his banished son.

All might have been well for the state, had not King Richard, in a last act of wayward despotism, converted Henry Bolingbroke's banishment from ten years to life, and confiscated his Lancastrian inheritance.

These acts proved the King's undoing, as the outraged Bolingbroke returned from his continental banishment with a powerful band of supporters, landing on the Yorkshire coast in late June 1399 at Ravenspur, where he was met by Robert Waterton and two hundred foresters, probably from the Royal Forest of Knaresborough.

Pickering and then

Knaresborough castles fell to Henry Bolingbroke, who finally overcame King Richard at Westminster on September 30, 1399, when King Richard resigned the crown of England to Henry.

On October 13, the new King was crowned Henry IV, who decreed that forever after, the possessions of the Duchy of Lancaster should be merged with the monarchy. That is why to this day, the Duchy of Lancaster has an important role as an owner of lands and estates in Yorkshire.

Yet if the role of the Duchy is clear, there is much confusion about the title of Duke of Lancaster, which well-meaning people sometimes use when toast-ing the health of the present Queen.

Although one writer on

the peerage has observed that the "Ducall title of Lancaster was drowned in the title of the Regal dignity", it was a case of merger, rather than extinction.

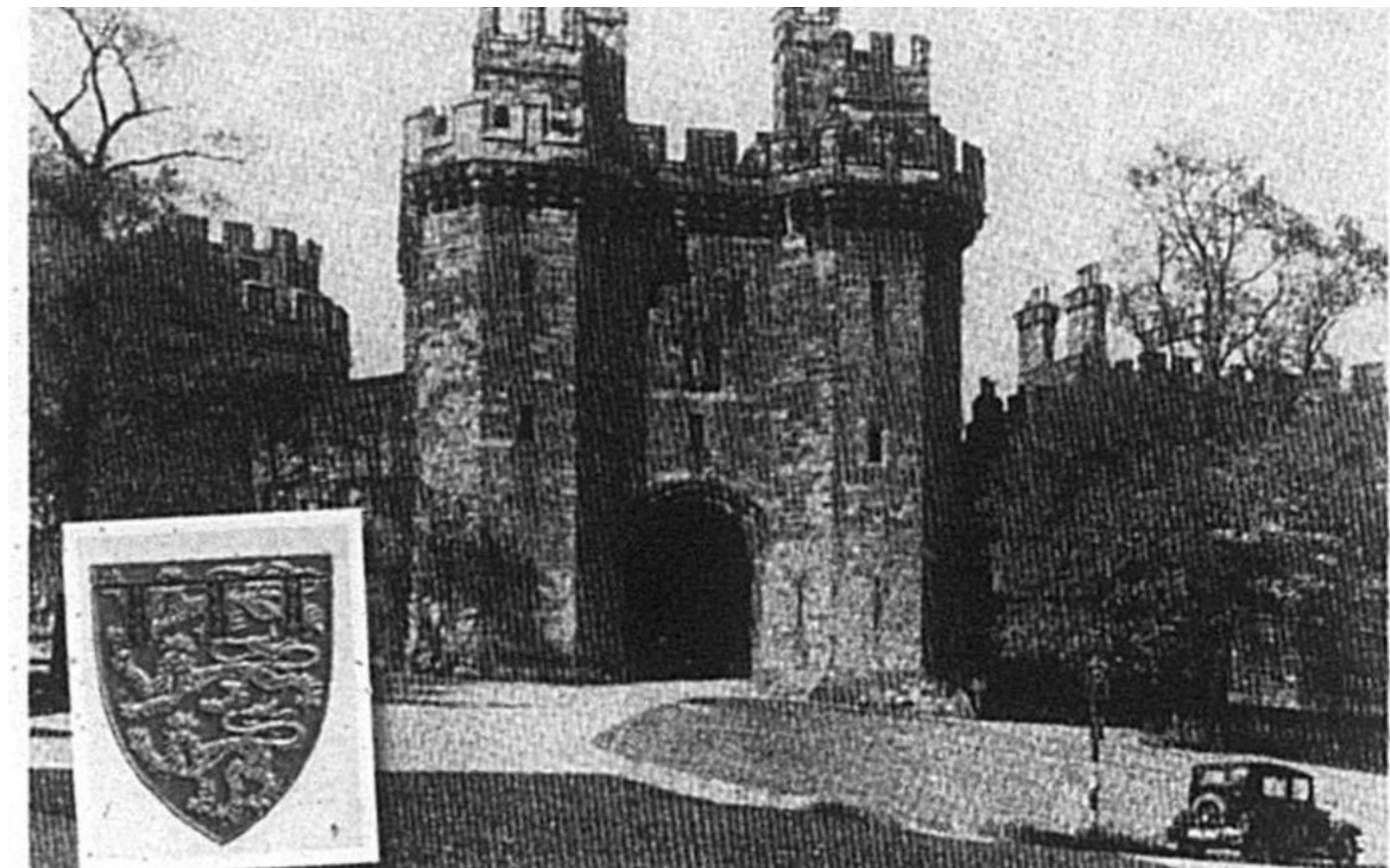
King Henry IV granted the title of Duke of Lancaster to his son, the later Henry V, but kept the Duchy to himself. Similarly, Queen Elizabeth 1st retained the Duchy, but is reported to have offered the title to James VI of Scotland. Queen Elizabeth 2nd holds the Duchy of Lancaster inheritance, but does not use the title Duke of Lancaster.

The ownership of the Duchy came to have great significance to the inhabitants of the Forest of Knaresborough in 1770, when Parliament passed an Act for its enclosure.

This meant that the forest would be divided into sale lots, and had it not been for a clause granting two-hundred acres of land in Harrogate being forever open and unenclosed, the public mineral springs that became the life's blood of the local economy might have been bought by a wealthy landowner, and closed to the public.

Such a disaster was however averted by the Duchy sending a team of surveyors to map the forest, and set aside land for common use. So much is well known, but what is sometimes forgotten is that the Acts of Parliament ensured that the Duchy's rights to the sub-soil minerals remained preserved.

It has been through such joint ownership that, for example, the integrity of the Harrogate Stray has remained inviolate, in that the surface was granted to the public, whereas the sub soil minerals remained with the Duchy of Lancas-



Lancaster Castle and, inset, the arms of the Duchy of Lancaster. Below is a copy of the original article.

ter.

Readers of this newspaper may recall that the recent issue for June 28 included a letter from the Duchy's chief executive officer, Paul Clarke, advising the public that the Duchy was currently registering its historic manorial mineral ownership, following a change in the law governing the registration of land.

The Land Registration Act Of 2003 set a deadline of October 2013 for the owners of centuries old mineral rights to register them officially.

Harrogate has much for which to thank the Duchy of Lancaster, not least of which was the careful way the Duchy enabled its land holdings to be developed.

This article was first published on July 19, 2012.

A note from Harrogate Civic Society: It is now more than two years since Malcolm's death. He left behind an astonishing body of work that we at the Harro-

To this day, the Duchy of Lancaster has an important role as an owner of lands and estates in Yorkshire.

gate Civic Society are determined should be preserved and enhanced for the benefit of future historians and, indeed, for the benefit of anyone who cares about Harrogate.

Not long before his passing, we discussed with Malcolm and the Advertiser republishing at least some of his articles.

Many of Malcolm's articles dealt with the history of the town, exploring the people, places and events that helped to form the

Harrogate we know today. At other times Malcolm concentrated more on contemporary issues.

While acknowledging that Harrogate could not stand still, he was convinced that change should always be tested.

In September, the first re-publication of Mr Neesam's articles appeared and this today is the sixth.

We are grateful to Malcolm's family for their approval, to Simon Kent (closely involved with securing Malcolm's legacy) for his work researching and preparing the articles for reprint, for the advice of historian Paul Jennings and to Graham Chalmers and his team at the Advertiser for their support and encouragement.

We hope you will enjoy reading (or in some cases re-reading) these irreplaceable snapshots of history.

If you are able to add to our knowledge, or wish to know more about our work, contact us at: history@harrogatecivicsociety.org

Our Heritage
A look at yesteryear of a spa town

The Duchy and Harrogate

With **Malcolm Neesam**
ackrill.news@prb.co.uk

Douglas Yeadon
NOW STOCKING Eastyo Yogurt Makers!
Special Offer £5 OFF

Accident Claims
We can help you claim all of your compensation

- Medical & Dental Negligence
- Work Accidents
- Road Accidents
- No Win No Fee