



More than a decade later, the high-born 6-year-old Lady Margaret Beaufort became a ward of the Duke of Suffolk and his wife Duchess Alice Chaucer of Ewelme, who seized the opportunity to arrange her betrothal to their equally young son and heir, John de la Pole. (Lady Margaret was not the first choice of a marriage alliance; another aristocratic ward, Anne Beauchamp, Countess of Warwick briefly held the position until January 1449, when she died at Ewelme at 3 years of age and was buried in Reading Abbey). Lady Margaret's father, John, Duke of Somerset, a friend, and political ally of Suffolk was dead, thus Suffolk was appointed Margaret's guardian until the marriage could be legally consummated when she attained the age of 12. (Lady Margaret had an impressive pedigree, being a great-granddaughter of King Edward III's third son, John of Gaunt, the powerful Duke of Lancaster, and Lady Katherine Swynford, his mistress and eventually third wife. Their offspring were later legitimised by King Richard II and known as the Beauforts). After Suffolk's dramatic downfall in 1450, King Henry VI annulled the betrothal in March 1453, and in 1455 married Margaret, at the age of 12, to his half brother, Edmund Tudor. Margaret gave birth to their son Henry Tudor in January 1457 whilst still only 13 and already a widow, Edmund having died of plague in November 1456.

After the brutal assassination of Duke William de la Pole in May 1450, Duchess Alice, although arraigned by Parliament on the same charges of corruption and bribery, incredibly avoided prosecution, keeping her lands and titles under the protection of the saintly but mentally fragile King Henry VI. However, in 1460 she forsook the doomed Lancastrian King and judiciously married her 15-year-old son John, the second Duke of Suffolk, into the rising House of York. His bride was Elizabeth Plantagenet the daughter of Richard Duke of York, (the late Duke William's bitter enemy), thus Elizabeth was the sister of the future Kings Edward IV and Richard III. John and Elizabeth had 10 children, and the family managed to survive the perils of the times, living in Ewelme, and undertaking high positions at Court. So high, that at the death of King Richard III's only son in April 1484, Richard appointed his trusted nephew, John Earl of Lincoln, the Suffolk's' eldest son, his heir! (Allegedly, Lincoln's sister, Anne de la Pole, was also destined for a crown! In September 1484 Archibald Whitelaw, a member of the King of Scotland's Council, was at King Richard III's Court negotiating her marriage to Prince James, the future King James IV of Scotland).



Inside Ewelme Church showing the tomb of Alice de la Pole (née Chaucer). The photograph in the middle is viewed looking through to St John's chapel. Left: Alice's effigy in life (on top of tomb) and right: her sculpted cadaver (lying beneath the tomb).

Meanwhile, Margaret Beaufort, together with her son Henry Tudor who was safely exiled on the Continent, were conspiring with other Lancastrians to overthrow King Richard III. The story of the Battle of Bosworth in August 1485 is well known, and Lady Margaret was doubly instrumental in Richard's defeat, when her third husband, Lord Stanley, treasonably switched his allegiance to Henry at a crucial moment in the battle.

John, the second Duke of Suffolk had lived a relatively quiet life in Ewelme, and accepted the new regime, carrying the sceptre at Henry's coronation, whilst his Duchess waited at the Court of the new Queen, her niece Elizabeth of York. However, their son John, Earl of Lincoln, was plotting to overthrow the Tudor king, and raised an invading army in support of the first pretender Lambert Simnel. In 1487 the rebellion failed, and Lincoln was defeated and killed at the Battle of Stoke.

Henry VII used Lincoln's conspiracy to pass a Bill of Attainder to confiscate his lands, but to show he held no animosity to his ageing parents, the Duke and Duchess, he visited them at Ewelme. (Historical lecturer Dr David Starkey conjectures that during a month-long visit in the summer of 1490 by Henry and Elizabeth of York, the future Henry VIII was conceived at Ewelme Manor, as he was born nine months later). Duke John judiciously steered a safe course for himself and his Royal wife through turbulent times, and he died in his bed in 1492. Elizabeth died in 1503.

The financially astute Henry VII sold back to Edmund de la Pole the second son, his dead brother's property for the vast sum of £5,000. Henry VII had visited Edmund at Ewelme at Michaelmas 1495 when Ewelme 'Manor' became known as 'Ewelme Palace'. Edmund was not permitted the title of Duke, but as the Earl of Suffolk and a cousin of the Queen was a frequent guest at Court. However, in 1501 he and the third brother Richard revolted, fled to the Continent, and were declared traitors. In 1503 Parliament passed a Bill of Attainder against '*Edmund the rebel*' and Henry VII confiscated the Suffolk estates. (In 1504 King Henry ordered the Bishop of Hereford to visit Ewelme and inspect the accounts of the almshouses). In 1506 Edmund was captured and extradited to England on condition he was not executed. Henry VII imprisoned him in the Tower but his son, King Henry VIII, ordered Edmund's beheading without trial in 1513. (In 1501 the youngest brother, William, had been confined in the Tower where he remained until his natural death in 1539).

King Henry VIII took an interest in Ewelme. He enlarged the old Chaucer hunting park to cover 895 acres - stretching to Park Corner at the top of the Chilterns. He built a hunting Lodge where Ewelme Park now stands commanding wide views over the natural amphitheatre of the valley below. There is an area to the east of Ewelme still known as Huntinglands and a field called Kings Standing. In 1525, Henry VIII gave Ewelme and the title Duke of Suffolk to Charles Brandon, who was married to his sister Princess Mary. Before their marriage, Anne Boleyn was in the King's retinue on the Summer Progress which stopped in Ewelme on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1531 *en route* to Woodstock, and again on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1532 when returning to Windsor. In 1535 Henry claimed Ewelme back from the widowed Brandon and, on the Summer Progress of that year, the King and Queen Anne Boleyn visited the property on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> July, *en route* between Reading and Abingdon Abbeys. This repossession was to prove beneficial for Ewelme when King Henry VIII was making the break from Rome in 1536. He had become the patron of Ewelme Rectory and

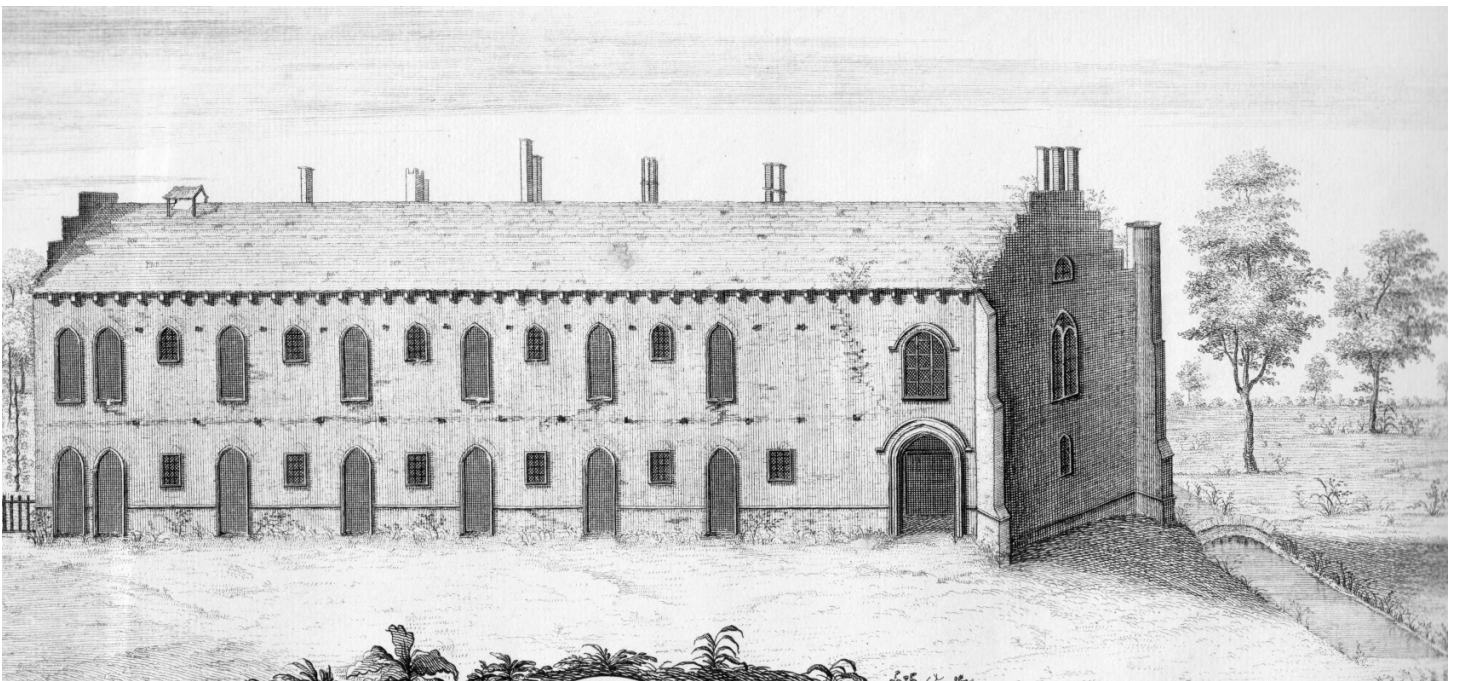
thus he did not dissolve the Chantry. The almsmen continued to pray for his soul to be swiftly liberated from Purgatory on his death; so, the Suffolk's' foundation was left untouched to prosper.

There is a poignant connection to Anne Boleyn in the church. Adjacent to the font there is a brass plate memorial to the memory of 5 years old Edward Norreys who died in 1529. On 28th January 1520 his father, Sir Henry Norreys had been appointed Bailiff, Woodward and Keeper of the Hunting Park at Ewelme, at a fee of 2 pence per day. Norreys held high offices at Court, including Groom of the Kings Stool, and in this office, he was the most intimate of the court officials to King Henry. He was also a friend and supporter of Queen Anne Boleyn, and when the King was moving to rid himself of his tempestuous wife, his chief minister Thomas Cromwell, implicated Sir Henry (with others) in a charge of adultery with the Queen. (There is a fanciful story that allegedly Henry was reluctant to see his favoured courtier beheaded and promised Sir Henry his freedom if he would confess, but he declared he would die a thousand times rather than ruin an innocent person. Infuriated, King Henry purportedly exclaimed – *'Hang him up then! Hang him up then!'*) Norreys went to the block on Tower Hill on May 17th, 1536. (Ironically, the Norreys family had also been instrumental in the downfall of the de la Pole dynasty some 50 years earlier. Sir Henry's grandfather, Sir William Norreys, commanded Henry VII's army at the Battle of Stoke in 1487 when John Earl of Lincoln was killed). It is recorded that Henry VIII held a Privy Council in Ewelme on 25th and 26th August 1540 whilst on honeymoon with another ill-fated wife, Queen Katherine Howard (beheaded in 1542).

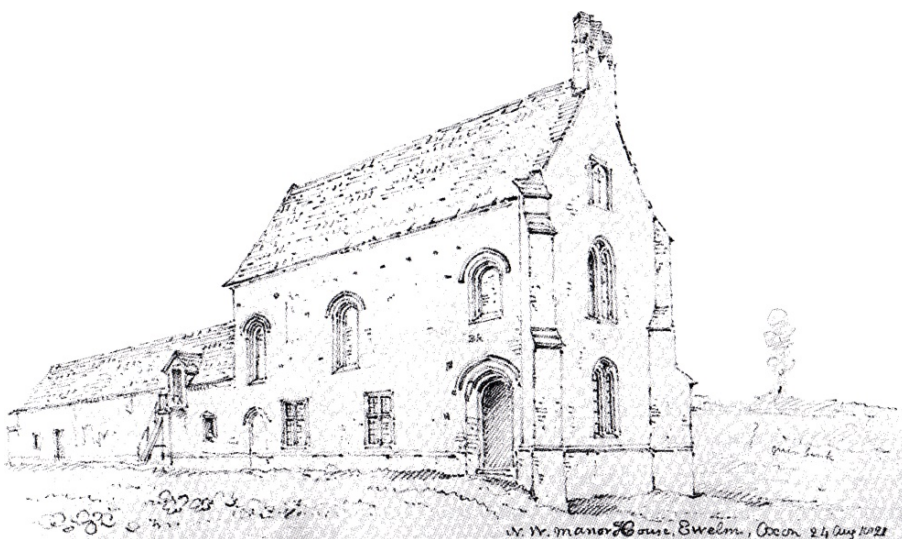
In 1542 the Palace is described grandly:- *"The base court of it is fair and is builded with brick and timber. The inner part of the house is set within a fair moat and is builded richly of brick and stone. The hall of it is fair and hath great bars of iron over thwart it instead of gross beads."* In 1550 (or 1551) Edward VI conveyed the palace and park at Ewelme by Letters Patent for Life to his teenage sister Princess Elizabeth. After becoming Queen, Elizabeth visited Ewelme with her favourite, Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, giving rise to the naming of Love Lane where they were supposed to meander, and she and Dudley rode to Aldworth in 1570 to visit the medieval monuments in the church. At the top of the Chilterns, Ewelme Park, (Manor or Lodge as it was variously called), was used by Elizabeth after Dudley's death. In 1600 his arrogant young stepson, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex was banished from Court

to the hunting Lodge in the Royal Park. Elizabeth ordered Devereux's beheading for treason in 1601.

In 1609, only 5 years after Elizabeth's death, Ewelme Palace was derelict ... *"the capital mansion of Ewelme was completely ruined and in decay."* King James I ordered its complete demolition, completed by 1613. Only an accommodation building was left. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century this building was reduced in size and remodelled into Ewelme Manor as it is seen today. The outline of a bricked-up window and a door can be seen at the western end, along with the original buttresses on the western corners.



The remains of the Palace, leaving only an accommodation building.



In war and peace Ewelme was host both to the 'Plantagenet' de la Poles and the 'Lancastrian' Tudors. Who could have envisaged on the day young Lady Margaret Beaufort was allied to the Suffolk household, that within 70 years her ruthless ambition

for the throne for her son had irreversibly destroyed her first “husband’s” family? However, their downfall, and Henry Tudor’s subsequent marriage to Elizabeth of York, finally ended the bloody ‘*Cousins War*’, dubbed more colourfully 300 years later by Sir Walter Scott – ‘*The Wars of the Roses*’.



Photograph of Ewelme Manor House taken in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The original gable end of the ‘Accommodation Building’ can still be seen in the end wall of the remodelled Manor.

The roof timbers of part of the original Palace complex are still extant.