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JOAN PLANTAGANET

THE FAIR MAID OF KENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Joan Plantagenet: The Fair Maid of Kent
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Joan Plantagenet, Known as the Fair Maid of Kent, was born in 1328. She grew to be one of the most beautiful and influential women of her age, Princess of Wales by her third marriage and mother of King Richard II. The study of her life sheds new light on the role of an intelligent woman in late fourteenth century England and may reveal some new insights into the early regnal years of her son.

There are several aspects of Joan of Kent's life which are of interest. The first chapter will consist of a biographical sketch to document the known facts of a life which spanned fifty-seven years of one of the most vivid periods in English history. Joan of Kent's marital history has been the subject of historical confusion and debate. The sources of that confusion will be discussed, the facts clarified, and a hypothesis suggested as to the motivations behind the apparent actions of the personages involved.

There has been speculation that it was Joan of Kent's garter for which the Order of the Garter was named. This theory was first advanced by Selden and has persisted in this century in the articles of Margaret Galway. It has been accepted by May McKisack and other modern historians. The third chapter of this study will demonstrate the unlikelihood of the theory and propose another possible candidate for the role of the lady behind the Garter.

Several critics of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer have proposed a connection between Chaucer and Joan of Kent. Since it is highly probable that they were acquainted, a possibility exists that some of Chaucer's early works were
written for or about her. The views of Margaret Galway, George Williamson, and others on this subject will be briefly considered in the fourth chapter.

In the fifth chapter we will consider the character of Joan of Kent as it is revealed by her actions on various occasions. It is the contention of this author that because most historians have tended to view her as an amiable but ineffectual woman who was greatly loved by her son but who did not attempt to influence him, the period of Richard's minority has been viewed incorrectly. This chapter will show that Joan of Kent was an astute judge of character, accustomed to achieving her ends, capable of brave and resolute action and of managing her own affairs, and not the kind of woman who would be content to have others manipulating her young son.

The final chapter will advance the theory that Joan of Kent, not John of Gaunt or Simon Burley, was the most influential person in the life of the young king. Because her actions were largely behind the scenes the evidence for this conclusion is largely circumstantial. However, it is believed that a convincing case can be made.

This study has been interesting to pursue, because although quite a bit of data on Joan of Kent has been found to exist, it exists in a wide variety of sources, and has never been compiled in one place. When the bits and pieces of information are brought together, a fascinating woman begins to appear. Many of the pieces have been lost, some may yet appear as more of the documents in the British Museum and the Public Record Office are published. The evidence that presently exists is sufficient to destroy some of the myths about Joan of Kent and to re-establish her as an important personage of the late fourteenth century.
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CHAPTER I  BIOGRAPHY

Joan Plantaganet was born in 1328. Her early years were lived in the shadow of tragedy. In March, 1330, her father, Edmund, Earl of Kent, was beheaded on a charge of treason. He was the victim of a plot by Mortimer to secure his own influence over the young Edward III by removing the boy's uncles from the scene. Edmund of Kent had been led to believe that his brother, Edward II, was still alive, and was accused of attempting to overthrow Edward III in order to restore Edward II, the deposed king. The Dictionary of National Biography gives March 19, 1330, as the date of Edmund's death. Although Earl Edmund's estates were forfeited, Edward did not forget that the dead man was his uncle, for on the very next day an allowance was ordered for his aunt, Lady Margaret Wake, "Late wife of the...earl, staying in Arundel castle, 13s 4d daily for the expense of herself and her children for so long as she shall stay there." ¹

At this point, Lady Margaret had three children, Margaret, Edmund, born about 1327, and Joan, aged almost two. In April, 1330 she gave birth to a son, John, and Joan became his godmother. It is curious that Joan and not her older sister Margaret was chosen to be the infant's godmother, but an explanation may lie in Froissart. He says ² that when the "conte" of Kent died, his daughter Joan, aged seven, was taken under the care of Queen Philippa. There is obviously an error here, because Joan was only two at the time of her father's death. Also, there is no mention anywhere of her being in any sense a ward of the Queen (although later she and her siblings became wards.
of the king as minor children of a deceased lord who had held lands of the king), particularly where one would most expect it, at the time of her marriage in 1340. As a member of the royal family she was well treated and received financial benefits, but there is no hint of a special relationship between Joan of Kent and Queen Philippa.

It may well be that Joan's sister Margaret was the child in whom Philippa felt an interest. Very little is known about Margaret, not even the year of her birth, but she was betrothed on April 4, 1340 to Amaneo d'Albret who was "of Gascoigne". This may have been an attempt to establish a political tie by a marriage arranged by the king for the queen's ward. In any case, that is the last mention of Margaret, who died without issue probably shortly thereafter and certainly before 1352 when Joan became her brother John's heir. If Margaret was the child Philippa favored, she may have been with the queen by April 1330, which would explain Joan's position as John's godmother.

Despite Froissart's allusion to an early bond between Joan and Queen Philippa (a bond certainly did exist by the time he was writing) there is no evidence to suggest that Joan grew up anywhere other than with her mother at Arundel castle.

Since the lands of anyone convicted of treason reverted to the crown by forfeiture, Margaret Wake launched a determined campaign to clear her husband's name and have his lands restored to her and her children. Early in 1331, she was petitioning Parliament for an inquiry into Mortimer's connection with the Earl's death and had submitted a
petition in the name of Edmund, her eldest son, which stated that his father's death was an injustice. Although the Earl's name was cleared in 1332, the haggling over his estate continued until 1339, the king being naturally loath to relinquish control of the extensive land holdings. In 1333 Edmund died, so John, the second son became the heir presumptive.

At some point between October 30, 1340 and February 10, 1341, Joan Plantaganet was married to William de Montacute, son and heir of the Earl of Salisbury. There is no doubt that this was an arrangement which pleased Joan's mother. The Earl of Salisbury was a prominent warrior and friend of Edward III, Marshall of England, and had acquired great wealth in reward for his services. For the de Montacutes, there would be a connection by marriage with the royal family. William and Joan were both twelve years old. Joan may have already shown promise of the beauty for which she was later renowned as "la plus belle dame de toute le roialmme d'Engleterre, et la plus amoureuse." In 1347, a knight named Thomas Holland, lately returned from the siege of Calais, petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury for Joan's hand in marriage. He claimed that he and Joan had made a pre-contract of marriage before she was wed to William de Montacute, and that she was rightfully his wife and should be restored to him. A papal commission was duly appointed, and in November of 1349 Pope Clement IV awarded Joan to Thomas Holland. The circumstances surrounding these events, and the light they shed on the individuals involved, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Thomas Holland and Joan of Kent produced five child-
ren. Their son Thomas was born in 1350, and John in 1352, and they had two daughters, Joan and Maud or Matilda. The Dictionary of National Biography mentions a third son, Edmund, who presumably died in infancy. When Holland, as a lieutenant of the King, was sent to Normandy in 1358, Joan and their children accompanied him.

In 1352, upon the death of her brother John, Joan had become Countess of Kent and Lady Wake of Liddell. This eliminated the necessity of the £100 yearly stipend given to her and Thomas Holland by the king. Joan and Thomas Holland continued to undertake charitable works, like becoming patrons of a nunnery, and he attended Parliament as Lord de Holland from 1353 until they left for Normandy. In 1360 Holland became Earl of Kent in right of his wife, but he died on December 28 of that year, leaving Joan a beautiful wealthy widow of thirty-two.

Although Thomas Holland's estate was not large, Joan had great financial resources of her own. Her mother's brother, Thomas Wake, had died childless. His lands, with the exception of those held in dower by his widow, Blanche, passed to Joan's mother, Margaret. Margaret died a few months before Joan married Thomas Holland, and her lands passed to Joan's brother, John. When John died childless in 1352, Joan received two-thirds of the estate, the remainder going to his widow, Elizabeth. Elizabeth became a nun, but after a short period left the convent to marry a poor knight, and despite the fact that her remarriage would normally have resulted in the loss of the dowry from her first marriage, Joan permitted her to retain the lands for her life. When Blanche of Wake and Elizabeth (Juliers) died, Joan's inheritance was completed. So when Thomas
Holland died in December, 1360, the Countess of Kent was bereaved, but financially well situated.

It appears that Joan of Kent had loved Thomas Holland. He was not a wealthy man when she married him, he was probably nine years her senior, he had lost an eye in the French campaigns, and yet she willingly divorced William de Montacute to marry him. In her will she requested that she be buried with him at Friars Minor in Stamford. Yet within a year of his death she was married again to England's most eligible bachelor, Edward, the Black Prince, two years her junior.

The story of how this beautiful widow became the wife of the Prince of Wales in the fall of 1361 is, of course, a romantic one. The Black Prince epitomized the knightly ideals of the age, and the accounts of his love for his Princess are no doubt colored by the medieval concept of "amour courtois" which will be discussed in Chapter IV. There is a great deal of evidence in addition to the romantic tales that the marriage was contracted by the parties involved, by their free choice, and was not one of the typical marriages arranged by Edward III for his children.

Joan and Edward had known each other since childhood, as cousins in the large family group over which Queen Philippa presided. And they had kept in touch. The Prince's accounts for 1348 show the gift of a "silver biker for his cousin Jeannette," although the occasion of the gift is not indicated. The Prince had stood godfather to her eldest son, Thomas Holland, in 1350. Because they were cousins (the Prince was related to Edward I in the third degree and Joan of Kent was related to him in the
second degree) a papal dispensation was necessary before they could marry. This was granted on September 7, 1361. Later when it was realized that a dispensation was also required because Edward was Thomas Holland's godfather (and hence, in medieval church law, identical to his father), a second dispensation was also obtained, lest issue of their marriage be subsequently declared illegitimate.

On October 6, 1361, their espousals were celebrated by Simon Islip, Archbishop of Canterbury, and they were married on October 10 at Windsor Castle in the presence of the royal family. The marriage was publicly proclaimed by the Pope in December.

The reaction of Edward III, who was known for using the marriages of his children to promote his political aims, has been variously reported. Some sources contend he was greatly annoyed, others that he was greatly pleased by the match. Edward III did not attend the wedding, but since he and the Queen spent Christmas with the bridal couple, he must have suppressed any initial displeasure he may have felt. It does seem certain that the Prince chose his own wife, without the advice of his father, and that it was a love match. Even those chroniclers who criticize the Prince for his mercenary inclinations, his cruelty to his subjects in Aquitaine and at Limoges, have nothing but praise for his conduct as a husband. It was apparently a very happy marriage.

Joan and Edward presided over a magnificent court. They left England for Aquitaine in the spring of 1362, taking with them Joan's children by Thomas Holland. They were both accustomed to luxurious living, and Edward was
generous with his wife. He granted her £1,000 a year for her expenses, and in addition gave her gifts of embroideries and jewels, including a set of buttons which cost £200, and "a litter made in London" for £121. It is worth noting at this point that most of the king's knights were living on stipends of £100 yearly, as had Joan and Thomas Holland when they were first married, and that most of the magnates of the realm had incomes of £2,000-3,000. The value of the pound in the late fourteenth century has been estimated at about thirty times its 1968 value.

The magnificence of the court at Bordeaux was probably second only to that of the court of Edward III.

During 1362 and 1363 the couple travelled through France. Their permanent residence was at Poitiers but they were at Angouleme in 1365 when their first son, Edward, was born. This son, for whom much was hoped, was a sickly child, and died in 1370. The letter Joan sent to the city of London, however, knows only a mother's joy in having produced a son, and a future queen's concern for her relationship with the premier city of her realm.

By the Princess of Gascoigne and Wales.

Dear and well beloved. Forasmuch as we do well know that you desire right earnestly to hear good tidings of us and of our estate, be pleased to know that on this Monday, the twenty-seventh day of January, we were delivered of a son, with safety to ourselves and to the infant, for the which may God be thanked for his might; and may He always have you in His keeping...

Edward was acutely conscious of the need to maintain an income equal to his expenses, and when Don Pedro of Castile came to plead with him for assistance against the
attempts of the bastard Henry to seize the throne, the Prince could not refuse the chance to perform a chivalric service for a legitimate king who had been illegally ousted from his kingdom and make a profit at the same time. Once he was assured of the blessing of his father and the assistance of his brother, John of Gaunt, the Prince determined to march on Castile. He delayed his departure, however,

Because the Princess, his wife, was big with child again, and very near her time, and she was mightily concerned lest he should leave her before her delivery. Wherefore fearing that either she or the child might come to any harm, he was content to stay, til that danger was over, and she was extremely pleased when she heard him promise to do this.\(^{28}\)

Joan of Kent was thirty-nine when Richard was born in January, 1367. He was her seventh child, and there was reason to fear for the safety of the mother and child. Richard was born at St. Andrew's Abbey in Bordeaux. The Prince waited until Richard was properly baptized on January 9, by the Archbishop of Bordeaux, with the Bishop of Agen in Agenois and the King of Majorca as his godfathers. A few days later John of Gaunt arrived at the abbey "where the princess lay, who joyously received him."\(^{29}\) Gaunt went on to join the Prince for the battle of Najera, of which the primary account is contained in a letter from the Prince to Joan at Bordeaux.\(^{30}\) It begins "My dearest sweetheart and much loved companion."

There is ample evidence that the Black Prince and Joan of Kent continued to be sweethearts for as long as he lived. On the Prince's return to Bordeaux, "The Princess came to meet him, bringing her firstborn son, Edward. The knights
and ladies came there to welcome him and made great joy. Very sweetly they embraced when they met together. The gentle prince kissed his wife and son. They went to their lodging on foot, holding each other by the hand."

Unfortunately, the Prince returned with the illness which was to destroy him. By 1371, he was sufficiently ill that a return to England seemed imperative. As the family prepared to leave, Edward of Angouleme died, but the Prince was in too weak a condition to permit the delay of their departure. Joan left Aquitaine and the funeral of her dead five-year-old son in the hands of John of Gaunt in order to return to England with her dying husband, four-year-old Richard, and the Holland children.

They established residence at the Prince's home of Kennington, in London, across the Thames from the Savoy. The prince had periods of good health, but increasingly grew worse. According to one chronicle:

For the space of five years and more continually was he visited by a great and incommodious disease of his body; for all that time, commonly every month, he suffered flux both of sede and of blud, which two infirmities made him many times so feeble, that his servants took him very often for dead...

He died on June 8, 1376, having lived long enough to receive the promises of his father, Edward III, and brother, John of Gaunt, that Richard would be named Prince of Wales and next in line to the succession. According to the Chandos Herald, "The lovely and noble Princess felt such grief at heart that her heart was nigh breaking." The Black Prince had been an extremely popular figure. His widow and son must have found comfort in the knowledge that
their loss was shared by all of England.

On November 20, 1376, Richard was named Prince of Wales, and placed officially in his mother's charge. She received an allowance of 1,000 marks a year for him from Edward III, and over the next few years her dower of one-third of the Black Prince's land holdings was assigned to her. Joan and Richard continued living at Kennington, and on January 25, 1377, the commons of London put on an amusement there for Richard in honor of his tenth birthday.

They were there a month later when a revealing incident occurred. John of Gaunt had appeared with John Wycliffe before Bishop Courtenay of London. Gaunt, who had been out of favor with the Londoners since the Good Parliament of 1376, was thought to have insulted Courtenay, and a mob attacked the Savoy where Gaunt was dining with Henry Percy. Gaunt and Percy fled from the Savoy to the closest place where they could feel secure -- to Joan of Kent at Kennington. There were two very good reasons why Gaunt chose to go to her instead of seeking sanctuary elsewhere. First, Kennington was easily accessible by the Thames from the Savoy, and secondly his sister-in-law remained extremely popular with the Londoners.

As one chronicler relates the incident, John of Gaunt and Henry Percy dashed from the Savoy,

...And entering the Thames, never stynted rowynge until they came to a house nere the manor of Kennington, where at that tyme the prynce with the young prynce aboade, before whome (with great feare, as appeared by his sweatynge and tremblynge) he made his complaynt of all those things that had happened. The prynces hearing there talk comforted them with such words as she thought best for the
tyme, promysing that she wold make a fynall end of all these matters which should be profitable to them, as they should well perceyve.  

Although the Princess sent three of her knights, Aubrey de Vere, Simon Burley and Lewis Clifford to talk with the Londoners, and although the London delegation said they wished they could accede to her wish for a reconciliation, they were not placated until Gaunt apologized for the supposed insult to their bishop before the King.

It is possible that Joan of Kent's choice of knights to mediate for Gaunt was offensive to the Londoners. She sent a Lollard sympathizer. Lewis Clifford was named in a papal bull of May, 1377, along with Joan of Kent and others, instructing the Archbishop of Canterbury to warn the king and nobles of England against the heresies of Wycliffe's teachings. Although the issue in the case was personal rather than theological, the Londoners may have resented the choice of Clifford to plead for Gaunt, the defender of Wycliffe.

In June of 1377 Edward III died and ten-year-old Richard became King Richard II. The grand coronation was planned largely by John of Gaunt, whom Joan seems to have trusted despite the suspicions voiced by the Londoners and some of the magnates about his motives. The Princess' primary goal was apparently to consolidate all possible opposition in the support of her son. The various means by which she managed to insure the preeminence of her own position of influence will be discussed in the last chapter.

During the early years of Richard's minority, the young king and his mother remained primarily in London.
The high point of Richard's early years, in terms of his own personal achievements, occurred during the days of the Peasants' Revolt in London, during June, 1381. Richard demonstrated that he was his father's son (brave, quick-witted, independent) as well as his mother's (ready to promise anything to achieve peace and stall for time).

Joan's first encounter with the rebels occurred as she was returning from Canterbury, presumably from a visit to the grave of the Black Prince. She and her ladies were accosted by a group of Kentish peasants on their way to London. Although the women were frightened, the rebels meant them no harm, and allowed them to proceed after a few playful kisses. This was yet another incident in which Joan of Kent's popularity was demonstrated.

The Anonimale Chronicle is the only contemporary account which implies that Joan was with Richard at Mile End. Although it seems generally to be the most accurate account of the events in and around London, it mentions that Joan left the Tower with Richard's party. Tout accepts her presence with Richard at Mile End. Collis is probably correct in saying that if Joan left the Tower with Richard, "she can only have been seeing him off, as far perhaps as Aldgate, as she was certainly in the Tower a little later," since Froissart and the Monk of Evesham both place her in her bedroom in the Tower at the time the rebels broke into the royal chambers. Again she was unharmed, but badly frightened, and fainted when one of the rebels asked for a kiss. Her ladies-in-waiting and squires carried her to a postern gate on the bank and removed her to the Queen's Wardrobe in the Old Jewry. Richard joined her there later.
After Richard's marriage to Anne of Bohemia in January of 1382, which she arranged, Joan seems to have been less visible at Court. She may have stayed at her favorite manor of Wallingford, while the young court moved about. She was old now and very corpulent, so a more sedentary life probably had more appeal. Her eldest son Thomas Holland had married in 1362, and she must have been pleased to see his children growing up. Her second son, John, was a difficult ill-tempered sort, for whom her intercession was often needed. Thomas and John were both close to Richard, and influential advisors of their half-brother. Joan's daughter Joan was married to John IV, Duke of Brittany. Her second daughter, Maud, had been married to Hugh, Lord Courtenay, but after his death married Waleran, Count de Saint Pol, against the advice of her mother. Joan cut her off, personally and financially, and there is no mention of her after de Saint Pol was expelled from England for his "misdeeds" in 1380. The banishment took place secretly, so as not to embarrass the king, who was apparently fond of his sister and had given her the manor of Byfleet when Joan disinherited her.

In any case, it is likely that the years between 1383 and 1385 were quiet ones for Joan of Kent.

In the spring of 1385 a serious breach developed between Richard and his uncle, John of Gaunt. Each man heard that the other was plotting to kill him. A friar who claimed to bear proof to Richard of Gaunt's treachery was killed by the men of Joan's son John Holland, in whose care he was being held. Despite her age, her obesity and the physical discomfort of mobility, Joan of Kent travelled between Pontrefact Castle, where the Duke had sought refuge,
and Richard in London, until a reconciliation was achieved.

In June, 1385, Richard assigned several of the knights who had been close to his father and to Joan (with the exception of Simon Burley, perhaps because Richard wanted him with him in Scotland) to stay with his mother "for her comfort and security wherever she shall abide within the realm, rendering other services befitting the estate of so great a lady." 38

A few months later, another of John Holland's indiscretions led to her death. John and Richard were in the north preparing for yet another war with the Scots. John Holland murdered Ralph Stafford, a close friend of Richard's, in a quarrel over the death of one of Holland's squires. Richard intended to punish John Holland by seizing his estates, and refused Joan's messages of intercession.

It is said 39 that grief over this apparently hopeless breach between her sons caused Joan's death. Ironically, John Holland lost his life in 1399 because Henry IV found him too loyal to Richard. Joan of Kent died at Wallingford Castle, almost immediately after writing her will, which is dated August 7, 1385. 40 Her body was wrapped in cloth and encased in lead to be preserved until Richard's return from Scotland. Her will was proved on December 9, 1385, and she was interred in the Church of Friars Minor at Stamford with Thomas Holland, as she had requested.
CHAPTER I FOOTNOTES


9. Ibid., p. 27.


11. Margaret Galway contends (University of Birmingham Historical Journal, vol. I, 1947, p. 17) that he was not blind in one eye, but wore an eye patch as a vow he had taken until victory over the French was assured. Her argument is unconvincing, however, since it is based on Le Voeux du Heron, in which Holland is not mentioned, and there are many references to his one-eyed condition and no references to an eye patch.


32. "Transcript of a Chronicle in the Harleian Library of


40. The exact date of her death is variously reported. Dugdale (p. 94 (884)) gives August 7, as does Beltz (p. 219). Nichols (p. 82) says August 8. The Escheat Rolls (quoted in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as 9 Rich. II, No. 54) imply her death occurred on August 14, 1385.
CHAPTER II  MARITAL HISTORY

The confusion surrounding the marital history of Joan of Kent is typified by William Dugdale in *The Baronage of England*, written in 1675. In two places (pp. 864 and 884), he states that she was married first to Thomas Holland, then to William de Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, and finally to the Black Prince. In two other places (pp. 648 and 865), he reverses the order of the first two marriages.

The mystery surrounding Joan of Kent's marriages is interesting for several reasons. First, it is curious that there has been so much historical confusion about events that were open and public in the fourteenth century. Secondly, the dates of Joan's marriage to Salisbury bear on the question of whether or not her garter became the symbol of the Order of the Garter, which will be discussed in the following chapter. And thirdly, one cannot help but wonder how, if some accounts are correct and she was divorced from the Earl of Salisbury for infidelity with Thomas Holland, she and Salisbury managed to remain friends. He became one of Richard II's loyal advisors and generals and was present in the Tower during the fateful days of June, 1381. It would also be surprising, if those who support the infidelity theory are right, that the Church subsequently smiled on her marriage to the Black Prince.

The facts of Joan of Kent's marital background were outlined in the first chapter. The research of Margaret Galway in her attempt to prove links between Joan and the Order of the Garter has been extremely helpful in establishing that chronology. A review of the various accounts of the Countess of Kent's marital adventures follows, concluded
by an attempt to interpret the facts of the case and the motives which may have been behind them.

The crucial question seems to be whether or not Joan of Kent and Thomas Holland had indeed made a pre-contract of marriage before she was married to young William de Montacute at the end of 1340. In the fourteenth century, a pre-contract, even though it might be a secret verbal commitment between lovers, was considered binding in the eyes of the Church, particularly if it was followed by intercourse, which Holland claimed was the case. If this pre-contract existed, then Thomas Holland may be considered Joan's first and third husband, William of Salisbury her second, and the Prince of Wales her fourth.¹

The accounts of the chroniclers are vague:

Isto anno (1361) Edwardus princips Walliae dēponsavit Johannam comitissam Canciae, relictam domini Thomae de Holand, quae fuit separatā comite Salisburiae, militis praedicti causa.²

In this same year (1361) Edward Prince of Wales took as wife the daughter of Edmund Count of Kent who was before the wife of the Count of Salisbury and divorced from him for concupiscence³ with Thomas Holland.

Longman⁴ has her married first to Holland, then to Salisbury from whom she was divorced. He offers no explanation of the Holland marriage, or how it could have been terminated (Holland lived until December, 1360). This same chronology without detail or source is given in the glossary to the Pope edition of the Chandos Herald.

Dunn-Pattison avoids the problem by discounting a marriage to Salisbury, but adds that "no doubt there were certain indiscretions which added to the dislike of the king
and queen for this marriage"⁵ (to the Black Prince). Surprisingly, Powicke also makes no mention of a marriage to Salisbury.⁶ According to James, Joan of Kent was engaged to Salisbury, but never married him, "Thomas Holland having a pre-contract with her father, which was legally confirmed;...she became the wife of Lord Holland, never having been Countess of Salisbury."⁷ This explanation of an engagement but no marriage to Salisbury was also accepted by Barnes,⁸ and is one of the arguments against Joan's being accepted as the Garter Countess, as will be seen. The James account is obviously suspect because Joan's father had been long dead and her mother, according to the plea of Holland to the Archbishop of Canterbury, was a staunch advocate of the Salisbury marriage.

Joan's first husband was William de Montacute, born July 28, 1328,⁹ who became Earl of Salisbury on July 11, 1349.¹⁰ He was the son of William de Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, who fought for Edward III in France, was Marshall of England, and died of wounds received in a tournament at Windsor on January 30, 1344.¹¹ William's mother was Lady Catherine Grandison. The parentage of Joan's husband seems obvious, except for a few oblique references that all may not have been as it appeared. Galway attempts to demonstrate that William was actually the bastard son of Edward III by a sister of William de Montacute, the first earl.¹² Her evidence is based on the literary convention of deliberate confusion in "Le Voeux du Heron," a fourteenth century poem, applied to Jean le Bel, and is not convincing. If we may dismiss Miss Galway's allegations to the contrary, then William, Joan's husband, was the son of William de Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, (hereinafter referred to as William, Sr.) and Catherine Grandison as is generally
believed.

In any case, on October 30, 1340, the king granted William de Montacute, Sr. an assurance that should he die while his heir (William, Jr.) was under age, the king would not meddle with his son's inheritance or attempt to arrange a marriage for him.\(^{13}\) (When William, Sr. died four years later, Edward III did "meddle" and there was a lengthy series of hearings until William, Jr. and his mother finally got all of the lands to which they felt entitled, in 1349.\(^{14}\)) This entry demonstrates that as of October 30, 1340, William, Jr. was as yet unmarried, although a marriage was presumably being contemplated since the issue was raised.

Then on February 10, 1341,\(^ {15}\) William, Sr. received license to grant manors to his son, William, Jr. and his wife Joan. So it is possible to pinpoint the date of the marriage of Joan Plantaganet and William de Montacute as having occurred between October 30, 1340 and February 10, 1341.

There can be no doubt that this was an arranged marriage. The bride and groom were both twelve years old. The de Montacutes stood to gain a bond with the royal family. They had been seeking such a tie. In 1333, when William, Jr. was five, he had been betrothed to Alice, younger daughter of Earl Thomas of Brotherton.\(^ {16}\) This Earl Thomas was the older brother of Edmund, Earl of Kent, Joan's father, so Joan was first cousin to William's prospective bride. Alice was about twelve at the time. The marriage never occurred, and Alice subsequently married Edward de Montacute, the uncle of Joan's new husband.

Joan's mother, Margaret Wake, undoubtedly thought she
was providing well for her youngest daughter, who, in 1340, would not have appeared to have had any prospects for inheriting the wealth which came to her twelve years later.

After the death of William de Montcute, Sr. in 1344, William became a ward of the king. It may have been at this time, while William was the king's ward, that Edward III appointed Thomas Holland steward of William's lands.

There is only the chronicler's word that Holland was William de Montacute's steward. Thomas Holland was the second son of a not very prominent Lancashire family. Between 1340 and 1347 he seems to have been very steadily in France except for a period between 1344 and 1346. If he was indeed appointed William's steward, it was during this period. Holland would be a strong candidate for such a post in the eyes of Edward III, as a worthy knight (he and Salisbury were both among the original knights of the Garter) in need of financial assistance (he did not begin to acquire wealth until after the siege of Calais in 1346-7, and then not a great deal, as he and Joan were granted a stipend of £100 yearly after their marriage in 1350.) It does seem unlikely that Thomas Holland would have been assigned William's steward if any word had reached Edward III, Catherine Grandison or Margaret Wake of a pre-contract of marriage between Holland and William's wife.

In 1347 Holland returned from France and claimed Joan's hand in marriage by reason of a pre-contract made before her marriage to Salisbury. He claimed further that Salisbury was holding her against her will.

To the Archbisp of Canterbury, and the Bishops of London and Norwich. Mandate, on petition of Thomas de Holand, knight, stating that his wife
Joan, daughter of Edmund, earl of Kent, to whom he was married upwards of eight years ago, was given in marriage to William, son of William de Montecacuto, during the absence from the realm of Thomas, then in Prussia, and that the said William and Margaret, Joan's mother, opposed Thomas in recovering his conjugal rights. The cause was, at the instance of Thomas, brought before the pope, and a suit of nullity of marriage against William and Margaret and Joan was ordered to be heard by Aymar, Cardinal of St. Anastasias's, but Joan was caused by William to be detained in England, and kept in custody. She is to be enlarged so as to be able to appoint a proctor and carry on the cause.

After the completion of the Cardinal's investigation, in a papal bull issued from Avignon on November 13, 1349, Clement VI decreed the marriage contract of William of Salisbury and Joan of Kent to be null and void.

Soon thereafter, William de Montacute married Elizabeth Mohun, eldest daughter of John, Lord Mohun, by whom he had one son. And Joan of Kent married Thomas Holland, producing their eldest son, Thomas, in 1350.

Had there been a pre-contract? At the time it was alleged to have been made, in 1340 or before, Thomas Holland was the second son of an obscure Lancashire knight who had yet to make a name for himself as a soldier in France. Although it is possible that he could have made the acquaintance of a young woman of the royal family, it seems unlikely that they would have had any contact.

The earliest certain time of a meeting would have been at the festivities surrounding the institution of the Order of the Garter, the date of which is uncertain. It seems likely that once Joan was married to one of Edward III's knights, she would have met others. If Thomas Holland was appointed steward to William de Montacute in
or after 1344, they might have met then for the first time.

Clues to the events behind the known facts may lie in several sources. There is the implication that Salisbury divorced Joan because of her infidelity with Holland. 21 "It is said by some that this Thomas, being steward of the household to William de Monecute Earl of Salisbury, married his mistress; viz. Joane, wife to that Earl." 22 Although Dugdale goes on to disallow this, as untrue because of the pre-contract, he does add this intriguing comment on the divorce: "the Earl of Salisbury acquiescing therein, as it seems, by his after marriage with another woman." 23

It seems that Dugdale was groping toward the conclusion about the circumstances surrounding Joan of Kent's early marital history which seems unavoidable. In 1347, after seven years of marriage during which they grew from twelve to nineteen years of age, Joan and William both wished to be free of the bond, or Joan did and convinced William to let her go. Divorces were difficult to obtain, unless a couple could demonstrate that they were related within the proscribed degrees, which Joan and William were not, or unless the case of infidelity, with its ensuing scandal, could be proved.

The only alternative which would provide an end to the marriage and still protect the reputations of the parties involved would be if they could show that a pre-contract between Joan and Thomas Holland had existed. If the agreement to marry had been a secret commitment, only the word of those two would be needed to prove their case. In order to enhance the veracity of the claim, William went through the motions of detaining Joan to prevent her from
testifying.

There is no clear evidence to support this theory. A pre-contract may have existed, which Joan was convinced by her mother to forget when the Salisbury marriage was proposed, and Holland may not have had the money or influence to pursue his claim to her before 1347. Set against this possibility is the use of the phrase "prae-dictae sententiae acquiescens" in the papal decree voiding the marriage which implies that by that time William de Montacute was amenable to the divorce, or at least resolved not to contest it.

In addition, there is the fact that Salisbury married again almost immediately after the divorce, although his was not a love match. He married six-year-old Elizabeth de Mohun, daughter and coheir of Lord John de Mohun. He must have been prepared for the papal decision.

The fact that Joan of Kent and William of Salisbury were able to part on sufficiently good terms that they apparently bore no enmity toward each other indicates that Salisbury was at least amenable if not a party, to the divorce. Not even the most forgiving of women would be likely to forget a man who forcibly detained her in a matter of the heart.

While Joan of Kent as a girl of twelve might have allowed herself to be married by arrangement in the manner of her time, Joan of Kent as a young woman of nineteen apparently did not allow convention to stand in the way of her own happiness and that of the husband of her choice.
CHAPTER II FOOTNOTES

1. A note in Notes & Queries, London, Series VII, 1888, vol. V, p. 149, suggests that Joan had a fifth husband, or at least another fiancé, in Amaneo d'Albret. The writer contends that Joan's sister Margaret never existed, so it must have been Joan who was engaged to d'Albret in 1340. This contention is not based on any evidence.


16. Ibid., p. 402.


18. The Dictionary of National Biography, under Thomas Holland, First Earl of Kent. The account of his marriage to Joan, and hers to Salisbury, is obviously incorrect.


23. Ibid.


The origin of the Order of the Garter is shrouded in mystery. Even the date of the founding is unclear. There are three primary questions to be discussed in this chapter. Was the order named for a lady's garter? If so, was the owner of that garter Joan of Kent? And if not Joan of Kent, who might she have been? These questions cannot be answered finally, at this point in time more than six hundred years after the fact, because Edward III never explained the name of his order, and there are too many variables which tend to lend credence to one or another of the various accounts of its origin.

Froissart placed the founding of the Order of the Garter in 1344, and many other sources use this date. Ashmole, who is considered the definitive authority on the subject, places the founding in 1349. McKisack conjectures 1348. The precise date will probably never be known.

There are two primary views of the source of the name of the order. Ashmole believed the garter was chosen as a symbol of the unity of the Round Table of King Arthur, which Edward's order was intended to resurrect. Ashmole discussed but dismissed the older view which stated that the order was named for a blue garter, dropped by the Countess of Salisbury, with whom the king was then in love. Edward was said to have picked up the garter, and subsequently announced the order with the blue garter as its symbol.

According to Barnes, Polydor Virgil, "a man of indifferent reputation," started the association of the order with the Countess of Salisbury. Several of the chronicles
link the Countess with the garter, Speed's and Baker's in particular. Selden went one further and stated that the countess in question was Joan of Kent.

Others refer it to the Lady Joan Countess of Kent and Salisbury her garter, that falling from her leg in a dance, was taken up by the king who much affected her, and (as they say too) wore it on his own leg, and whether upon the Queen's jealou[sie, or some of the Lords merrily observing it, told them all openly, "Honi soit qui mal y pense." 7

Although Froissart does not include this incident of the dance, it is his order of events which implies a connection between the infatuation of Edward III for the Countess of Salisbury and the naming of the order. Froissart describes an incident of the Scottish wars in which the Countess of Salisbury bravely defended the castle of Wark from attack by David Bruce. Afterward, Edward visited her at the castle, and was overcome by desire for her, which he honorably suppressed. Then he returned to Windsor whence he summoned all his knights and ladies for a feast and tournament. 8 Soon thereafter the Order of the Garter was instituted.

The story of the attachment of Edward III for the Countess of Salisbury is confused. As Kervyn demonstrated, the date is open to debate. Froissart says the incident occurred in 1342, but also that it was after the sack of Durham (which took place in 1346). David Bruce was out of Scotland until June of 1342, by which time Edward III was in Brittany. 9 So attempts have been made to place the story later, when all of the alleged participants might have been present, in 1346. The account in Froissart may
be entirely apocryphal, but it should not be summarily dismissed.

Froissart's story is taken from the pages of the *Chronique de Jean le Bel*. The account in Jean le Bel is different from Froissart's in several interesting respects. The lady in question is called Alice, and the king does not honorably restrain himself. He rapes her. When the Count, her husband, returns from France, his wife tells him of her dishonored plight. He condemns the king, leaves the country, and the lady Alice dies soon after of grief. The tournament at Windsor and the founding of the Order of the Garter follows immediately.

Now, supposing the incident to be based on a true event (Froissart denounced the rape scene as untrue, but apparently felt he had grounds for accepting the king's infatuation for the Countess), who is the Countess of Salisbury?

The obvious answer is Catherine Grandison, wife of the First Earl of Salisbury, and mother of Joan of Kent's husband, William de Montacute. There are problems with this identification, which are amply enumerated by Miss Galway. Primarily they are the fact that Catherine was twelve years older than Edward III and hence unlikely to have inspired such passion in him (her eldest son was at least fourteen and perhaps as old as eighteen, depending on the dating of the incident); the woman in question is named Alice, not Catherine, and the young squire (William de Montacute, fairly certainly Joan of Kent's husband) is called her nephew, not her son. Also Edward is said not to have seen the Countess since she was married. Catherine was married around 1327. It is known that Edward saw her in 1335 and since she was the wife of England's Marshall
he had probably seen her since then. The only evidence for Catherine is her title of Countess (held from 1337 to 1349) and the mention of the fact that her husband was long a prisoner. William of Salisbury was held in France for at least a year and possibly as long as three years between 1339 and 1342.

Galway manages to twist the evidence in such a way as to make the most likely candidate Joan of Kent. In this she follows Selden (1631) who conjectured the lady was "Joan, Countess of Kent and Salisbury." Ashmole (1672) says that Joan was neither Countess of Kent (which was true, as she did not inherit from her brother until 1352) nor Countess of Salisbury, so the legend is untrue. Others, following Barnes (1688), claimed that Joan of Kent was not a viable choice because she had never actually married William of Salisbury and she was only thirteen (or possibly as old as seventeen if the 1346 date is accepted) at the time of the incident. James, writing in 1842, dismissed Joan of Kent because she had never married William of Salisbury and was the wife of Thomas Holland at the time the Garter was instituted. (Which is incorrect, since the Garter was founded by August, 1349, at the latest, and she did not marry Holland until November of that year.)

Now that Margaret Galway has shown that Joan of Kent was indeed married to William of Salisbury, the question again presents itself. Does the old tradition that equates Joan of Kent with the Countess of Salisbury and hence with the Order of the Garter rest on fact or at least a solid probability? Miss Galway's argument, based on the application of literary nuance and misappropriated historical evidence is not satisfactory, despite the fact that several
subsequent authors have found it convincing. Miss Galway takes the abovementioned account in Froissart, adds to it an interpretation of Froissart's account of the Queen of England inspiring her men before the battle of Neville's Cross (which "Queen" she contends is Joan of Kent) and that same person's triumphal entry into Calais in 1347, and concludes that Joan of Kent, Countess of Salisbury, was the beloved of Edward III and the wearer of the blue garter dropped at a victory ball at Calais, for which Edward named his chivalric order. It is of course possible that all of this is true, but unless more substantial evidence comes to light, it appears to be a conclusion based on speculation and interpretation which is impossible to accept for several reasons.

In her article on Joan of Kent and the Order of the Garter, Miss Galway makes several careless mistakes, which tend to color her conclusions. For example, her statement that William of Salisbury had no children by his second wife is simply untrue. He had a son, William, who was killed accidentally in a tilting match in 1382, reportedly by his father's own hand. And despite her convoluted explanations of why Jean le Bel and Froissart continuously refer to "Alice" as the aunt of the young William de Montacute, she apparently never took the simple step of checking to see if William had an aunt named Alice, which he did. If Miss Galway did not bother to check this, she is guilty of carelessness. If she did, she is guilty of suppressing evidence that might tend to throw doubt on her thesis that Joan of Kent was "Alice."

A key portion of Miss Galway's complicated argument to prove Joan the Garter Countess is her feeling that
William of Salisbury, Joan's husband, was actually the son of Edward III by a sister of William de Montacute, Sr. Her evidence is circumstantial and based on misappropriated and misinterpreted fact. For example, she mentions a case in which Catherine Grandison and her son John were supposedly suing young William to get back some of John's land (her true son, John, suing the bastard she had been forced to raise as her own, William), but the source she cited revealed a case brought by William and Catherine against one John Lotterel, knight, who had usurped the use of some of their land.

Although Miss Galway's arguments appear convincing on first reading, they do not stand up under scrutiny. Therefore, if her conclusions are correct, it is probably fortuitous.

The descriptions of the events at Wark Castle in both Froissart and Jean le Bel make Joan of Kent as unlikely a candidate for the person of the mysterious Countess as her mother-in-law, Catherine Grandison. Although it is true that she was the wife of William of Salisbury in the period during which the incident is thought to have occurred, William's father did not die until 1344, and William did not receive his title until 1349, so she would not have claim to the title of Countess until that time, although it may have been applied to her. There are other problems. The woman in question is unmistakably called "Alice" and William of Salisbury is described as a young squire, "her nephew" in Jean le Bel and Froissart, and certainly not her husband. She is called a great beauty, as Joan of Kent was, but surely other ladies were as well. Of the comment that Edward III had not seen her since she was married and
the implication that that had been several years before, since she was much lovelier than he had remembered, Joan of Kent had married William of Salisbury only a year previously and could not have changed a great deal. Even if one accepts the 1346 date, leaving five years since Joan's marriage, that does not alleviate the difficulties. It is probable that Joan and William spent the Christmas of 1343 with Edward and Philippa at court, so Edward would have seen her then, and also almost certainly during 1344 after the death of William's father when the youth became the king's ward.

There are other difficulties in the Jean le Bel version (the Countess had a twelve-year-old son, her husband left her and she died shortly thereafter) but since Froissart omitted these details in the belief that they, like the rape scene, were untrue, they may have been embellishments on the part of le Bel.

The Galway interpretations of the lady at Neville's Cross and at Calais (who seems to have been Queen Philippa, but who was not Joan of Kent) are not based on historical evidence but literary nuance. In short, Joan of Kent fits the description of the Countess no better than does Catherine Grandison.

Who then can this lady be?

James suggested Elizabeth de Mohun, William of Salisbury's second wife, but unfortunately for that theory she was not born until 1343, so even if the events took place in 1346, she would hardly have been old enough to defend a castle and inspire such passion in Edward III.

There is another lady who seems to fit more of the description than either Catherine or Joan, although not a great deal is known about her. She is Alice de Montacute,
the lady to whom Joan's husband William had been engaged as a child, and who subsequently married Edward de Montacute, William's uncle. Alice was born about 1321, so she would have been in her early or middle twenties in the 1340's. Her name is right, and she was indeed young William's aunt. It seems likely that Froissart, who used the titles Count and Earl interchangeably, may have confused Edward de Montacute with his brother William in his depiction of these incidents. Hence, the phrase used to describe young William as "son to the earl of Salisbury's sister" which Galway used in her argument for Edward III's having sired William, probably meant "son to Edward de Montacute's sister-in-law" or Catherine Grandison.

Alice was married before August 29, 1338 to the brother of William of Salisbury, Sr., so several years might well have elapsed since Edward III had seen her. Although Alice had no more claim to the title of "Countess" of Salisbury than did Joan of Kent (between 1342 and 1346), there is at least one reference to her as "Lady Alice Countess of Salisbury" in a chronicle of the early fifteenth century while there are no contemporary references to Joan of Kent by that title.

Alice de Montacute's husband, Edward, "was actively engaged in the Scottish wars under Edward III" and was, according to Froissart, responsible for the defense of Wark castle. Since he was obviously not present at the time of Alice's defense of the castle and Edward III's visit, it is possible that he may have been captured by the Scots and imprisoned, as Froissart says the Count of Salisbury was long in prison at the time of the incident, although Froissart clearly states that he was imprisoned in France. Perhaps Edward de Montacute had been left in
charge of the castle while William, the rightful owner, was in France, and he himself was simply absent at the time of the incident, having left the castle to the care of his wife and his young nephew.

Finally, Froissart mentions that two of Edward III's knights received well-born brides in thanks for their services in the Scottish wars previous to the incidents he places in 1342. One was William de Montacute, but since he had been married since 1327, Froissart may well have meant his younger brother Edward.

Et pour lui remunérer ses bons services, li rois li donna le jone contesse de Salebrin, madame Aelis, dont il tenoit la terre en se main et en gard, et estoit li une des plus belles jones dames del monde.

The other knight so rewarded was Walter Manny, whose wife's name is not given, but who was, at the time Froissart was writing, married to Alice de Montacute's sister Margaret. There is also a possible clue to the identity of the Count of Salisbury being not William de Montacute but his brother in Froissart's listing of the knights who attended the great feast at Windsor which Edward called so that he might see Alice again. The Earl of Salisbury is listed sixth, although William of Salisbury was Marshall of England and, if present, should have headed or been close to the top of the list. These two latter pieces of evidence (the reward marriages and the seating at the feast) are almost as oblique as the arguments of Miss Galway. However, it does seem that if Edward III became enamoured of a lady in Wark Castle, she was Alice de Montacute, not Catherine Grandison or Joan of Kent.
If Edward III was infatuated with this lady, is there any evidence that the Order of the Garter is a tribute to her garter? Except for the uniqueness of the symbol, there is really none except the old tradition. Perhaps the garter did fall from the leg of the lovely lady and inspire the name of the order. Or perhaps Ashmole is correct, and it is simply a symbol of a unity that has no beginning and no end.

In any case, whatever claim to a place in the history of England Joan of Kent has, it should not be in the role of the Countess of the Garter.
CHAPTER III FOOTNOTES

1. Dictionary of National Biography under Thomas Holland, although under William de Montacute it is given as 1350.


CHAPTER IV JOAN OF KENT IN LITERATURE

It is tempting to attempt to find references to Joan of Kent in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Joan of Kent was a renowned beauty of her time with a romantic past. Several of her knights, notably Lewis Clifford and Richard Stury, are known to have been friends of Chaucer's, and her brother-in-law, John of Gaunt, is generally acknowledged to have been Chaucer's primary patron. Chaucer was frequently at the court of Richard II and must have been acquainted with the king's mother.

Yet despite the fact that an acquaintance may be assumed, the only strictly documentable connection is that on the tenth of September, 1385, Geoffrey Chaucer was issued 3 1/2 ells of black cloth as livery of mourning for Joan of Kent's funeral.¹

This lack of concrete evidence of an association has not prevented literary speculation, however. Margaret Galway, and to some extent George Williams, have attempted to see Joan of Kent in Chaucer's works.

The late fourteenth century witnessed a revival of interest in literature and art in court circles. Chaucer, Gower and Langland, as well as lesser poets and many chroniclers were recording their times. Chaucer and Gower wrote primarily for Court audiences, Langland for the London middle class and perhaps for the seriously devout.² The marriage of Joan of Kent and the Black Prince embodied the contemporary fashion of "amour courtois,"³ the heroic and handsome prince marrying the woman regarded as "en son temps la plus belle dame de toute la royaulme d'Engleterre, et la plus amoureuse."⁴ This love match has been described
in many places.

The gentle prince married no long time afterwards a lady of great reknown, who enkindled love in him, in that she was beauteous, charming, and discreet. And after that marriage he... betook himself...to Gascony...The very noble Prince took his wife with him, for that he loved her greatly.

There is just a brief mention of the circumstances which reputedly surrounded the courtship in Hardyng.

The prince her vowid unto a knight of his, She said she would none but himself I wis. And for hir beaute all only he hir tgoke, And wed hir and so to Guyan wente...

This version of the story, that the Black Prince came to Joan of Kent to solicit her hand for one of his knights, is reported in other places.

...the Prince only intended at first to endeavor to encline her to the love of a certain knight, a servant of his, whom he designed to advance thereby; but that after sundry denials, with which he would not be put off, she told him plainly, "how when she was under ward, she had been disposed of by others; but that now being at years of discretion, and mistress of her own actions, she would not cast herself beneath her rank; but remembered that she was of the royal blood of England, and therefore resolved never to marry again; but to a prince of quality and vertue, like himselfe." The Black Prince was a passionate admirer of every gallant spirit, how then could he do otherwise, but take satisfaction from so obliging a declaration; when he well knew that all she said was true...

The story is further embellised in this account "from one of the French chroniclers." The Prince approached Joan
of Kent on behalf of his knight, Monsieur de Brocas.

She showed herself a lady of great subtility and wisdom. For the Prince was enchanted with her and said to her, "Ah, my dear cousin, is it the case that you refuse to marry any of my friends in spite of your great beauty? Although you and I are of the same lineage, there is no lady under heaven that I hold as dear as you."

Thereon the Prince became greatly enamoured of the Countess. And the Countess commenced to weep like a subtle and far-seeing woman. And then the Prince began to comfort her and kiss her passionately, grievously distressed at her tears, and said to her, "I have spoken to you on behalf of one of the most chivalrous knights of England and one of the most honourable of men." Madame the Countess replied in tears to the Prince, "Ah, Sir, before God do not you talk to me thus. For I have given myself to the most chivalrous knight under heaven, and for love of him it is, that before God I will never marry again as long as I live. For it is impossible that I should have him to my husband and my love for him parts me from all men: it is my intention never to marry." The Prince was extremely curious to know who was the most chivalrous knight in all the world and pressed the Countess to tell him. But the Countess the more she saw him aflame the more she begged him to make no further inquiry and said to him, "Before God, my very dear Lord, by his agony, by the Sweet Virgin Mother, suffer it to be so." To make a long story short, the Prince told her that if she did not tell him who was the most chivalrous knight in all the world, he would make him his deadly enemy. Then the Countess said to him, "My dear and indomitable lord it is you; and for love of you that I will never have any other knight by my side." The Prince, greatly amazed by the love of the Countess, replied, "My lady, I also vow to God that as long as you live never will I have any other woman save you to my wife."

This attitude of courtly love is evident in the Chandos
Herald's account of the fear of the Princess at the departure of the Black Prince for the wars in Portugal. It stands as another example of the way the couple epitomized the chivalric ideals of the time.

But according to what I heard, the Prince set out from Bordeaux fifteen days after Christmas. And then the Princess had right bitter grief at heart, and then she reproached the goddess of love who had brought her to such a majesty, for she had the most puissant Prince in this world. Often she said: "Alas! what should I do, God of Love, if I were to lose the very flower of nobleness, the flower of loftiest grandeur, him who has no peer in the world in valour? Death! thou would'st be at hand. Now I have neither heart nor blood nor vein, but every member fails me, when I call to mind his departure; for all the world says this, that never did any man adventure himself on so perilous an expedition. O very sweet and glorious Father, comfort me of your pity." Then did the Prince harken to his gentle lady's words; he gave her right noble comfort and said to her: "Lady, let be your weeping, be not dismayed, for God has power to do all." The noble Prince gently comforts the lady, and then sweetly takes leave of her, saying lovingly: "Lady, we shall meet again in such wise that we shall have joy, we and all our friends, for my heart tells me so." Very sweetly did they embrace and take farewell with kisses. Then might you see ladies weep and damsels lament; one bewailing her lover and one her husband. The Princess sorrowed so much that, being then big with child, she through grief delivered, and brought forth a very fair son, the which was called Richard. Great rejoicings did all make, and the Prince was right glad at heart, and all say with one accord: "Behold a right fair beginning." Then the Prince set forth, he waited no more...

The story of this romantic relationship, not to mention Joan's amorous past, must have been known to Chaucer.
Whether or not he chose to include it in this poems is another question.

Margaret Galway spent more than a decade, from 1938 to 1949, writing articles designed to show that Joan of Kent was prominent in Chaucer's life as patroness and inspiration. In 1938 she published an interpretation of Prologue F to the "Legend of Good Women" in which she claims Joan of Kent was represented in the allegory as Queen Alceste. Miss Galway also contended that Joan of Kent inspired Anelida in "Anelida and Arcite," the Squire's Tale in the Canterbury Tales, and that the Knight's Tale of "Palamon and Arcite" may be an account of the rivalry of William of Salisbury and Thomas Holland for Joan's love.

In a subsequent article Miss Galway proposed that Chaucer feigned a "hopeless love" for Joan of Kent and that she may have been his patroness in securing appointments for him. In 1949 Miss Galway published an article on the famous frontispiece to Troilus and Criseyde, folio b of MS. 61 in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The subject of the lovely miniature painting is acknowledged to be Chaucer reading to Joan of Kent's court at Wallingford, and she identified all of the persons in the painting, Joan of Kent being prominent in the foreground.

There is no point in duplicating here Miss Galway's arguments, or retracing the laborious steps by which she reached her conclusions. She may be right. Chaucer may have viewed Joan of Kent as his "Lady" and may have depicted her in many of his allegories.

There seems to be no agreement on the subject within the community of Chaucer scholars. There was much criticism of Miss Galway's theories when they were published,
based primarily on her use of evidence. Other interpretations of the poems she studied abound. The arguments of the critics were very convincing. Miss Galway does tend to overwork her evidence and use specious reasoning, as was discussed in the Second Chapter, above.

George Williams has used the same type of evidence as Miss Galway (use of color, placement of figures, lines of sight) applied to the Troilus Frontispiece and found a very different set of Chaucer's listeners represented there. It seems safe to say that although Miss Galway's theories may be correct (one critic found her association of Alceste with Joan of Kent "very plausible"), knowledge of her tendency to overstate facts, ignore evidence which might refute her views, and jump to conclusions based on assumptions, must lead one to agree with those scholars who question her visions of Joan of Kent in the works of Chaucer.

Curiously, the one poem which George Williams feels was probably written for Joan of Kent, the "Complaynt of Venus," Miss Galway contends was written for Isabella of France, Richard II's second wife. Based solely on internal evidence, such as the fact that it is addressed "Princesse" and records a woman's love for her gallant and gentle lover, who has died, Williams concluded that it was probably written for Joan of Kent or at the request of Joan of Kent shortly before her death.

There may have been good reasons why Chaucer did not want to write about Joan of Kent. For example, she hardly fit the medieval ideal of the faithful wife, praised by Chaucer in his early works, having managed a divorce from William of Salisbury and then marrying the Black Prince within a year of Thomas Holland's death. Yet as the mother
of the king she could hardly be portrayed as a faithless wife either. Perhaps a better explanation for her probable absence from Chaucer's works lies in the fact that during Joan of Kent's lifetime, Chaucer was most closely associated with John of Gaunt. The Book of the Duchesse was surely written for John's first wife, and the Troilus probably concerns his love for Catherine Swynford, Chaucer's sister-in-law. By the time Joan was dead, Chaucer was involved with the Canterbury Tales and then finally with pleasing Richard's successor. At no time did he really need the favor of the mother of the king. He had sufficient patronage in John of Gaunt and Richard.

So, if Chaucer did write for or about Joan of Kent, the references are by no means certain, and are not valid sources for clues to her character, her views, or her past.
CHPATER IV FOOTNOTES


3. Ibid., p. 124.


CHAPTER V CHARACTER ANALYSIS

It is difficult to assess the character of an individual on the basis of recorded actions when little can be ascertained about the motivations behind those actions. This type of evaluation must be attempted, however, before it is possible to determine the influence exerted by Joan of Kent in the early regnal years of Richard II. If one does not know what his mother's dominant traits were, and the means she was known to use in order to achieve her ends, as well as the goals she was likely to pursue, it would be difficult to assess her success in manipulating her son and the forces around him.

In Chapter II a possible explanation of the motivations surrounding the divorce of Joan of Kent from William of Salisbury was suggested. It appears that, as the Papal decree states, William of Salisbury acquiesced in the divorce. The fact that he and Joan of Kent had no children together, although both had children by their subsequent marriages, (Joan's son Thomas Holland was born in 1350, following the divorce in November, 1349), may indicate the lack of a close physical relationship. The unlikelihood of Edward III's appointing as steward to William of Salisbury a man with whom Joan was known to have had a pre-contract was also mentioned in Chapter II. Although the pre-contract may have been a closely guarded secret between the principals, the possibility that no pre-contract actually existed must be admitted. These conjectures, the possibility that there was no pre-contract and that the marriage of Joan and William of Salisbury was not a particularly successful one, coupled with the subsequent behavior of Joan and William in preserving an amiable relationship,
leads to the conclusion that the dissolution of the marriage was amicable. In short, that Joan of Kent was able to extricate herself from a marriage that had been arranged for her in order to marry the man she loved. It is impossible to guess whether Joan of Kent or Thomas Holland thought of claiming a pre-contract. There is ample evidence that Joan of Kent had a mind of her own, was used to making decisions and acting upon them.

The most clearcut example of this resourcefulness is an incident recorded by Froissart. While the Black Prince was in Portugal fighting for Don Pedro and shortly after the birth of Richard, Henry the Bastard, the other claimant to the throne, came to France, allied himself with the Duke d'Anjou and took a castle on the border of Aquitaine. Joan, who had been left in charge of Aquitaine, and her two small sons, received word "how that King Henry purchased him aid and succour on all sides to the intent to make war to the principality and to the duchy of Guyenne, wherewith she was greatly abashed."²

The obvious course of action for Joan would be to appeal for help from her husband, or at least to let him know her situation so that if he could not come to her aid himself he could send someone to help her. Barring that, she could appeal to Edward III that a foreign force was threatening England's duchy of Aquitaine. Joan did not follow either of these alternatives.

Instead, she sent word to Charles of France that Henry was in France, and desiring that the French king "not consent that the bastard of Spain should make any manner of war, saying that her resort was to the court of France, certifying him that much evil might ensue and many incon-
vents fall thereby. Then the king condescended lightly to the princess' request and hastily sent messengers to the bastard Henry commanding him out of the realm."

Joan took a chance. The king might have taken advantage of the Prince's absence to ally himself with Henry and attempt to re-take Aquitaine. But the Treaty of Bretagne was still in effect, and he did not. He helped her. She solved her problem very effectively in an ingenious way.

In addition to being resourceful she was independent. In 1380, her daughter, Joan, widow of John IV of Britanny, married the Count de St. Pol against her mother's wishes. Joan of Kent was infuriated. De St. Pol was a Frenchman, perhaps suspected of being a spy, and relations with the French were unstable. She probably also considered the marriage below the half-sister of the King of England, and may have thought it an attempt on the part of the King of France to gain access to the inner circles of the English court. Whatever her reasons, she was sufficiently angered to cut her daughter off, personally and financially. Young Richard, who had not been informed of Joan's actions, gave his half-sister the manor of Byfleet upon her marriage. Shortly thereafter the Count and his bride were secretly expelled from England because of the Count's misdeeds (unspecified, perhaps having the effrontery to marry young Joan). The expulsion was covert, perhaps so as not to bring shame on the king, but the wording implies that the king did not even know of it. Joan must have felt that this problem was her concern, and not Richard's. In any case, her judgment proved correct. The Count de St. Pol went to France, was welcomed by the king and became his chamberlain.
Her independence is also apparent in her attitude toward John Wycliffe. Joan of Kent was apparently a good Catholic in the manner of her time. She was generous to St. Alban's and wrote to the Pope on behalf of its abbot when the monastery could not continue making large contributions to his treasury because of financial difficulties. In her will she confirmed that she was of sound mind "et fidem catholicam firmiter proficiendo."

But on May 22, 1377, the Pope issued a bull instructing the Archbishop of Canterbury to warn the king and nobles against Wycliffe's heresies. Joan of Kent and several of her knights (William Neville, Lewis Clifford and Richard Stury) were specifically named as being in need of warning. Joan is the only woman mentioned.

In 1378 the English bishops attempted to enforce the papal bulls against Wycliffe. He was to be tried before Archbishop Sudbury in London. However, Joan of Kent sent a message "de curia Principisse Johannae" warning Sudbury not to pass any sentence against Wycliffe.

The hesitation of Oman, who writes "whether the princess, who seldom meddled in politics, acted on her own initiative, or was inspired by some party behind the scenes, is not known," seems unjustified in the light of other instances of Joan's independence. She probably shared John of Gaunt's distrust of the Church's wealth and power and her support of Wycliffe would seem to have been anti-clerical rather than theological.

Joan's dominant trait seems to have been her love of peace. There are numerous instances in which she acted as intercessor, mediator or giver of counsel to end a conflict or disagreement or to end an injustice. Her attempt to
mediate between John of Gaunt and the angry citizens of London has been mentioned in Chapter I, and instances which occurred during Richard's minority will be discussed in the following chapter. Froissart records an incident which occurred in 1363 when the Prince and Princess of Wales were travelling through France.

The Prince and Princess were invited to the town of Tarbes in the county of Bigorre by the earl of Armagnac. He owed two hundred fifty thousand francs to the earl of Foix, which was his ransom from a battle. The earl of Armagnac requested the Black Prince to ask the earl of Foix to forgive him all or part of the sum. The Prince refused on the grounds that the earl of Foix was deserving of the money. Then Armagnac appealed to Joan of Kent, who with a good heart desired the earl of Foix to give her a gift. "Madam," quoth the earl, "I am but a mean man, therefore I can give no great gifts: but madam, if the thing that ye desire pass not the value of threescore thousand francs, I will give it you with a glad cheer." Yet the princess assayed again if she could cause him to grant her full desire; but the earl was sage and subtle and thought verily that her desire was to have him forgive clearly the earl of Armagnac all his debt, and then he said again: "Madam, for a poor knight as I am, who buildeth towns and castles, the gift I have granted you ought to suffice." The Princess could bring him no farther, and when she saw that she said: "Gentle earl of Foix, the request that I desire of you is to forgive clearly the earl of Armagnac." "Madam," quoth the earl, "to your request I ought well to condescend: I have said to you that if your desire pass not the value of threescore thousand francs, that I would grant it you; but madam, the earl of Armagnac oweth me two hundred fifty thousand francs, and at your request I forgive him thereof threescore thousand francs." Thus the matter stood in that case...
The event reveals Joan of Kent's independence in the face of her husband's prior decision that the earl of Foix deserved his money, as well as her concern for the underdog and her love of bringing peace between opponents.

Her kindheartedness must have been well known, as both the Patent and Close Rolls contain instances in which individuals appealed to her for intervention in litigations against them, and Joan of Kent intervened to see justice done. It has already been mentioned in Chapter I that when her sister-in-law, Elizabeth, widow of Joan's brother John, left the convent to which she had retired after his death in order to re-marry, thereby creating a scandal and eliciting a severe penance from the church, Joan treated her kindly, and permitted her to keep the dower assigned to her from her first husband's estate. As a woman who followed the inclinations of her own heart, Joan must have sympathized with Elizabeth's actions.

Joan of Kent was a beautiful woman who cared about her appearance.

Her love of dress was notorious in an age of extreme luxury and show. She affected the most costly robes of iridescent shot silk. Her wardrobe was crowded with hundreds of dresses; but be they for ordinary wear or for State occasions, they were all of the costliest fabrics. She it was who introduced the custom of embroidering her bodices with ermine. Wonderfully jeweled belts, costly furs, silks from Lyons, Aleppo, and Alexandria, scarce satisfied her longing for show. Her lofty coifs were radiant with pearls and her person glittered with jewels.

No source for this description is given, but it substantiates the impression one gets from reading the Black
Prince's Register, some of the expenses from which were cited in the first Chapter. Yet she was not easily bedazzled.

In spite of her love of jewelry, she had refused to be dazzled by the wonderful gold and jewelled imitation of the Round Table which Don Pedro had presented to her husband on his first arrival. The adventure seemed full of ill omen, and she said to the Prince, "I fear lest ill come of it. The present is beautiful, but it will cost dear." 15

She seems to have been a woman who trusted her intuitions about people. She was typical of her age in believing in the influence of the stars on the course of human events. One John Somer, a mendicant friar, made an astronomical calendar for her. 16

Her love of beauty in the form of brilliant jewels and gowns has been mentioned. It is unknown to what extent she was interested in other forms of beauty, specifically in the arts, although Richard's love of such things may well have come from his mother. There is no record of her having possessed books, although Richard did.

Joan of Kent's character has been varyingly assessed by different authors. Most agree that she was as sweet as she was beautiful, that she had "a discreet and honorable mind, sweetened with all the delicacies of a most surprising beauty." 17

She was a warm-hearted woman, very feminine and appealing, against whom no one had a word to say. 18

Despite her chequered matrimonial history, Joan of Kent is given a high character by her contemporaries. She was beautiful, gentle, and peace
loving, a devoted wife to the Black Prince and in no sense a political intriguer.  

The Chandos Herald, indeed calls her a "lady lovely agreeable and wise," but while she, no doubt, fully deserved the first two encomiums, she had little claim to the last, save in the respect of knowing how to get what she wanted.

Her primary traits were "beauty and desirability rather than strength of character." She was a vigorous and masterful lady, enterprising and energetic in spite of the excessive corpulence which was reducing her physical activity. (in 1377) A considerable heiress in her own right, she had early been used to the control of a great establishment, and was by no means anxious to curtail her estate now that her son was king.

By the time of Richard's accession, Joan of Kent was "amiable and corpulent, but lacked political wisdom and ambition."

Richard had been kept hitherto under the close care of his mother, for his father, the Black Prince, long a broken invalid, seems to have had little to do with his rearing. The Princess of Wales was a lady of whom no man could speak any ill -- unless indeed he was malicious enough to refer to her early matrimonial infelicities with William of Salisbury. She was a lover of peace, a reconciler of enemies, a ready friend of the unfortunate. Her influence was always exerted on the side of wisdom and moderation...To complete the picture of this amiable, if not very forcible, princess, we must add that she was decidedly inclined to favour the reformer Joan Wycliffe.

What sort of a woman was Joan of Kent? Obviously, opinions differ. It does seem that there is enough evidence that she was not just a sweet, simpering beauty, but a woman of independence, who perhaps followed the inclina-
tions of her heart more than of her mind, but who was capable of resourceful action when the situation demanded it, as in her appeal to the French king when the bastard Henry threatened Aquitaine. There is evidence in the expulsion of her daughter Joan and Joan's husband from England that Joan of Kent had a temper and did not like being disobeyed.

She was a devoted mother who kept her family together, taking her four Holland children with her and the Black Prince to Aquitaine and seeing to it that all of her children married well. Thomas, the eldest, married Alice, the daughter of the Earl of Arundel, in 1366. John married Elizabeth, daughter of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster. The marriages of the two Holland daughters are unclear. Matilda (Maud) married Hugh, grandson of Hugh Courtenay, second Earl of Devon. Joan became the consort of John IV, Duke of Brittany and Knight of the Garter. One of Joan's daughters later married the Count de St. Pol. Some sources say that it was Maud, but Walsingham, who was closest to the time, records that Joan was the daughter who married the Frenchman.

Although a devoted mother, she was not a sentimentalist. When forced to chose between the welfare of a dead son and a very sick husband in 1371, she left Edward of Angouleme in Aquitaine to be buried by John of Gaunt and returned to England with the Black Prince.

Joan of Kent's love of peace and her concern for the well being of her youngest son when he became King of England at the age of ten-and-a-half, combined to make her a strong positive influence over her son and the people surrounding him during the early years of his reign.


3. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p. 356.


15. Ibid.


27. Ibid., under Thomas Holland, First Earl of Kent.


CHAPTER VI  INFLUENCE ON RICHARD II

Within the last ten or fifteen years a number of studies have appeared in which reassessments of the reign of Richard II have been attempted. Some of the exaggerations about Richard's lack of wisdom, his financial mismanagement and extreme extravagance, his fiery temper and frequent loss of self control are being eroded. The myths about Richard's ineptitude date from the time of Henry IV, when it was necessary for Henry to justify Richard's deposition. They were continued by the Lancastrians and enshrined by the Tudors, who needed to secure their own right to the throne through the line of Lancaster.

This new look at Richard, his character and his reign, may well lead to a new view of the late medieval ideas of kingship, and royal prerogative, and of the relations of kings and magnates. It is to be hoped that this study of Richard's mother may contribute to this reappraisal of the late fourteenth century monarch by clarifying some aspects of Richard's personality and by demonstrating that it was Joan of Kent, not the Continual Council or Simon Burley or John of Gaunt, who was the primary influence on Richard's reign between 1377 and 1383, and possibly until her death in 1385. Because Joan of Kent's role during Richard's minority was played largely behind the scenes, much of the evidence of her influence is circumstantial. In view of the new understanding of her character presented in the preceding chapter, the image of Joan of Kent as an amiable and corpulent woman who lacked political wisdom and ambition may be laid to a final rest beside the deliberately misleading views of her son.

Joan of Kent was thirty-nine when Richard of Bordeaux,
her seventh and last child, was born. Despite the age of his mother, which would have been advanced for child bearing even in modern times, Richard was a healthy baby.\(^2\)

The circumstances surrounding his birth were mentioned in Chapter I. One modern author suggests that the tension and excitement surrounding the departure of the Black Prince for Portugal may "have had an effect on his (Richard's) nervous system and helped to make him the curious person he turned out to be."\(^3\)

Although this theory may not be medically sound, it is certainly likely that the subsequent actions of Richard's father, leaving the boy in the hands of his mother, had an effect on the boy's character. The Black Prince must have been an absentee father. During Richard's early years in Aquitaine his father was off fighting a good deal of the time. Then ill health forced him to lead a more sedentary life, but what little energy he still possessed seems to have been directed more toward bolstering the declining years of his father, Edward III, than overseeing the formative years of his son. As Oman states, by the time of his accession, "Richard had been kept hitherto under the close care of his mother, for his father, the Black Prince, long a broken invalid, seems to have had little to do with his rearing."\(^4\) The Prince apparently was content to appoint very able tutors for his son, and then trust his upbringing to them and the boy's mother.

The influence of a famous and popular father may be even stronger on a son if reports of that father are delivered by a third party than if the father is himself present. It is likely that Richard developed an idealized view of the Black Prince, and perhaps the fear that he could not
compete with his famous father's exploits. For example, although Richard was physically brave (witness his actions at Smithfield and the fact that he personally led his army in the field on three occasions) and loved horses, he did not participate in jousts. Mathew suggests that this may have been because the idea of being unhorsed was abhorrent to his concept of royal dignity. This may be true, but it may also be that he dreaded unfavorable comparison with his father's prowess in tournaments.

It is impossible to study someone's psyche after he has been dead almost six hundred years. But the fact of the Black Prince's absence during Richard's youth may help to explain the appearance of several of his traits in exaggerated form in his son. Specifically, Richard's bravery, which bordered on foolhardiness at Smithfield; Richard's sense of the royal prerogative, which when applied to the property of the magnates led directly to his deposition; Richard's idea of governance, embodied in a strong central authority, which bred disaffection among his vassals in England as it had among his father's subjects in Aquitaine; and finally his sense of largesse, or extreme generosity, which prompted both father and son to expend huge amounts on rewarding their friends.

From his mother Richard acquired a love of luxury in jewels and dress. Fashions for men became very important during his reign, as courtiers attempted to copy the king. His blonde Plantagenet good looks probably came from both parents, but perhaps more from his mother than his father.

He was the goodliest personage of all the Kings that had been since the conquest, tall of stature, of streight and strong limbes, faire and amiable of countenance, and such a one as might
well be the son of a most beautiful mother.  

The following description, in contrast to the above, is an interesting attempt to analyze the face in Richard's coronation portrait at Westminster, doubtless colored by the author's knowledge of Richard's later life.

The face is boyish and bright in general, but the eyes are strangely withdrawn and introvert, haughty, humorless and overbearing. There is also a lurking sadness. It is the face of a clever person, very conscious of self and of high position, assured, not easily daunted, petulant, sudden in mood and unpredictable, altogether a difficult boy. One has the impression that his mother, famous ex-beauty, leader of fashion, gay sensible and good natured, cannot have had much influence over him.

Although Richard did not inherit Joan of Kent's love of peace, her amiability, or her instinctive sense of how to handle people, he was influenced by her guidance in these directions as long as she lived.

Richard became king in very troubled times. As Myers points out, any attempt to assess the troubles of Richard's reign in terms of his character alone is not satisfactory.

The favorite explanation of Richard's failure is that he was always mentally unbalanced, and finally mad. It is true that he was temperamental, tactless and emotional, too fond of flaunting his authority instead of exercising it unobtrusively, and a bad judge of character and situations. After his victory in 1397 he grew increasingly reckless, capricious, and tyrannical, and it may be that in these last years he became mentally unbalanced. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that not only his failings but his talents worked to his destruction. He preferred beauty and refinement.
to war; and, just as Henry II had been despised by the magnates, Richard found his tastes and qualities, from his patronage of art to his introduction of the use of handkerchiefs, regarded as extravagant and effeminate. To concentrate on the defects of Richard's character is to underestimate the difficulties of the situation. Some of his policies were the same as much-praised Tudor aims — to strengthen the authority of the Crown as the surest safeguard against aristocratic faction and civil strife, to end the waste of resources in the French war, and to assert instead the power of the English crown in the British Isles. To have achieved these aims an abler king than Richard would have needed a more favourable situation. Richard reaped the harvest of his grandfather's policy.

Edward III died in June of 1377, an old man whose old age was blighted by increasing senility and a continuing attachment to Alice Perrers. He was as much distrusted by the commons as was John of Gaunt, not because his intentions were questionable, but because he was thought to be the tool of self-seeking advisors. Although the succession was assured, the heir, Richard, was a child. The stage was set for a power struggle of factions for control of the throne.

The magnates of the realm saw a chance to enhance their own position during a minority. John of Gaunt's place as the eldest of Richard's uncles and the greatest landowner in England has been thoroughly discussed by various authors. Although Gaunt had pledged loyalty to Richard, there was apparently widespread suspicion of his motives, since the death of Edward III followed closely Gaunt's announcement of the annulment of the work of the "Good" Parliament of 1376 toward controlling the advisors
and finances of the king, and his imprisonment of Peter de la Mare, leader of that Parliament.

The Princess and her advisors saw that Richard, though only ten-and-a-half, must be crowned as soon as possible and thereafter the government entrusted to a council deriving its power from him. There could be no question of making the Duke (John of Gaunt) regent. He was too widely distrusted. The belief, unfounded though it was, that he aspired to the throne, was still held, particularly in London. It was this suspicion, which prompted the mayor and alderman, as soon as they heard of Edward's death, to send a deputation under John Philpot to assure the Princess that their money and lives were at Prince Richard's disposal. The Princess, however, did not want to take up a stand against the Duke. She knew that he was quite loyal.\[11\]

The reconciliation between John of Gaunt and the Londoners which Joan of Kent effected within a few days after the death of Edward III was completely characteristic of her. Her young son was to be crowned king. His reign must not be begun on a note of suspicion and distrust.

...at the moment of her son's accession she gave proof of her good sense by accepting frankly the loyal protestations of John of Gaunt and refraining from any attempt to raise up an army against him. Nothing could have been more easy than to take the other course: there were old enemies of the duke who would have been only too happy to combine for such a purpose if the chance had been given them.\[13\]

Despite Tout's allegation that John of Gaunt was using Joan of Kent in an attempt to enhance his own position in order to influence Richard, the prevailing opinion seems to be that Gaunt was not making any moves at this
juncture. Most of the action seems to have been directed toward the prevention of any increase in his power.

With the death of Edward III and the accession of Richard II there came a natural attempt on the part of the popular party to assert itself against the Gaunt dictatorship. At the same time there seems to have been a personal movement on the part of the king's mother to secure her influence in the government by bringing into office dependents of the king's father, the late Prince of Wales (some of whom had been on the popular side in the late crisis) as a counterpoise to the influence of her brother-in-law.

Briefly, the known facts of the transition of office are these: immediately after the death of Edward on June 21, 1377, Joan of Kent brought about a reconciliation between John of Gaunt and the Londoners (with whom she remained ever popular) by convincing Gaunt to release Peter de la Mare, the imprisoned leader of the Parliament of 1376. With Gaunt and London united in support of the boy king, a writ was issued in July 1377, "By writ of the king himself, under the signet," announcing the formulation of a "Continual Council" to aid the king in governing the realm. It is unlikely that Richard himself initiated the writ. It is unlikely that John of Gaunt could have, since he seems to have deliberately withdrawn from any more than a supporting role, and any such move on his part would have unleashed a storm of protest. The most likely candidate for the authorship of the writ is Joan of Kent, acting with the advice of some of her trusted knights from her late husband's retinue. These advisors were possibly the very knights who became members of the Council, Lord Cobham, Richard Stafford, John Devereux, and Hugh
Segrave, with the probable addition of Simon Burley, Richard's former tutor, who seems ever in evidence and was soon to become vice chamberlain.

The day after the coronation a council of eight lords and four knights was set up. A compromise was sought. One sees here the Princess's influence. She and her small boy must try to be on good terms with everyone.

The first Continual Council was composed of the following members:

Bishops
- William Courtenay of London
- Ralph Ergum of Salisbury

Earls
- Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March
- Richard Fitz-Alan, Earl of Arundel

Barons
- Lord Latimer
- Lord Cobham

Bannerets
- Ralph Beauchamp
- Richard Stafford

Knights Bachelors
- John Knyvet
- Ralph Ferrers
- John Devereux
- Hugh Segrave

The Council was selected not in Parliament, but in a meeting of the magnates dominated by the followers of John of Gaunt and Joan of Kent, who was eager to placate the members of the "popular" cause, those who had supported Peter de la Mare and the Good Parliament of 1376. It is interesting that membership in the council was so deliberately distributed among the various echelons of society, as well as between the different political factions.

Although there has been some disagreement, notably between Tout and Lewis about the political leanings of
the members, there is agreement on the fact that the
council was so well balanced that it had no real leadership
or position and was unable to formulate policy. The lean-
ings of the members were the following, according to Lewis:

Sympathetic to John of Gaunt

Beauchamp
Ferrers
Latimer
Knyvet
Salisbury

Sympathetic to Joan of Kent (the Court faction)

Cobham
Stafford
Segrave
Devereux

Sympathetic to the "Popular Cause" (Magnates)

Courtenay
Mortimer
Arundel

Tout puts Beauchamp, Knyvet and Ferrers in the camp
of the Court faction.

By October it had become apparent that the Council was
unable to govern because it was too balanced, and probably
too large. The changes made are interesting because they
show a reduction in the number of Gaunt's adherents. Lati-
mer, Knyvet, Beauchamp and Ferrers were removed, but only
two men were appointed to replace them, Henry le Scrope
and Thomas Appleby, Bishop of Carlisle. Appleby was clearly
of the Court faction and le Scrope was probably of that
group. Arundel was replaced by Hugh, Earl of Stafford, who
was apparently trusted by all sides. These changes gave
the "Court" group of Joan of Kent a majority of six of the
nine members of the second council.

The following October Parliament appointed a Third Continual Council of eight members, of which four or five were adherents of the "Court" faction. This council was the last, and Lewis claims that its more balanced composition reflects the dulling of old animosities. Joan of Kent's policies, of securing her own influence over the council, and of bringing peace among the various factions, were apparently successful. The council was discharged by the Parliament which met in January of 1380.

While the council had responsibility for "ordering the war and all other matters touching the estate of the realm," the responsibility for the king himself remained with his mother and her household. "Joan of Kent acted as his informal guardian and the centre of his court, while Richard himself had his own great seal, privy seal and signet from the beginning." This latter situation represents an attempt to maintain the fiction that the young king was actually ruling with the advice of the council.

"The main influence competing for his (John of Gaunt's) control was that of the Black Prince's household now headed by the Princess of Wales, Joan. Her position of vantage, as permanently in touch with the young king, was partly neutralized by her not very strong character." If it may be accepted that Joan of Kent was indeed a strong character, was used to positions of authority, and had been "early accustomed to the control of a great establishment, and was by no means anxious to curtail her estate now that her son was king," it may be admitted that the advantage to Joan of Kent of constant proximity to the king, would be great.

The household she headed was composed of the most
trusted of the Black Prince's dependents and a few of her own. Joan of Kent did not forget people who had been loyal to her. William Pakington, head of the Wardrobe, had been her receiver. Aubrey Vere received lands and offices. Alan Stokes, the Prince's receiver, became keeper of the great wardrobe, after Walter Ralphs, the Prince's tailor. John Fordham, the Prince's secretary, became keeper of the privy seal. A relation of Joan's, Robert Braybrook, became Richard's secretary and later Joan's own secretary. Simon Burley became vice-chamberlain. Joan's son Thomas Holland, Earl of Kent, was Chamberlain. Tout proposes that Burley was the real leader of the group around the king, and not Joan of Kent. Mathew suggests that Simon Burley was Joan of Kent's "friend and possibly in some sense her lover." Although it is not possible to see into the inner workings of the king's household, it seems possible, now that more is known about the king's mother, to suggest that she was the moving force behind the government. She was in 1377 issuing documents "de curia Principissae Johannae" and in 1380 effected the expulsion of her daughter and son-in-law apparently without Richard's knowledge, which may show that royal officers were used to taking orders from her.

The household was large and expensive to maintain. On three different occasions, in 1377, 1379, and 1380 the king had to borrow £5,000 from the city of London, for which he placed items of plate, clothing and jewelry as security. The expenses of the government were great, and the attempts at taxation which ensued precipitated the Peasants Revolt of 1381.

The various accounts of that rising are well known.
There has been much discussion of the way in which the group clustered around the king in the Tower of London conducted their strategy. Kreighn \(^{31}\) suggested that the influence of Joan of Kent may be seen in Richard's granting of charters to the peasants. This is possible, but it seems reasonable to assume that given the numbers of the peasants and the lack of a ready royal army this course of action would appear prudent even to the old soldiers present, Knolles and Joan of Kent's former husband, William of Salisbury. Steel\(^ {32}\) asserts that the pardons granted after the revolt were Joan of Kent's doing.

It seems likely that Joan of Kent stayed deliberately in the background during the revolt. Probably she was frightened. Perhaps she felt that it was a time when the boy king must be seen as the Monarch alone and without the support of his household. Richard grew up to be something of a gambler, taking his chances with people and events.\(^ {33}\) There is ample evidence that he and his mother were acutely aware of the high stakes involved in his confrontation with the rebels. There is a sense of risking all to gain all in the accounts of those days of June, 1381. It echoes in the words of Joan of Kent and Richard upon his return to the wardrobe after Smithfield.

And whan she sawe the kyng her sonne she was greatly rejoysed, and sayde, A fayre sonne, what payne and great sorowe that I have suffred for you this day. Than the kynge answered and sayd, Certaynly madame, I knowe it well; but nowe it is tyme. I have this day recovered myne herytage and the realme of Englande, the whiche I hadde nere lost. Thy the kyng taryed that day with his mother...\(^ {34}\)

In January of 1382 Richard was married to Anne of
Luxembourg. There is no doubt that Richard developed a deep romantic love for his bride, although in the early years of their marriage "it was still the princess of Wales who presided benignly over the two married children -- for they were little more." 33

After Richard's marriage his mother slipped gradually into the background. She was fifty-four in 1382, and there are many references to her corpulence. Whether the famous former beauty was suffering from dropsy or some other ailment, or whether she just succumbed to years of good eating is unknown. There are some references to her increasing discomfort which could be disease or simple obesity. In either case, Joan of Kent led a quiet life until 1385 when she was again called in to the role of mediator.

In this same year fell a controversie betwix the kyng and the duke of Lancaster, in so much that summe of the kyngis house had conspired the dukes deth. That aspied, the duke vitailed the castel of Pountrefaçt and kept him there; but afterward, be mene of the kyngis modir, there was procured pes betweix hem. 38

The Princess believed that Richard could rule successfully only with the support of John of Gaunt. She could not bear to have him lose that support. A monk had come to Richard, babbling of a plot on Gaunt's part against the king. Richard, infuriated, threatened the duke. The monk was placed in the custody of John Holland, Joan of Kent's second son, but was tortured until he died without revealing the source of his charges. Gaunt holed himself up in Pountrefaçt and Richard at Westminster.

But Princess Joan, the mother of the king, unable to tolerate so great a division of sover-
reignty, although she was obese and ill, and because of the fatness of her body was scarcely able to support her own weight, nevertheless, heedless of her own physical comfort, voluntarily took upon herself the laborious journey, now to the king, now to the duke, sparing neither expense nor humble entreaty, until, the expression of a pledge having been effected, she re-established peace and harmony between them.

There is also a vivid account of this episode in Higden's *Polychronicon*, and in Adam Usk, both of whom date the incident in 1386 (after Joan of Kent's death). The Usk account, although its details are wrong (it depicts Richard refusing to listen to a council appointed to advise him in 1386) presents a poignant scene of a mother begging her son to become independent and wise.

And on her knees she prayed to the king, her son, as he looked for her blessing, in no wise to bend to the wishes of flatterers, and especially of those who were now urging him on; otherwise he would bring down her curse upon him. But the king with reverence raised her up and promised that he would willingly be guided by the council of the twelve. To whom his mother replied: "At thy coronation, my son, I rejoiced that it had fallen my lot to be the mother of an anointed king; but now I grieve, for I foresee the fall which threatens thee, the work of accursed flatterers."

Despite the inaccuracies of the setting, it is interesting to see that at least one near contemporary source regarded Joan of Kent as a wise woman whose advice Richard did not follow, to his own detriment.

Joan of Kent died in August, 1385, her death perhaps hastened by Richard's refusal to listen to her pleas for forgiveness of her son John Holland, who had murdered one
of Richard's knights. By that time she undoubtedly realized that Richard had a temper which she could not control for him, and that his lack of judgment would bring him problems. According to Stubbs, her death "seems to have been the signal for the outbreak of political quarrels, which had perhaps been temporarily healed by her influence whilst she lived."  

There can be no doubt that Richard loved his mother deeply. He listened to her advice, and generally heeded it. When it became obvious that her ill health would require constant attention, by June of 1385, he appointed thirteen of her knights "to assist continually about the person of the king's mother for her comfort and security wherever she shall abide within the realm, rendering other services befitting the estate of so great a lady..."  

According to Steel, Richard possessed a "gentle, obvious affection" for his mother. His famous badge of the white hart was adopted from her symbol, the white hind, rather than any of the emblems employed by his father. Her death occurred while Richard was attempting to subdue the Scots, and her body was carefully preserved until his return. She was buried, by her request, with Thomas Holland in Stamford.

It has been the contention of this paper that earlier studies of Richard II's reign have erred because they have failed to take into account the influence of the king's mother.

Joan of Kent is a woman about whom a great deal of information has been recorded, but in bits and pieces in very diverse sources. This information has not until the present been correlated into any single place, so a picture of Joan of Kent has never emerged. She is a shadowy figure
in the Garter legends, in Chaucer criticism, chronicles and history books. It is hoped that this attempt to draw together what is known about her into one place, and to characterize the woman that emerges from the puzzle pieces, will dispel some of the shadows.

The woman that appears is a strong character, used to achieving her own ends, who tried to moderate the tempestuous character of her youngest son in order to make him a wise and temperate king of England. The course of English history would be very different had she succeeded in effecting a more lasting change in him.
CHAPTER VI FOOTNOTES


29. Ibid., pp. 429-430.

30. Ibid., pp. 443-444.


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