

CECILY PLANTAGENET'S 1ST MARRIAGE¹

by Douglas Richardson²

ABSTRACT

In this article Douglas Richardson discusses the evidence for the marriage of Cecily Plantagenet sometime in 1485 to Ralph Scrope of Upsall. The brief marriage was dissolved in 1486.

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Polydore Vergil stated in his history of the reign of King Richard III that just prior to overthrowing King Richard III, while still in France, Henry Tudor [future Henry VII] received rumour that King Richard III had married his [i.e. Richard's] niece, Cecily Plantagenet, daughter of King Edward IV, to an "obscure man". An exact quote from Vergil reads as follows:

Henry [Tudor]... he departyd to Roan [Rouen]. While he taryed here, and riggyd his navy at the mouth of Seyne, a rumor came unto his eare that king Richard, his wife being dead, was amyndyd to mary Elizabeth, his brother Edwardes dowghter, and that he had maryed Cecyly, Edwards other daughter, unto an obscure man of no reputation. (Ellis, 1844).

Alison Weir (1992) makes reference to this passage in Vergil in her book, *The Princes in the Tower*, where she states:

... Vergil states that when Henry Tudor, in France, learned what was afoot, ... [he] was even more downcast when he heard that Richard proposed to marry Elizabeth's sister Cecily to an unknown knight so that Henry should be baulked of yet another Yorkist princess.

Since Vergil first reported the "rumour" of Cecily Plantagenet's marriage to an "obscure man," historians and genealogists have largely ignored Cecily Plantagenet's possible first marriage. Recent scholarly research indicates, however, that King Richard III did in fact marry Cecily Plantagenet to someone as alleged by Vergil in his history. The correction volume to the Complete Peerage (Hammond, 1998) states (sub Welles) that Cecily Plantagenet married...

.... sometime after June 1482, probably after the accession of Richard III" to "Ralph Scrope of Upsall, brother of Thomas Lord Scrope of Upsall. This marriage was dissolved in 1486.

The source cited by Hammond (1998) for this information is Rosemary Horrox (1989), who mentions Cecily Plantagenet's marriage to Ralph Scrope in passing. In a footnote, however, Horrox in turn cites as her source for this marriage two other works: Helmholz (1974) and Chrimess (1972). I have examined both these works. Chrimess states that all of King Edward IV's daughters were unmarried in 1485, and, in a footnote, he lists all of these daughters by name and gives particulars of their lives and marriages. He includes Cecily in this list but does not mention any marriage to Ralph Scrope.

As for Helmholz, on pages 160-161, he includes a long discussion regarding the lack of surviving divorce records in medieval England for gentry and nobility, which discussion reads as follows: *The absence of litigants of the upper classes is also worthy of note. It is fairly certain that*

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the cases where the record gives no occupation for the parties did not involve people of higher standing. We can infer this because when they did appear, their status was specifically identified. Their title was given, they were specifically styled dominus, or the fact of their lordship of a manor was recorded. Several examples appear in the Cause papers at York [see Footnote 89]. In fact, the York records and the thirteenth-century Canterbury sede vacante material produce almost all the litigants of the upper classes that we have. In other dioceses, few or no persons of any rank appear [see Footnote 90]. This may seem strange. We usually think it was the upper classes which made most liberal use of marriage law, especially in suits for divorce. The most likely explanation for their absence from our records is that the gentry and nobility usually brought their disputes directly to the bishop, to be heard by him in person or in his court of audience ... Also there is reference to marriage cases involving upper class families in most Episcopal registers. This again suggests that these people went directly to the bishop. Perhaps greater privacy was thus available.

The footnotes referred to in the above quotation read as follows:

Footnote 89: *York Consistory Act Book, vol. 4, f. 88r (1486) is a suit between 'preclara ac nobilis domina Cecilia Plantagenet contra Radulphum Scrope de Upsall.'* Other examples of upper class litigants: *York C.P. E 12/1 (1323); C.P. E 46 (1340); C.P. E 179 (1390); C.P. E 259 (1368-9); Canterbury Ecc. Suit, no. 203 (1294); no. 219 (1301); no. 297 (1293).*

Footnote 90: *An exception is Lichfield B/C/1/1, f. 270r (1469), where a litigant was styled armiger.*

While Helmholz makes no effort to identify Lady Cecily Plantagenet, it is obvious that she was in fact King Edward IV's daughter and that she was married by King Richard III as alleged in Vergil's history to someone below her station.

Hammond (1998) dates Cecily Plantagenet's marriage to Ralph Scrope as having taken place *sometime after June 1482*. The June 1482 date appears to be derived from the first of three documents found in *Foedera*, by Thomas Rymer (1727), as follows:

1. Agreement dated 11 June 1482 between King Edward IV and Alexander Stewart, Duke of Albany, contains provision that if Alexander can make himself *clere from all other Women*, that within the following year King Edward shall *gyf my Lady Cecille his Douchter on the said Alexander*. [pp.156–157]
2. Document dated 4 Aug. 1482 regarding proposed marriage of the *Ritht Noble Princes Cecile* and James, first born son of King James III of Scotland. [pp.161-162]
3. Document dated 12 Oct. 1482, whereby King Edward IV utterly rejects the proposed marriage between his daughter, *Cicile*, and James, son of James, King of Scotland [pp.165-166].

We see that Cecily Plantagenet was definitely unmarried as late as 12 October 1482, when her father, King Edward IV, "utterly" rejected a proposal of marriage for her and the son of the King of Scotland. As noted above, Chrimes (1972) states that all of King Edward IV's daughters (including Cecily) were unmarried in 1485. As such, the marriage of Cecily Plantagenet and Ralph Scrope must have occurred after 12 October 1482 and probably sometime in 1485, just before Henry Tudor invaded England and defeated and killed King Richard III as the Battle of Bosworth 22 August 1485.

As for the identity of Ralph Scrope of Upsall, he is doubtless the same individual as Ralph Scrope of Masham (or Upsall), 3rd son of Thomas Scrope, 5th Lord Scrope of Masham (died 1475), by his wife, Elizabeth de Greystoke. On his brother, Henry's death without issue in 1512, he succeeded as 9th Lord Scrope of Masham (or Upsall) (C[okayne], 1949, sub Scrope). While hardly from an obscure family, being the younger landless son of a deceased baron, Ralph Scrope was surely much below Cecily Plantagenet's station. Curiously, Hammond (1998) makes no mention of Ralph Scrope's brief marriage to Cecily Plantagenet under its listing of corrections and additions for the Scrope family.

I find that Ralph Scrope and Cecily Plantagenet were blood related as follows:

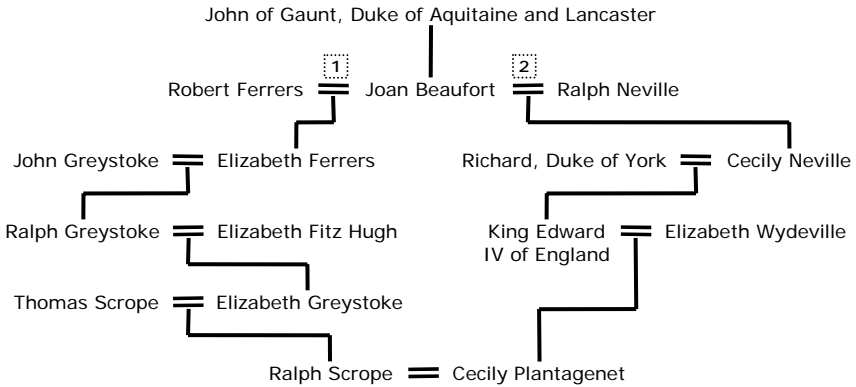


Fig 1. Blood Relation Between Ralph Scrope and Cecily Plantagenet

Fig 1 shows that Ralph Scrope and Cecily Plantagenet were related in the 4th and 3rd degrees of kindred, both being descended from Joan (or Jane) Beaufort, the legitimated daughter of John of Gaunt. If so, a dispensation would have been required for this marriage. I have not yet checked for such a dispensation, and, if anyone knows of its existence, I should appreciate knowing about it.

In conclusion, it appears that Cecily Plantagenet married sometime in 1485 to Ralph Scrope of Upsall. The marriage was evidently brief and childless. It was dissolved sometime in 1486. Mr Helmholz deserves much credit for the discovery of the divorce record pertaining to this marriage.

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