

RICHARD CLOUDESLEY'S LIFE AND TIMES

Richard Cloudesley's modern fame rests on the charity bearing his name, and perhaps some people living in Islington associate him correctly with Cloudesley Place, Road and Square.

With the loss of so many official records from the Tudor period and in the absence of any private papers, Richard Cloudesley must remain a somewhat shadowy figure, but sufficient survives to enable us to reconstruct his career, and to gain some insight into his life. In 1509, shortly after the accession of Henry VIII, he described himself, somewhat loosely, as a 'husbandman, yeoman or gentleman' living in Islington when he took the precaution of suing out a general pardon.¹ Such pardons were a matter of course for men of some substance and position, which was precisely what Cloudesley was.

As a 'husbandman, yeoman or gentleman', he belonged to a class which with an income of at least 40*s.* a year qualified to serve as a juror in a variety of proceedings, to hold office in shire administration, to pay taxes and to vote in parliamentary elections. (At the turn of the sixteenth century 40*s.* freeholders in Middlesex numbered some 1200.) In other words, he belonged to the class upon which the routine running of the kingdom fell. What has come to light about him reveals him to have been an active member of his class, a prominent figure in Islington and its locality.

Cloudesley was Islington born and bred. Although he himself was to live somewhere not far from the parish church, to which it was linked by a 'causeway' (a raised road), his parents had lived at the north end of the town, more conveniently situated near the chapel called the Hermitage where they worshipped, and where masses were said for their souls after their deaths.

Alternative Surname of Yon

The names of his parents have not come down to us. Cloudesley used an *alias* Yon, sometimes spelled Yin, Iyn or Eyne. Although this may indicate that he was born out of wedlock, surnames in the early sixteenth century had not stabilised as they were to later. It was by no means standard practice for a man to use his patronymic. Thus, Yon is likely to have been Cloudesley's mother's maiden name. A family called Yon of the same social status as the Cloudesley family can be traced in the county of Middlesex from the late middle ages, and a John Yon and his wife Joan were neighbours of Cloudesley's in Islington.²

¹ *LP Hen. VIII, i(1), 438.*

² *London Guildhall RO, ma 9168/5, f.41.*

Cloudesley had two brothers. Thomas Cloudesley *alias* Yon of Islington outlived him by some four years when the administration of his goods was granted to his ‘natural’ brother John, who survived until 1527.³ (At first sight the use of the adjective ‘natural’ seems to support the

possibility of illegitimacy, but in sixteenth-century usage it served to distinguish men born of the same parents from their brothers-in-law, both of whom were called simply ‘brother’.) At the time that the Cloudesleys and Yons lived in Islington it was a predominantly agricultural community with a population of nearly 500.⁴

Cloudesley as “Constable”

Cloudesley was probably born in the reign of Edward IV (1461-83). He must have been at least 21 when he was appointed one of the constables for Islington. Constables were minor officials responsible for the routine maintenance of law and order. In 1494, while executing his duties as constable, he killed William Lloyd of Islington, gentleman, in self-defence, and for this reason he briefly surrendered himself into the Marshalsea prison in Southwark, pending his exoneration by John Elryngton, one of the coroners for Middlesex, and its acceptance by Chief Justice Hussey. Subsequently, on 24th October 1494, Henry VII granted him a pardon for this unfortunate episode.⁵

Ten years later, in 1504, Cloudesley was one of a number of men accused by Richard Walker, the son and heir of a London grocer, of depriving him of his inheritance. Walker, who was under age, had parted with land in Islington and elsewhere, and then regretted it.⁶ Sometime, in the following 12 years, Cloudesley, together with two other men, was accused of preventing William Gibson from entering into 31 acres of wood, meadow and pasture in Islington, in what looks like a collusive action to establish Gibson's title to the property.⁷ None of these matters seems to have harmed his career.

Appointed “Escheator”

In the autumn of 1513, he was appointed escheator for Middlesex, with responsibility for



³ London Guildhall RO, ms 9168/7. ff. 24, 227.

⁴ London and Middlesex Chantry Certificates (London Record Society xvi, 1980), 62.

⁵ PRO, C 66/576. 10(30) calendared CPR, 1494-1509, p.7.

⁶ PRO, C1/313/25.

⁷ PRO, C54/364, m. 50 calendared CFR, 1500-1509, p.113.

collecting dues owed to the King.⁸ This marked him out as a man well regarded by the crown and his neighbours. It was an important, initial step in the work of administering Middlesex.

Late Marriage Cloudesley's advancement was cut short by his death in 1518 (when he was probably approaching 50). This seems to have been unexpected. It occurred shortly after his marriage to one Alice, whose maiden name has not been established. On 7th January 1518 he acquired from Sir William Sandys a 'mese' (house) and 30 acres of meadow in Holloway which he had previously held by copyhold from Sandys as lord of the manor of Barnsbury. This land, Alice later implied, was to have been settled on her.⁹ A week later, over the space of three consecutive days from the 13th, Cloudesley made his will and testament.¹⁰ This was standard procedure on marriage, and his will gives no hint of illness, only the conventional assertions of the testator being clear of mind and of good memory.

Probate of Will

However, within two months he was dead. On 18th March 1518, Richard Hawkes, one of the executors, exhibited Cloudesley's will in the London commissary court and together with Robert Myddelton, Thomas Wylkinson, John Wylson and Robert Assheton testified to its authenticity. Hawkes was granted probate.¹¹ On 18th May he reappeared in the court with a copy of the inventory of Cloudesley's possessions (unfortunately lost).¹²

After leaving his soul to 'Almighty God, my Creator and Saviour, to His most blessed Mother Saint Mary and to all the Holy Company of Heaven', Cloudesley asked to be buried in the churchyard at Islington near the grave of his parents, and for five marks (£3 6s. 8d.) to be distributed in pence to the poor attending his funeral. More unusually, in an age when gravestones were rare, he asked for 'a stone to be laid over me on my grave, the price five marks'.¹³ He left the friars from the four London friaries £4 for escorting his body to Islington church for burial, and the highly respected Franciscan Observants from Greenwich £2 for

⁸ *LP Hen. VIII*, i(1), g. 2484(17); *List of Escheators for England and Wales* (List and Index Society lxxii).**

⁹ PRO, C 1/131/25.

¹⁰ London Guildhall RO, ms 9171/0, ff. 75-7.

¹¹ London Guildhall RO, ms 9168/5, f. 17v.

¹² London Guildhall RO, ms 9168/5, f. 21.

¹³ This gravestone was subsequently inscribed '1517', which was the old style date, which remained popular long after the introduction of the new style dates. Cloudesley's will is also dated 13-15 January '1517', but that it was made in 1518 is made clear from the reference immediately following to it being the ninth year of the reign of Henry VIII, which ran from 22nd April 1517 to 22nd April 1518.

singing a solemn *dirige* and mass. (He also gave the nuns of St Mary's, Clerkenwell, £2 for singing a *placebo*, *dirige* and a requiem mass.) He provided at Islington for 1000 masses to be said for his soul.

He also allowed for masses to be said at his month's mind, that is the commemoration of his death one month after his decease, and for obits, that is masses for his soul, to be said monthly for a year, and thereafter for annual obit, as well as for masses to be said at the Islington Hermitage. He also left the brotherhood of Jesus (attached to the parish church) 26*s.* 8*d.* a year towards maintaining the mass of Jesus at Islington, on condition the fraternity caused a trental of masses (a set of thirty masses to be said on one day or within a given period) to be said for his soul. Finally, he endowed a priest at the Scala Celi (the Ladder to Heaven) at the Savoy Hospital to sing for him for a year. (In his elaborate and costly arrangements for his funeral and for the transition of his soul through Purgatory, Cloudesley was the embodiment of late medieval piety, soon to be swept away at the Reformation.)

In addition to these provisions, he left torches to be burnt in his memory at Islington and in the adjoining parishes of St James's Clerkenwell, St Pancras Kentish Town, Hornsey, Finchley, Friern Barnet and Hampstead, where he was a familiar figure. He gave small sums to the parish priests there to pray for him openly at divine service on Sunday and to exhort their congregations to do the same. As was customary he left token sums to his parish church, St John's priory Clerkenwell (the most important religious foundation in the locality), the prisons in London (Newgate) and in Southwark (King's Bench and the Marshalsea), the lunatic asylum at the London Bethlehem and the leper hospital in Highgate, where in return the lepers were expected to remember him while saying rosary.



St John's Priory Clerkenwell

He also donated clothes to the indigent, the gowns for the recipients in Islington to have the name of Jesus on them for men and the name of Mary for women: he prohibited the beneficiaries from selling or pawning their gowns. In an age where road maintenance was the responsibility of the parishes through which the roads passed, and could be burdensome to the local communities, he provided £20 for the repair of Holloway Road, and if that was insufficient a further £20. He set aside 14 acres called Stoney Fields in Islington, the revenue from which was to be administered by six men chosen annually to pay for the masses, obits and charitable distributions in perpetuity. (His munificence exceeded the donations made on average by his social peers, and suggests that not only did he die well off, but also he had no children to provide for.)

With the exception of two leases granted to Robert Myddelton and John Bucton, Cloudesley ordered the sale of the rest of his property in Barnsbury, Islington and Clerkenwell, the proceeds

being left to St John's priory or the London Charterhouse. Almost as an afterthought, he remembered his brothers (£10 a piece), his wife ('the lease of my house that I now dwell in') and asked for his debts to be settled. As 'special executors' he named Thomas Docwra,¹⁴ the prior of St John's Clerkenwell, Sir Thomas Lovell,¹⁵ treasurer of the royal Household, Sir John Fyneux,¹⁶ chief justice, John More,¹⁷ a King's serjeant, Bartholomew Westby, Richard Hawkes and Thomas Roberts. It was standard practice of men of Cloudesley's rank to name local magnates and bigwigs as supervisors of their wills, and thus the appearance of figures such as Docwra, Lovell, Fyneux and More denotes little beyond business acquaintance. The bulk of the work executing the will fell on Hawkes and Roberts.

Widow Remarries

After Cloudesley's death, his widow Alice married Henry Lodesman who lived in Clerkenwell, and who in 1524 was assessed for tax on goods worth £40.¹⁸ Alice Lodesman alleged (correctly) that as Cloudesley's widow she was entitled to a third of his estate. Unfortunately, the outcome of the lawsuit she brought in the court of Chancery is not known. Nor are any of the details of the settlement made on her on marriage to Cloudesley, which are likely to have been sufficient to meet the legal requirement for her provision after her husband's death: they may also have been conditional upon her not remarrying.

Confiscation by the Crown

Under the Act of 1548 dissolving religious foundations (1 Edw. VI, c. 14), Cloudesley's endowments passed to the crown. Later in the same year a receiver for the Court of Augmentations (the court responsible for the administration of former ecclesiastical property) noted under Islington:

Obit and Jesus Brotherhood: a close of 12 acres, bequeathed by Richard Cloudesley and now tenanted by Walter Coyny at the rate of £7 a year. Of which, £1 obit, including a distribution of

¹⁴ Sir Thomas Docwra was constantly being used by Henry VII and Henry VIII for various tasks but his possession of firm administrative qualities is shown by his role of Prior of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem based at Clerkenwell, a post he held for 25 years.

¹⁵ Sir Thomas Lovell had previously been executor of Cecilia Duchess of York (1494), Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond, and founder of St John's College in Cambridge, Henry VII, Sir Thomas Brandon, the Earl of Oxford (1512) and Sir Robert Sheffield, Lord Mayor of London (1514).

¹⁶ Sir John Fyneux had also been an executor of Henry VII and had performed the same role for Cardinal Morton (1500). His early experience in property management had been recognised in his native Kent. In his 30s he had been steward of 129 manors at the same time.

¹⁷ Sir John More, like his father before him and also his more famous son Sir Thomas More, had been trained as a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn, becoming a serjeant (the early version of a QC) in 1503 and a judge by 1518.

¹⁸ PRO, C1/425/50; E 179/141/113, nos 1.6.

6s. 8d. to the poor; £1 6s. 8d. to the brotherhood singing masses for the same Cloudesley; total reductions £2 6s. 8d. Clear remainder £4 13s. 4d. a year.¹⁹

What appears to have been a slip on the part of the receiver in respect to the obit money seems to have led to an investigation which in 1551 ended with a decree that the crown was entitled to £2 13s. 4d. and no more. The feoffees were entitled to the residue of the estate, and the residue was to be distributed according to Cloudesley's directions.²⁰

The Charity Cloudesley's Will founded does continue to this day, as a landowner in Islington.

The entitlement of the Crown to the £2 13s. 4d. charged on the Estate was transferred by James I as part of his contribution to the capital of the New River Company. It was redeemed in the early 1900s.

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¹⁹ *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificates*, 62.

²⁰ Islington Public Library, Report to the Vestry on the Cloudesley Estate 1851.