

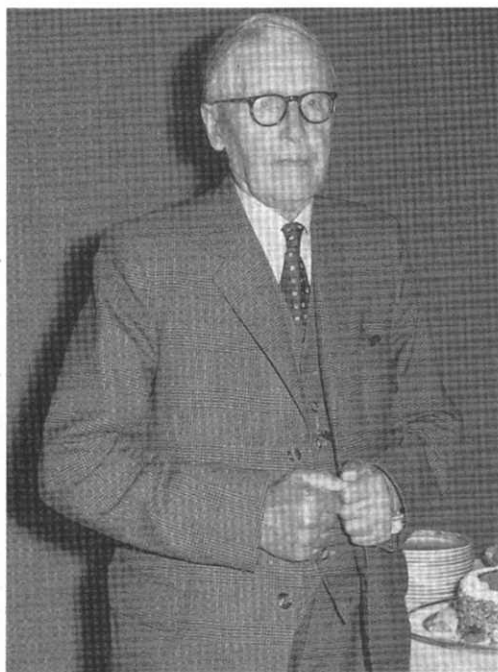
# A Great Richard III Evening in York

JOHN SAUNDERS

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The early activities of the Fellowship of the White Boar are not well documented, and what we do know is dependent on references in letters or the occasional press coverage. In the 2004 spring *Bulletin* I wrote about the unveiling of the Middleham window. In this issue we go forward one year to 1935 when Saxon Barton gave a lecture at the Tempest Anderson Hall in York. The hall is still there and is part of the building that forms the Yorkshire Museum situated in the city's attractive Museum Gardens. It is also still used by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society for lectures.

This story makes reference to a number of other individuals: Reginald Bunnett, Captain Tom Churchill and Canon Gill in particular. Captain Tom Churchill shared an interest in the tomb at Sheriff Hutton with Barton and was a member of the Fellowship. Reginald



Reginald Bunnett

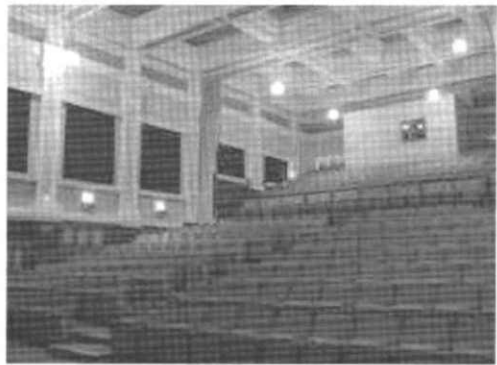
Bunnett will be well known to Yorkshire Branch members for he was a founder, and for many years a stalwart of the branch and was made a vice-president of the Society in recognition of his service. He died at the age of 96 in 1976. His obituary in *The Ricardian* notes that 'He shared his great knowledge of the Plantagenets and the period. No-one in Yorkshire did more for the Society and the rethinking of Richard's life and times.' Reginald Bunnett will be the subject of a future *Ricardian Heroes* article. Unfortunately I have not been able to find out any further details about Canon Gill, so if any readers have information about him I would be pleased to hear from them. Others mentioned: Philip Nelson, Aylmer Vallance, Philip Lindsay and Tom Heslewood were all Fellowship members; Vallance and Nelson were antiquarians, Lindsay a writer and Heslewood an actor.

However let's get back to the 1930s to take up the story. Reginald Bunnett had written to Saxon Barton back in 1933 asking him to lecture to the Yorkshire Archaeological Society. He replied immediately 'I don't want to put you off altogether. I should dearly love to fill an evening for you. My trouble is I have too much to do just now – having my own Society to run single handed.' It was to be two years before he was able to give his lecture. It was finally fixed for 1 November 1935 and was given a rather flamboyant title *King Richard III and his only son. The Pride of York. The Hope of England*. Nonetheless, it would be a rare opportunity for the Fellowship to state their case in public.

His fellow Sheriff Hutton enthusiast, Captain Tom Churchill, had written to Barton early in earlier in the year 'Now! There is a Canon of York Minster called Canon Gill who is a staunch Plantagenet loyalist ... he is very keen to meet you, and has cut out of the papers all your letters ... I found him very

friendly, and would like you to go and see him or write to him.' Contact was made and a correspondence began. In September Barton proudly advised the Canon of his forthcoming lecture 'We are to have a great Richard III evening in York on Friday 1 November at eight o'clock when I am to speak ... some of the opposition party may take the trouble to come up from London to speak afterwards and Philip Nelson, Aylmer Vallance, Tom Heslewood and Philip Lindsay are coming to support the Richardites ... to my great astonishment Philip Lindsay seems to have a sort of 'fan' following of young ladies who believe in Richard. Several have written to me to say that if their Mamas will allow they will travel great distances to hear Richard vindicated.' Who the 'opposition' was is not clear although it is most likely they were historians who took the traditionalist view of the period. If this were the case it is an indication that the Fellowship was having some impact. Gill replied 'I am delighted that you are coming ... you will have a big audience, very many of them young people – the very ones we want to imbue with our ideas ... I do not fear any opposition from London. 'Ça va sans dire' that Philip Lindsay has a large following of beauty.' The reference to the young ladies attached to Philip Lindsay perhaps anticipated a trend in the future membership profile of the Richard III Society.

With the challenge of a mainly uncommitted audience and the possibility of some opposition, Barton pondered on what to cover. To Canon Gill he wrote 'I want to stress his many kind and generous acts, his (if you like) 'good character' before Bosworth, with as an anti-climax the hideous tyrant depicted thereafter. I want to stress the fact that Yorkshire believed in him to the last and that Yorkshire men are no fools ... and I am going to ask my audience to be the jury and I am going to ask for a verdict of 'not proven'...' In the course of his professional life Barton had given many lectures, but he had some reservations about this one which he expressed to Gill, 'I only doubt my own ability to "put the message across", as the Americans say – for I am no orator. I have searched in vain for a local orator to take my place, but none will come.



Tempest Anderson Hall

So to the best of my poor ability I must try the role myself and must try my best not to betray my cause.'

The lecture was to take place at the Tempest Anderson Hall. The previous week had seen Canon Gill lecture on 'Heart Burials', and he doubtless made use of the occasion to publicise Barton's the following week. Barton had been working until three o'clock in the morning of 1 November finishing his lecture. After a few hours sleep he had to face a busy round of operations during the day and then the long drive from Liverpool to York. Despite the heavy workload he managed to get to York in time for the meeting's 8 o'clock start. His talk was illustrated with slides borrowed from Aylmer Vallance.

The following day *The Yorkshire Post* reported on the meeting 'Dr Saxon Barton, who has spent many years in historical research, lectured last night on Richard III and his Yorkist associations and suggested that Richard had been maligned by history and received less than justice at the hands of historians. Whatever might be said of Richard III in modern documents, the ancient city of York always thought a great deal of him and whenever he visited the city gave him a tremendous reception. Yorkshire men are supposed to be shrewd and perhaps their judgement in this case was correct. Perhaps Richard was a brutal feudal prince of his period, but if they looked back into ancient documents they would see Richard in quite a different light, which might cause them to modify their views. Dr Barton said that the murder of the young prince at Tewkesbury, the mur-



Saxon Barton

der of Henry VI and Clarence and other crimes he was supposed to have committed, were reported by ancient chronicles as little more than rumour and were insinuations by his enemies rather than historic facts.' The report gives a revealing insight into Barton's style of debate and suggests that he spoke

with a fair degree of passion about his subject. He certainly seems to have convinced *The Post's* correspondent.

Barton's own feelings about the lecture were expressed in a letter to Canon Gill written shortly after he returned to Liverpool 'I have never made quite such a fool of myself before and cannot understand how I came to lose all sense of time, as I am used enough to speaking to students at my own lectures to know that one has to fit one subject to the clock. When I did wake up I had not even reached the truly important evidence I wanted to bring forward – I really ought to apologise to your Society – I am sure that they have been bored to tears – and in very trying circumstances they were very polite.' He was being too harsh on himself. It is not at all unusual for lectures to over-run and the press reports give no indication that the lecture was anything but a success. Indeed Canon Gill wrote to congratulate Barton on behalf of the Archaeological Society.

Rather prophetically Barton had mentioned in a letter written shortly before the event that 'this is probably the last chance of a counter-attack on the enemy in public for many years'. He was right. It was to be the last recorded public activity of the Fellowship until after the Second World War, which was already looming on the horizon.