



AGINCOURT
600

**Was Margery Spuret married to Thomas Hornby?
(Or was Thomas married to Beatrix de Gillyng instead?!)
A medieval soap opera**

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Introduction

This is a lively and interactive classroom role-playing activity based on real-life events and characters from the 1390s. Names and events have **not** been changed to protect the innocent! The language used by the characters in this exercise has been modernised to reflect today's vocabulary but in all essential detail reflects the words actually given in evidence before a court of law over 600 years ago – a classic soap opera to rival anything *East Enders* or *Corrie* can offer!

The exercise focuses on a dispute between three young people, Thomas Hornby, Margery Spuret and Beatrix Gillyng (all in their late teens or early twenties). It is essentially a dramatisation of a case where the church court in medieval York was called on to pass judgement on who was actually married to whom. The resources allow a class to take on the roles of the protagonists in the case, the witnesses called to give evidence and to sit as a modern judge and jury to pass their own judgement.

These resources can be used in a number of different ways. At the most basic level, the role play can be used as a 'warm up exercise' of no more than ten to 15 minutes to help get pupils thinking and talking about life in the later Middle Ages. Beyond this, however, the resource offers considerable scope for thinking about and discussing issues to do with sources and interpretation, the structure of society and whether we underestimate the complexity of life and thinking in the later Middle Ages. Most of all, this activity is designed to help pupils learn that history is not just about politics, warfare, kings and queens but is just as much concerned with the daily lives of all people from rich to poor. The characters involved in these events made very little impact on history. They did not send hundreds to die on the battlefields of England or France, nor did their actions affect the fate of crowns, countries, borders or dynasties. But does this make their lives any less significant or their concerns more trivial?

In practical terms it teaches pupils about the daily lives of typical working people, how they lived and the kind of work that they did. It shows how young people met and socialised and how partnerships were formed. It also sheds light on how disputes were resolved, and the role of the church in people's lives. In particular it focuses on the medieval understanding of how marriages were formed, showing clearly that this understanding was different from today's and that ideas can and do change over time.

There is ample scope here for very lively debate and division along gender lines (perhaps to be anticipated). It should also be borne in mind that discussion and debate may get into potentially difficult areas and may require some sensitive intervention at points.

Objectives

Through taking part in this activity students will understand that:

- 1) We can learn about the lives of townspeople and villagers in the Middle Ages, not just about the good and the great – we just have to look for the right sources.
- 2) In some ways, people haven't really changed that much – the people in this exercise really just want to be settled, happy and to get on with their lives.
- 3) At the more detailed level:
 - a) Understandings of marriage in the Middle Ages were different from ours today.
 - b) The church tried to regulate marriage but still recognised the freedom of people to marry as, when and where they wished.
 - c) Church courts were sophisticated, but ordinary people knew where to go and who to go to in order to get their disputes taken seriously and resolved considerately.
 - d) People remembered dates and measured time in different ways.
- 4) In terms of understanding medieval society a little better:
 - a) What trade you pursued affected your social status.
 - b) Trade guilds played an important part in the structure of medieval cities.
 - c) The status of women in the Middle Ages is open to debate.

Essential information for this activity

- 1) Marriage was regulated by the church, but the medieval understanding of marriage was different from today's. To be married, all a couple had to do was to exchange suitable vows with each other and basically agree that they were married.
- 2) The church encouraged couples to do this properly, in front of witnesses and ideally in church or at least in front of a priest. **But** the church still recognised that properly-exchanged vows constituted a valid marriage whenever and wherever they took place.

Resources

- 1) Suggested activity outline/lesson plan
- 2) Character list (copy and give out to each pupil)
- 3) Opening claims – copy, cut up and give to the nominated 'characters'
- 4) Witness statements round 1 – copy, cut up and give to the 8 nominated witnesses.
- 5) Witness statements round 2 – for the 5 optional additional witnesses.
- 6) Evidence note sheet – one per pupil for recording evidence.
- 7) Voting slip – who was Thomas married to (if anyone?)
- 8) In-depth background notes for teachers.
- 9) Accompanying PowerPoint.

Possible activity outline

1) Setting the scene

Most of our understanding of events in the past relies on written sources – information recorded often for a specific purpose – how useful the source is depends largely on what it was written for and by whom on the one hand, and what we are trying to use it for on the other.

Discussion Where does bias fit in to the picture? Is there such a thing as a perfect source?

2) Introducing the activity

We are going to look at a specific set of written sources from a church court in the 1390s. It is all to do with the question of whether Thomas Hornby was or wasn't married to one of two different women, Beatrix de Gillyng and Margery Spuret, both of whom claim that he is their husband. To grasp this point the basic rules of medieval marriage need to be set out. **(Slide 1)**

Discussion How would a dispute like this be resolved today? Who would people go to today to get a case heard? The courts? The government? The mass media and public opinion? How about Twitter?

In the Middle Ages, disputes like this were taken to a church court – a court of law specifically run by the church to administer aspects of daily life that the church had authority over. The evidence was written down by the clerks of the church court. **(Slide 2: The documents)**

Discussion What kind of skills do we need to use these resources? They are written in Latin and not easy to read without a lot of training and practice.

3) Let's see what happened: the main complaints (Slide 3)

The court is prepared. The teacher will act as the judge in this case and the class will act as the jury. The three chosen protagonists are called before the court to read out their initial claims in order – Beatrix, Margery, Thomas.

Discussion Where do our sympathies lie?

4) The evidence: round 1 (Slide 4 lists witnesses)

The initial round of witnesses is called before the court and read their statements out one at a time.

Discussion After first round of evidence ask the jury to give their feelings so far. How confident are they?

5) The evidence: round 2, optional (Slide 5 lists additional witnesses)

A further five witnesses can be called to present their evidence if required/time available.

Discussion Do these witnesses add anything extra to our understanding of the case?

6) Time to decide!

The jury are called upon to give their verdict in the case. If required the voting slip can be used or a simple show of hands.

Discussion When the verdict is announced does anyone wish to challenge it?

7) What really happened? (Slide 6: the big reveal)

In reality the court ruled in favour of Beatrix, holding that Margery had not proved her case sufficiently.

Discussion Was our verdict different? Was Margery treated fairly? What may have influenced the court finally in reaching its verdict?

8) Lead into structured coverage of objectives

Discussion What have you learned about life in the fourteenth century? Possibly including but not restricted to:

- Specific to this case:
 - What links the people who speak up for Margery?
 - What links the people who speak up for Thomas?
 - What does the detail of the various statements tell us about daily life in the city?

- What have we learned about the ideas people had about marriage?
 - Have these changed and evolved over time?
 - Are these ideas still changing today?
 - What role did the wider family play when a couple wanted to marry?
 - What was more important, happiness or family status?

- What have we learned about the how the church courts worked?
 - Do you think people were treated fairly?
 - What words would you use to describe the treatment given to people?
 - Sympathetic?
 - Considerate?
 - Male-dominated?
 - Do you think it is right for the church courts to work in this way?
 - What do you think about how the evidence was gathered?
 - Whose words are actually being heard/read?

- What have we learned about how time was measured and events remembered?
 - What does this tell us about how religious people were?
 - How do we remember dates and events today?

- What have we learned about how young people worked and learned a trade?

Characters in our case

The main claimants

Beatrix de Gillyng A woman in her late teens

Margery Spuret A woman aged about 20 in 1394

Thomas Hornby A man in his early 20s in 1394

The witnesses

Isabel Spuret Margery's 40-year-old, widowed mother

Juliana del Grene Roger's wife and Margery Spuret's aunt. She is in her 30s.

Katharine Sadler A woman in her 20s

Thomas Hornby (senior) A man in his 40s, a saddler, uncle of Thomas Hornby junior

Walter de Mellerby A man in his 30s, a saddler

John de Akom A man in his 20s, a saddler

Thomas Gasegill A man in his later 20s, a saddler

John Wyresdall A man in his 30s, a barber. He is Margery's uncle.

Robert Polayn A man in his 20s, a tapestry weaver

Richard Wyresdall A man in his 40s, an uncle of Margery

Margaret Esyngwald A woman in her 40s

Thomas Menston A goldsmith in his 30s

Alice Menston A woman in her 30s, wife of Thomas Menston

Characters mentioned but not questioned

Roger del Grene A man who owns a house in Castlegate

John Crayk A friend of Thomas Hornby

Ellen Spuret Margery's sister

Un-named wife of John Wyresdall

Thomas Hawden A monk from Selby

Places mentioned

York Major city in the north of England, population around 14,000

Castlegate Street in the city near the castle, about 400m from the river

Haxby Small village outside the city heading north

Crayk (Now Crayke) Small village about 14 miles to the north of York

Akom (Now Acomb) Suburb of the city

Gillyng (Now Gilling) Small village to the north of York

Esingwald (now Easingwold) Market town about 10 miles north of York

Selby A market town about 14 miles south of York

This page should be copied and cut up to give to the claimants to read out.

The opening claims

Beatrix de Gillyng

My name is Beatrix de Gillyng. I am about 18 years old. I live in the household of my brother-in-law Thomas Menston. Last year, I entered into a marriage with Thomas Hornby whom I met in the city of York. We were both free to get married and I would like the court to recognise this marriage. Lots of witnesses were present at the time, including my sister Alice and her husband. They all know about this marriage and will give evidence that we said the proper words and everything. So as far as I am concerned it was a proper lawful wedding and everybody should respect that (including my husband, Thomas!).

Margery Spuret

My name is Margery Spuret. I am about 21 years old and I live in the city of York. I work as a wool comber and also as a general servant. Five years ago, Thomas Hornby and I agreed that we wanted to marry each other when we were both working in the household of Roger del Greene in York. We said the proper words and everything in front of my mother and my aunt who will tell you that this is the truth. I have now heard that another woman is claiming that Thomas is married to her. This is not right as Thomas is not free to marry anybody else. I would like the court to recognise that Thomas and I are married. Lots of witnesses are prepared to speak up on my behalf.

Thomas Hornby

My name is Thomas Hornby. I am aged about 24 I think. I am a saddler by trade and have worked in a number of workshops after serving my apprenticeship. I currently work for my uncle in his workshop. I am a good and honest worker and I hope one day soon to have my own workshop. As far as I'm concerned I'm not married to anyone. I did get to know Margery and I admit that we did have a bit of fun together. I do also know Beatrix but as far as I'm concerned we never got properly married. It was only a bit of fun too.

The witness statements: round 1

Isabel Spuret

I am Margery's mother and I am an honest and independent woman. Five years ago I was there when Thomas de Hornby married my daughter Margery. It was on the feast day of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That's the 8th day of September and we were all at the house of Roger del Grene in Castlegate. His wife Juliana del Grene was there with us. Thomas said to Margery in front of all of us: 'I want you for my wife.' And she said to him: 'I want to have you for my husband.' They then went to bed together, so they were definitely married.

Juliana del Grene

I am Margery's aunt and I am an honest woman. Five years ago my niece, Margery Spuret, was at my house in Castlegate. She was there with her mother, Isabel, and Thomas de Hornby.

Right there, in front of us, Thomas asked her to be his wife and she agreed. Later on I know they slept together, so they have definitely been married these five years past.

Thomas Hornby (senior)

I am an honest man and a saddler by trade. Thomas Hornby is my nephew. I don't know anything about a contract of marriage between our Thomas and this Margery. I do know that, that woman Isabel is her mother, and she's always wanted to get on in the world. She's been on the look-out for a good marriage for her daughter. Our Thomas is a saddler, just like me, and a good one at that. She knows that makes him superior in wealth and status to her and her daughter. She was after this marriage for her Margery for a while. I can give you evidence that they're poor. Why else does Margery have to leave the city every autumn for a month? Why, because she's out collecting the harvest for someone and earning money she badly needs. And, you know, five years ago she was staying at my house and she left for the countryside about the feast of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Went off to cut the harvest, she did. I've no idea how long she was away for.

Margaret Esyngwald

On that Sunday I heard vespers in the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Castlegate. It was the feast day of the Blessed Virgin's nativity, you know? Straight after vespers I went to the house of Roger del Grene as his wife Juliana was sick. I went round to take care of her, and when I got there, Margery was there, with Thomas, and also with Margery's sister, Ellen. As I'm an honest woman, they were eating and drinking at the house.

Thomas Gasegill

I am an honest man and a saddler by trade. I just want to say that everything John de Akom says is true. I was on that journey to Crayk and we were all with Thomas Hornby (junior) all day on the feast of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But I reckon it's only about 10 miles to Crayk.

John Wyresdall

I am Margery's uncle and an honest man of the city. I'm a barber. I know that this contract of marriage took place, because I have known Isabel and Juliana for 26 and 15 years. In all that time I have never known them to tell a lie, or to try to deceive anyone. They are good honest women, who live within their means and work hard. All the local people agree with me. Neither of them have any need of money; they both have property worth £10. The property is silverware and other things for their household. They both card wool and they earn plenty of money from that craft. Juliana also is skilled as a saddler like her husband. Margery herself owns goods to the value of 40 shillings and she is well born.

I wish the same could be said for Thomas Hornby (junior). He is a poor man and has many debts. I remember that on the evening of the Sunday that is in question (that's the day of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary), Isabel and Juliana came to my house. They said they had been in the house of Roger del Grene and, shortly after midday, they had witnessed Thomas Hornby (junior) and their Margery marry each other.

Anyway, that evening, I saw this Thomas with my own eyes. He was down by the river Ouse, by the bridge, in the parish of St Michael. Isabel, after she had told me about the marriage, asked my brother Richard and me to go with her to see how much we liked the look of him. Well, I thought he looked quite young to be married, but I said that if Margery was pleased to have him, then I'd buy them a wedding present. I said I'd buy them a horn, decorated with silver and worth 20 shillings. I say that Thomas could have left the village of Crayk at dawn and been back in York by two o'clock – it can't be more than 8 miles journey if that.

John de Akom

I am a saddler, an honest man and not related to either family. I remember that on the day before you are talking about, Thomas Gasegill, John Crayk, Thomas Hornby (junior) and myself, went out of York to the village of Crayk which is about 14 miles away by my reckoning. You see John's father had died and we were going to view the property that he had left in his will. It was a Saturday, and we got as far as the village of Sutton that night.

We spent the night there and next morning we rose early, that was the Sunday, and we travelled on to Crayk. We got there in time for Mass and then we had some food. We looked at the property in a wood and then set off back to York. That was a long day. It was supper time before we got to Haxby and that is still a couple of miles outside the city, so the York bell was striking ten before we got back. We were tired, so we went to my house and had a drink. Then the other three left me and I stayed at home. But that was after midnight, so I can tell you that Thomas Hornby (junior) was not in the house of Roger del Grene in York all of the Sunday in question. I hope both parties get justice; what a sorry business.

Thomas Menston

Beatrix de Gillyng is my sister-in-law. I don't know this Margery or any of her relations, nor can I speak about any events in 1389, but I can tell you what happened last year, in 1393.

It was the Wednesday after the feast of St Katherine. I was in my own room and I witnessed a contract of marriage between my sister-in-law Beatrix de Gillyng and this man Thomas Hornby (junior). They promised themselves to each other in front of me and my wife, and not just us, but also Thomas Hawden, a monk from Selby. What's more, my wife Alice and Sir Thomas both say the same. You can ask them!

The witness statements: round 2

Katharine Sadler

I am no relation of Margery Spuret and I am an honest woman. I couldn't say if Thomas and Margery made a contract of marriage, but I do know it was talked about often around four years ago. Margery herself talked about it, though I never heard Thomas say anything. I do know they slept together. Thomas is godfather to one of my children that was baptised in the local parish church.

Walter de Mellerby

I'm not related to any of them, and I am an honest saddler. No one could bribe me. I believe there was a contract of marriage between these two and I think they did go on to sleep together. I know that Isabel is Margery's mother, but I've no idea if Juliana is related to them. Thomas can make a good living from his craft as a saddler, but then, Margery can make a good living from her service. I wouldn't say that they were different in social standing. Margery has never disguised the fact that she takes a month in the country every autumn to help with the harvest. She was employed by Thomas Hornby (senior) as a servant and they had a formal arrangement that she would go to help with the harvest for one month a year.

I do know that Margery left for the country a fortnight before the feast of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin in 1389 and that she did not return to the city until a fortnight after the feast. How do I know? Well, you see, because she was away, I had to go down to the river Ouse every day and collect a jug of water for the master. That was usually Margery's job.

Robert Polayn

I have known Isabel eight years and Juliana 20 years. I agree with John Wyresdall. They are both richer than Thomas Hornby (junior), and I don't believe they ever pushed for a marriage between Thomas and Margery.

Richard Wyresdall

I'm an honest man, and I was in my brother John Wyresdall's house on that Sunday. After vespers I went with John and his wife towards Castlegate. We were going to meet Isabel Spuret, Margery and Thomas Hornby (junior). We met them by the River Ouse, on the staithe, near the bridge. John's wife pointed out who Thomas was. You see, my brother John hadn't met Thomas. Well, he said that if the marriage was good, that he would give the couple a present of a horn decorated with silver. Sorry, but I don't know anything about a trip to Crayk.

Alice Menston

He's right, my husband Thomas. We're honest people and we both witnessed the marriage of my sister Beatrix to this man Thomas Hornby the junior. Hearing of the case that was before court brought by Margery Spuret, I realised that poor Beatrix needed her case to be heard. Thomas Hawden of Selby was present at the time and he agreed that the proper words had been used and that he would give his blessing to the two of them if they wished. I know this is the case because I asked him if everything had been done right and proper because I know it's important to do these things correctly.

Jury Sheet

Witness name	Supporting (B,M or T)	Evidence

(Use back of sheet for additional notes)

Verdict Sheet

I, _____

**Do solemnly declare that in my opinion Thomas Hornby is
married to:**

A) Beatrix de Gillyng

B) Margery Spuret

C) No one

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Verdict Sheet

I, _____

**Do solemnly declare that in my opinion Thomas Hornby is
married to:**

A) Beatrix de Gillyng

B) Margery Spuret

C) No one

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Teacher's notes

Further information and background on the Gillying/Spuret v. Hornby case

The materials provided are taken from a genuine legal case heard in the consistory (church) court in the diocese of York in the years 1394-95. The records of the church courts are an invaluable resource for anyone interested in shedding light on the lives of 'ordinary' (whatever that may mean!) people in this period. The case is an example of a disputed marriage – a common cause of complaint that took up a lot of time in the courts and was an ongoing headache for the church hierarchy. The court is being asked to rule on whether a marriage did, or did not take place. The original papers are held in the archives of the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York, ref CPE-159.

This dispute is very much of its time and context – in our modern society the specific situation which the couple turn to the courts to resolve quite simply could not arise. The medieval understanding of the law and custom of marriage was very different to that of our modern society. It is worth noting, however, that the current debate over what constitutes a marriage, who is at liberty to marry and what roles the church and the state should play in regulating and recognising marriage provides a useful modern counterpoint to this 700-year-old dispute.

What makes the records of the church courts fascinating is the way in which the court set about the process of resolving the dispute. In pursuing its deliberations, the clerks of the court collected a mass of information in the form of witness statements, dictated in response to specific questions and written down more or less verbatim. These statements frequently reveal a mass of information about the daily routines and customs of the parties to the dispute and frequently go beyond the basic facts, shedding light on dress, domestic architecture, social and peer-group composition.

These notes provide further background to the materials by outlining the background to the dispute in a little more detail.

1) Medieval Marriage: theology, law and popular practice

The practice of marriage lay in a much-disputed middle ground between the theologians and the canon lawyers of the medieval church. These two schools of thought are frequently summarised as being represented on the one hand by Peter Lombard, master theologian of the University of Paris, and on the other by the canon lawyer Master Gratian of Bologna. The principal problem lay in the tension between the need to reconcile two seemingly incompatible philosophies. The theologians sought to preserve marriage as a sacramental means by which non-celibate men and women could counteract sinful human nature through the spontaneous infusion of God's grace as a blessing to the union. The canon lawyers on the other hand were concerned with the practicalities of the capacity to contract marriage, proof, evidence and the specific moment of contract formation.

The fourth Lateran council of 1215 went some way towards resolving these lines of argument. The principle was established that marriage should take place before the priest and in the presence of witnesses (in the face of the church) and only after the reading of threefold banns of marriage by the priest or clerk. A significant loophole remained, however, in that the church was effectively forced to accept that a marriage contracted willingly between two persons of legal age, free to marry, using a form of words appropriate to indicate their desire and willingness to marry must be recognised as being valid regardless of where or when such a marriage was contracted. Parties to such a 'clandestine marriage' would admittedly be regarded as having committed a sin and be subject to penance, but the marriage itself must be upheld by the church, especially if it could be established that the couple subsequently consummated the marriage. Back to square one, in other words.

The typical dispute which was brought before the church courts for resolution usually revolved around the simple question of whether a valid and enforceable marriage had taken place. In resolving the case, the court would take care to establish the exact circumstances of the time and place of the alleged marriage, the exact form of words used by both parties, whether any other witnesses were present or had knowledge of the marriage and whether the marriage was consummated. In examining the form of words, the court would be keen to establish whether the desires of the couple were expressed as either a present intent, or a future desire to marry. The former circumstance gave immediate effect to a marriage which could not be or was not going to be consummated for any reason. In the latter case, the act of consummation itself was seen as giving immediate effect to the marriage. This left open scope for complaint on the basis that the lack of ability to consummate a marriage rendered the marriage void where this was not evident in advance, or that there had in fact been no intention to marry before the two parties had sex – committing thereby the sin of fornication rather than giving effect to a conditional contract of marriage.

So – plenty for the lawyers to get their teeth in to!

2) The structure, practice and personnel of the church courts

From 1311 onwards the church courts at York (where the dispute between Margery and Thomas was heard) were governed according to statutes enacted by Archbishop Greenfield. There was to be a maximum of 30 individuals appointed to the courts acting as judges, advocates or proctors, although there is evidence of some fluidity between these roles. Ordained members of the clergy were barred. Those who acted as judges or advocates of the court were required to hold at least a university degree in either canon or civil law. The appointed judges effectively exercised the authority of the bishop of the diocese within which the dispute arose. Most judges had served a lengthy period as an advocate – a role similar to that of a barrister in the modern legal system. The advocates would usually act on behalf of a client where specifically legal technicalities were involved, or could be consulted by a Judge to help in the resolution of the case.

A maximum of 20 proctors at any one time were appointed to the courts to represent the interests of the litigants. Any complainant wishing to present a case to the courts would first approach a proctor and hire him to undertake the job of framing the complaint, organising evidence and placing the case before a judge. If necessary, the proctor would seek the assistance of an advocate in presenting the case if the circumstances were sufficiently complex. Proctors were not required to hold a university degree, but they did serve a lengthy apprenticeship within the court before being allowed to act on behalf of any clients. Essentially the court was a very professional and tight-knit community.

In the ordinary course of events, either one, or more usually both, parties to a disputed marriage would present themselves before the courts to state their case. This was usually done by the appointed proctor presenting a written case framed in the appropriate language. This initial statement took the form of a document known as the libel - usually in the form of 'It is alleged by Party Y that Party X married Party Y on such and such a date, in this place and at this time, using the following words and in front of the following witnesses and the court is requested to recognise and enforce this marriage.' A series of questions were then framed, usually by the clerk to the court on the instructions of the judge. Having the case thus presented, the parties to the dispute then nominated a number of witnesses to attest to the truth or falsity of the statements. The court then appointed an examiner, usually a junior clerk of the court, to interview all of the nominated witnesses in private and away from the court. This questioning took place in English, with the responses being recorded in Latin. The various statements were then collated and presented by the proctor to the court for judgement. The majority of cases brought in this way were presented by women seeking to have the court enforce a contract of marriage against a man who wished to avoid the marriage.

This clearly was a process which could take some time and cases frequently dragged on for a number of months and in some cases years. On the final presentation of all the relevant witness statements to the courts, the judge and advocates expressed their conclusions in the form of a sentence. This sentence could be subject to further appeal and re-examination of witnesses was permitted. It was not unknown in the most complex or ambiguous of cases for the court to find itself simply unable to rule conclusively, in which cases the parties to the dispute were 'dismissed to their consciences' in the sure knowledge that one day they must account for their actions before God as the ultimate judge.

3) Trades, guilds and domestic employment

The dispute between Margery and Thomas sheds a lot of light on the domestic circumstances of the two young people involved. They encountered each other within the household of Thomas's step-brother (Thomas Hornby senior) to whom it emerges Thomas junior was bound as an apprentice. Margery was present in the household as a paid, live-in domestic servant.

Apprenticeship was a significant step on the career ladder for any young man (and sadly it was a solely male preserve at this time). Typically, apprenticeships were served for a period of seven years, at the end of which time the apprenticeship could become a master of his craft, going on to serve as either a journeyman in the workshop of a master of his craft, or seek to set up his own workshop as a master in his own right. Crafts and trades were closely regulated both by the civic authorities and by the guilds to whom the various crafts and trades were affiliated. (There were over 100 different trade and craft guilds registered with the civic authorities in York in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ranging from bakers and butchers to tailors and nail-makers.) The numbers of workshops within the city, numbers of apprentices and journeymen employed and the quality of work and prices charged were all closely monitored by 'searchers' appointed by the guilds specifically for this purpose. It is noticeable that among Thomas Hornby's peer group on whom he calls for support in the dispute are a number of fellow apprentices and saddlers.

In contrast, those on whom Margery calls to act as her witnesses are for the most part directly related to her or form part of a small group of a predominantly female social group. Domestic service at this time was a well-established part of life for the majority of young people of both sexes – the *Downton Abbey/Upstairs Downstairs* model is misleading for this period. Rather than being a part of a rigid social hierarchy, domestic service in the Middle Ages was seen as being a part of the life cycle for young people seeking to establish their independence and learn the practical skills required to run a medieval household. The typical pattern seems to have seen children as young as ten or 11 leaving home to work in the household of a relative, progressing through to greater independence and service further afield in the mid to late teens. The master (or mistress) was expected to take responsibility for the conduct and morals of all the members of their household – and there are numerous examples in court records of masters being taken to task for failure to regulate the social interactions which inevitably took place between healthy teenagers living in close proximity away from the strictures of parental supervision!

Conclusion: the final outcome

The case of Margery and Thomas is unusual only insofar as the circle around Margery were willing to pursue her case so diligently. The case in fact went back to the courts on three occasions after appeals, but the final judgement remained the same. It was held that Margery had not sufficiently proved her case and the court upheld and enforced the subsequent marriage of Thomas and Beatrix.

Thomas appears in the roll of Freemen of the City of York in 1398, a stage of professional development required in order for him to set up and act as master of his own workshop. In 1419, there is another entry in the roll of Freemen for one Thomas, son of Thomas Hornby, Saddler. The timing is superficially right for this to be the son of Thomas and Beatrix. Significant circumstantial evidence, perhaps, of the ongoing good fortune of the Hornby family. Sadly there is no further trace forthcoming at the moment of the eventual fate neither of the disappointed Margery, nor of the family and social circle which had been so willing to pursue her case.